IMAGINING IDENTITY BEYOND THE FISHBOWL: A FRAMEWORK FOR USING ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXTS FOR CHILDREN TO CULTIVATE A PLACE OF INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Jacklyn Boggs

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Dedication

--For Rhea, the light of my life.

And for all children across the world seeking a safe space to belong.
ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy—the use of the literary arts for the purpose of healing—has been used by numerous professionals for a variety of reasons. Psychologists, social workers, educators, and health care professionals have specifically utilized works in the children’s genre as a tool for promoting dialogue with children around difficult topics, such as loss, trauma, oppression, self-abhorrence, and suffering. Children’s books can serve as vehicles for facilitating conversations and safe spaces of inclusion that invite them to explore the complexity of their identities and lives. Of course, not all texts are created equal, and thus this project aims to serve as a framework for thinking about utilizing children’s texts in this way. Moreover, this project predominantly utilizes theoretical works by women of color—Toni Morrison, Kimberly Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Anzaldúa, Grace Lin, Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni—to build a foundation for understanding how texts by marginalized authors for children can function as beautiful spaces of inclusion. In addition to untangling theoretical frameworks by strong marginalized women, this project will define important terms (ethnographic authors, cosmopolitan curiosity, trespassing, intersectionality, literary imagination, among others) to assist in analyzing and understanding the unique intricacies of these texts. This project contends that while the texts of children’s literature can be full of biases and prejudice, they can also serve as powerful tools to dismantle dangerous oppressive systems that shape children’s gazes of the world and how they interact within it.
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As a young child trying to survive a tumultuous childhood, literature was always my salvation—I found refuge there and escapism. Literature became therapeutic for me. Freeing. Early on in my life, I learned—much like the great poets Richard Lovelace and Jimmy Bacca—that liberation came from within the mind, not necessarily external circumstances. For this reason, I have dedicated twenty years of my professional career to sharing literature with others of all ages. I obtained a license to teach English before working in Title I public schools across Arkansas, Missouri, and Tennessee and intentionally sought schools where children needed the most help. I found schools with high rates of poverty and low resources because it was my passion to share literature with those who needed it most. I grew up believing that literature had a therapeutic benefit, so it made sense to me to share it with those who needed it most. In addition to public schools, I also taught literature as an adjunct instructor with adults in the college setting and at a program via the Salvation Army for women struggling with addiction.

In 2014, I joined the Hematology department’s education program in Memphis at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, where I worked with children from age 3 to 21 with hematological disorders such as sickle cell disease and hemophilia. Sickle cell disease (SCD) affects approximately 30,000 students in the United States, and because SCD developed as an evolutionary mutation to prevent people from getting malaria in Africa, Asia, and Central America, the disease disproportionately affects African Americans. Children with SCD are more likely to live in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods and attend lower performing schools, putting them at risk for poorer academic performance. Additionally, it is well known that children with chronic illness are more likely to perform poorly in schools than their peers because of “chronic absenteeism” alone—children with SCD require multiple medical...
appointments to manage their disease and may experience acute hospitalizations due to acute pain crises. Sadly, in addition to the above risk factors, children with SCD may also experience neurological deficits secondary to their disease, as many experience brain infarcts (decay of necrotic tissue) and sometimes strokes, causing potential problems with executive functioning, inattention, language comprehension and expression, IQ, and other skills important to learning.

Ultimately, the central nervous system (CNS) effects of SCD intertwined with social and environmental risk factors inspired my developing substantial expansions to the hospital’s Hematology Reading Clinic, alongside other teachers in the STARR program (Success Through Academic Research and Resources), as well as other psychosocial professionals in psychology, neuropsychology, and social work. Previously, the program consisted of teaching children’s foundational skills, like developing phonemic awareness. However, I opted to expand the program significantly by also developing curriculum centered around literature for reading and discussion, as well as a writing curriculum for students to explore their own responses to text and reflections of their world. It is not surprising that many of the texts created about specific chronic illnesses—such as sickle cell disease—were created by people also living with the disease themselves. Many of these texts were written by people who understood how important it was to have books represent people with chronic illness because they, too, lived with that chronic illness and thus understood the power of representation.

In addition to collecting children’s texts that feature rare chronic illness, I also weaved in more canonical literary pieces to generate discussions in the curriculum. For example, in a small literature circle, I invited teenagers with SCD and their parents to read and respond to essays by Audre Lorde that centered around themes of struggling and resilience. Other circles asked younger teens to read Sandra Cisnero’s *House on Mango Street*, Jacqueline Woodson’s *Harbor*
Me, or Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* with the purpose of discussing feelings of being different and experiencing discrimination. I spent years developing a program for patients with chronic illness to gather and use literature as a vehicle to interrogate the ramifications of their illness, while also interpreting the racial and socioeconomic boundaries of their communities. For example, one patient with sickle cell disease relates her pain to that experienced by a character in Cisernos’ *House on Mango Street* in a writing sample for the class.

As I continued to build the program for the children’s hospital, I noticed there were no others quite like it in the United States. The results from expanding the Reading Clinic program were successful, and I was invited to share our data in conferences, including internationally in London and India. Not only did more students opt to enroll in the program, but data from post-tests showed that student scores were increasing dramatically in reading comprehension. Although its success was exciting, I encountered a lot of challenges in developing the curriculum, namely that there were few frameworks for comparison. As I struggled to explain the program to people with non-humanities backgrounds, it became increasingly important for me to be able to articulate the importance of this work. People from numerous specialties asked a carousel of questions: How do you determine which texts to select for the curriculum? What do you think has contributed to the student’s increased interest in this program and why? Why might a child with sickle cell disease benefit from a reading discussion of Cisneros’ *House on Mango Street* differently than Esther Forbes’ *Johnny Tremain*? What does it mean for children in hospitals to read books that have characters who are like them and have chronic illness? How might uncovering themes in literature serve as a therapeutic refuge for students with chronic illness and promote a sense of inclusion?
These questions were important, but I often found myself at a loss to answer them thoroughly, especially for people who did not have a background in education or the humanities. One of the closest models that I discovered to be helpful was bibliotherapy, which is loosely defined as using the creative arts therapies, like reading texts or using narratives, to help people heal. Bibliotherapy has been used by many doctors and psychosocial professionals to confront difficult topics like the bereavement of a parent, accepting the diagnosis of a new disability, and coping with the aftereffects of physical and sexual abuse. Similarly, authors have used bibliotherapy within the children’s literature genre to help children understand other challenging topics, including exploring parental divorce, questioning gender identity, understanding adoption, and even acknowledging food insecurity.

This project identifies and begins to answer these complex questions and build a framework for creating a curriculum that promotes inclusion. In addition to discovering texts that successfully promote inclusion, social action, and healing, I wanted to further inquire into three important questions: Which texts were successfully accomplishing this and how? Which ideas and terms by literary and scholarly theorists can be used to help explain this work and justify its necessity? And lastly, what is at stake—and for whom—if this work is not done?

The following five chapters expand and develop these avenues of inquiry into the above questions. Chapter 1 will provide a framework for thinking about ethnographic texts in children’s literature and will introduce “intersectionality,” explaining how that theory functions as a tool to identify ethnographic texts for children. Intersectionality is a helpful tool in finding authors who are working to “explode” and destabilize the dominant gaze. In this study, the “dominant gaze” also references the perspectives of educators, parents, writers, publishers, and health professionals who may not have considered connections between literacy, chronic illness,
poverty, race, gender, class, and other aspects of identity. This chapter will argue that theoretical frameworks provided by women of color are especially powerful tools in helping adults utilize ethnographic texts for promoting inclusion and belonging. For example, Patricia Hill Collins’ *Social Critical Theory* comments on the “parallels between the challenges that confronted intellectual-activists who initially contributed to intersectionality’s emergence and those of today” and argues that intersectionality is “far broader than what most people, including many of its practitioners, imagine it to be” (14). Collins argues that intersectionality is a “tool for social change” and that scholars “have yet to fully understand the potential of the constellation of ideas that fall under the umbrella term” (18). Research suggests the transformative possibility in reading children’s literature to change attitudes, and it is helpful to use intersectionality as a tool in selecting diverse texts that build a space for inclusion. In addition to explaining the uses of intersectionality as a methodology in children’s literature, the project will argue that fictional images of children in books influence the identity of those children reading them.

Chapter 2, titled “Raising Strong Children,” discusses the power of ethnography and why it is important for marginalized groups to be represented and have a voice in defining themselves. This chapter also argues that it is also important to identify when representations of marginalized people are missing completely. I look at Carolyn Gerald’s “The Black Writer and His Role” to consider the harmful consequences that a “zero image” can have on marginalized populations, and I argue that texts written by ethnographic authors can be used to fill the holes within curriculum that is typically filled with texts written by white male authors. Ultimately, this chapter agrees with the sentiment expressed by Frederick Douglass that it is “easier to build strong children than repair broken men” and uses intersectionality as a tool to promote social action.
Chapters 3 and 4 focus on texts created by women of color. Chapter 3 explores children’s texts by authors of various racial and ethnic identities: Grace Lin, Ashley Franklin, Gabi Garcia, Malala Yousafzai, and Gloria Anzaldua. In addition to considering scholarship by Collins, Morrison and Gerald, this chapter will introduce concepts from Audre Lorde, Kwame Appiah, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Gloria Anzaldúa to urge the exploration of gazes beyond those centered in whiteness.

Chapter 4 focuses exclusively on children’s texts written by Black women: Jacqueline Woodson, Alice Walker, and Nikki Giovanni. This chapter explains why the fight for visibility of Black women is particularly challenging by reviewing the history of how white supremacy has shaped children’s literature. The tool of intersectionality as described in previous chapters helps guide the selection of the texts in these chapters, but the chapters also give readers new tools and terms to explore these texts: deterritorialization, trespassing, and cosmopolitanism. These tools help the reader understand how the authors of these texts are ultimately leaving the dominant fishbowl to explore fishbowls of their own creation.

The fifth and final chapter centers around the work of Toni Morrison, who is known for scholarship that encourages its readers to leave the fishbowl and experience new gazes that are not defined by the prevalent, white one. The chapter looks at how her own theoretical discourse in *Playing in the Dark* expands on the fishbowl metaphor and disrupts the white gaze, but also how her fictional work does as well. Although this chapter will focus on her works for children—*The Big Box*, *When God Made You*, and *Please Louise*—it will also visit the allusions made to the *Dick and Jane* series in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and how she shows that the white gaze (racism) causes Pecola Breedlove’s disturbing self-loathing.
By identifying the parameters of the fishbowl, and employing the tools created by women of color, this project argues that the children’s literature genre provides a powerful vehicle to move toward positive social change and engage in social action that promotes literacy and educational and health equity. Literature profoundly influences the gazes (the intersectional perspectives) of its readers, while simultaneously encouraging them to use their imaginations to create new narratives that promote inclusion and belonging.
Chapter 1

Imagining Identity Beyond the Fishbowl: A Framework for Using Ethnographic Texts for Children to Promote Imagination and Inclusion

It was as if I had been looking at a fishbowl—the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills; the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny, intricate fronts of green; the tranquil bubbles traveling to the surface—and suddenly, I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently and invisibly permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world. In other words, I began to rely on my knowledge of how books get written, how language arrives; my sense of how and why writers abandon or take on certain aspects of their project. I began to rely on my understanding of what linguistic struggle requires of writers and what they make of the surprise that is the inevitable concomitant of the act of creation. What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence. (Playing in the Dark 17)

Toni Morrison—highly esteemed for her writing of fiction and powerful contributions to and critical theory about American literature, as well as being honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993—used a metaphor about a fishbowl to warn of the quagmires of the white gaze. She was the among the first to write about how the narrative’s gaze is often political and reflective of accepted, dominant ideologies, and she contends that American education favors the Eurocentric tradition, “both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability” (Morrison 68). Morrison not only gives a literary explication of whiteness, but she encourages others to see the structure of the fishbowl. Morrison’s metaphor is commenting on the omnipresence of whiteness. In many ways, the bowl is invisible and thus observations are focused on tangible items such as fish and gravel within the bowl, without ever stopping to look at the bowl itself, which is the very thing that contains and shapes all the other aspects. In this
metaphor, the bowl represents the construction of the writer and the gaze through which his or her work is written. In a sense, the white gaze has created its own miniature world within the bowl, without ever looking at realities beyond its parameters, and such, is no representation of the actual world, but rather simply a representation of an imagined white world. Similarly, the metaphor can serve as a critique of humans submerged and influenced blindly by whiteness. The fishbowl illustrates how humans’ functions within the parameters of whiteness are confined to socially constructed limitations. Everything about the environment and how humans move within it are influenced by the vessel of whiteness, even though the vessel is normally unseen.

Not only does Morrison’s metaphor warn about the danger of the white gaze’s prominence for people who are not white, but it further shows how a person who is white is blind to that whiteness as an invisible privilege—one they often do not see and thus do not acknowledge or understand.

Borrowing Morrison’s fishbowl metaphor is advantageous here—but not just to look beyond the white gaze. In addition to racism, the presence of other dangerous power structures (sexism, ableism, classism, and homophobia) can be illuminated. Morrison goes on to reflect that she—as well as numerous others—have “made much here of a kind of willful critical blindness—a blindness that, if it had not existed, could have made these insights part of our routine literary heritage. Habit, manners, and political agenda have contributed to this refusal of critical insight” (18). But if literary giant Toni Morrison needed an epiphany to finally see the fishbowl in adult narrative, then impressionable children are left particularly prone to accept without questioning to whatever “truth” the dominant gaze wants to project.

My project aims to see how this “critical blindness” is generated via the children’s literature genre and how the genre is working to “correct” that blindness. As Morrison writes,
“Yes, I wanted to identify those moments when American literature was complicit in the fabrication of racism, but equally important, I wanted to see when literature exploded and undermined it” (16). In other words, Morrison inquires into perspectives that leave the confines of the bowl (whiteness), as well as texts that challenge and inquire into its structure, both of which are crucial ambitions, especially when thinking about the children’s literature genre. After all, it is through literacy that cultural identity can be explored and created, as “language becomes the vehicle for children to locate their place in the world and to understand the social and political implications of their society” (Davis 67). Furthermore, social scientists have long noted that children become conscious of racial and gender identities early in childhood. My project aims to identify those authors in children’s literature who “explode” and “undermine” the dominant gaze to understand how children’s authors have used the genre as a vehicle for changing attitudes about identity. In addition to analyzing how fictional narratives change when ethnographic authors center the gaze and perspectives on their own narratives and experiences, this project will also borrow arguments from other disciplines on how fictional images influence the identity of children.

Researchers have been chronicling the benefit of reading literature for a long time: nurturing the imagination, expanding one’s knowledge base and critical thinking ability, provoking empathy for others, and helping “children develop their cultural identities” by being able to “understand and appreciate the cultures of others” (Al-Hazzar and Bucher 210). Multiple disciplines tirelessly study childhood and literacy, including psycholinguists, who look at the way readers process language, and also cognitive psychologists, who are interested in the “the ways actual readers construct meaning from texts” (Rogers 139). The fruits of this research created “response studies,” which looks at how children respond to literature and pedagogical
practices in the classroom. Strangely, however, when it comes looking at literature for children among literary and cultural theorists, the genre itself appears in a need of legitimization.

Literary critic Barbara Harrison advocates strongly for the genre and argues in the text “Why Study Children’s Literature?” that “children’s literature warrants sustained critical attention as imaginative literature and as art,” as it, “like all literature, is concerned with human experience, with heroic possibilities fulfilled and unfulfilled, with longings which are gratified, and longings brought down by circumstance” (Harrison 243). But studying children’s literature does more than reveal “the integrity of this art, the humanizing possibilities inherent in the literary experience and the importance of literature to the education of the imagination” (Harrison 244), which in itself is significant. This work also aims to demonstrate how children’s literature can—under certain criteria—be revolutionary and make a positive change in both fiction and nonfiction narratives. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, a scholar working in multiculturalism of children’s texts, adds, “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author” (9). Children’s books invite children to explore new identities and new spaces, but they also can represent characters that validate identities of children. Bishop explains, “When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.” (12) The two benefits outlined here should not be underestimated. Multicultural children’s texts offer powerful
“windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors,” and this demonstrated power can transform attitudes about identities and diversity.

Indeed, children’s literature is complicated and messy—and scholars have a difficult time in even attempting to define the genre. Many well-known children’s texts, including Lewis Carroll’s 1865 *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree*, and Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* contain themes of violence (verdict first, trial later), shocking selfishness (destroying a tree to serve the needs of one greedy boy), and conquest and cannibalism (Max tells his mother that he will eat her up). The linguistic and thematic complexity of books like *Alice in Wonderland* and the presence of sex, death, and violence in many well-known children’s texts can be unsettling for readers and educators who believe they already know how to define children’s books as simple books, with simple words, and happy endings. People tend to make assumptions about children’s literature being innocent, simple, and devoid of references to complicated and difficult topics. Marah Gubar’s essay “On Not Defining Children’s Literature” alludes to Roger Sale, who noted, “Everyone knows what children’s literature is until asked to define it” and further complicates the topic via a myriad of arguments, such as “If we define it as literature read by young people, any text could potentially count as children’s literature, including Dickens novels and pornography” (209). The undefined boundaries of children’s literature, while messy and debated in literary scholarship, and scholarship related to curriculum and instruction, provides possibilities of bringing diverse authors and texts and perspectives under the large unwieldy umbrella of the children’s literature genre.

Similarly, many critical literary scholars have attempted to determine *why* and *where* misconceptions occur, and some chalk it up to our underestimation of children themselves:
“Misconceptions about children’s literature can be attributed, at least partially, to the curious myth of childhood as an idyllic state free from burdens, to be prolonged and to patronized. Adults who hold to the myth, some with surprising tenacity, respond to the literature as they might a child—amicably, but as if it were no more cute or silly. The myth is without basis. It belies human experience and art” (Harrison 64). To understand how ethnographic intersectional children’s literature can benefit children, it is helpful to involve the expertise of professionals who work with children and understand how they learn and develop. Lastly, it should be noted that a parade of canonical authors has contributed to the children’s literature canon: James Joyce, Toni Morrison, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Leo Tolstoy, James Baldwin, and T.S. Eliot (Reily 15). Perhaps these demonstrate the influential power of children’s literature through their own experiments with this genre.

Regardless of how children’s literature is defined, the role of representation and intersectionality within the genre remains worthy of analysis, particularly because research shows that representation within books has a notable benefit for marginalized readers. A defining case study in 1983 first describes “a young African American girl’s preference for stories with strong Black girls as protagonists, suggesting the need for more such literature as well as more studies of young African American readers” (Rogers 17). Of course, this representation of children is controlled by adults and a largely white publishing industry. Additionally, as adults are mostly responsible for the complex constructions of children’s literature, adults tend to represent their own ideas of childhood, which is typically characterized by innocence and simplicity (Nodelman 5).

By challenging ways that language and narrative reinforce powerful political systems and ideologies, such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, thoughtful ethnographic texts aimed at
children can help to complicate and diversify a larger dialogue on identity and textuality. Children’s texts—with their labyrinthine entanglement of meaning via language and visual significations—are often used pedagogically by adults as didactic tools to teach social, cultural, and political norms. These “truths” that are conveyed can be particularly messy “untruths,” particularly when constructs of marginalized identities surface, or when these identities are omitted entirely by those in more privileged positions.

Literacy is cultural practice that “has become almost synonymous with literacy studies in universities” and “argues that authors construct and reflect political and cultural meanings through symbolic forms” (Rogers 141). It is through literacy that cultural identity can be explored and created, as “language becomes the vehicle for children to locate their place in the world and to understand the social and political implications of their society” (Davis 67). Furthermore, social scientists have long noted that children become conscious of racial and gender identities early in childhood. For this reason, ethnographic and intersectional texts for children can emerge as useful tools in offering a more organic narrative for children, and in a sense, produce a larger discourse on marginalized identities by giving them voice and a place at the table to make meaning of their worlds.

Literature for Change and Explosion

The benefits of reading for children, including developing critical reasoning skills, have long been documented. Mary Usery’s “Critical Thinking Through Children’s Literature” outlines the benefits that extend well beyond developing knowledge. Usery’s research shows that the “goals of children’s literature are usually defined by educators as being those of enjoying, appreciating, and developing taste,” which makes it “unique in that it proposes the development of processes as its major goals” and it requires “behavior modifications within the
person” (47). Some noted benefits of using children’s literature to develop critical thinking include improving perception, analyzing information, making predictions, and drawing conclusions. The development of these processes at a tender age is sensitive and can be potentially dangerous. Images bombard children at young ages and are then devoured through various avenues—toys, television shows and cartoons, billboards, magazines, and children’s books. These images are powerful and persuasive, as they participate in child’s “development of taste,” understanding, and self-esteem. For marginalized children who are othered by society, these images can be particularly problematic, who are continuously growing and seeking an approach to make sense of their own roles in the world.

The knowledge that children’s books are powerful instruments to influence self-image and children’s psychology is not new; but this understanding has not always been used with the purpose of fostering inclusion. For example, a German children’s book published in 1938 by Julius Streicher titled Der Giftpilz (translated to “the poisonous mushroom” or “toadstool”) was created to for the opposite purpose: to indoctrinate young children to have hatred for Jewish People. The book begins with a German mother explaining an offensive metaphor to her son comparing Jewish people to poisonous mushrooms, “Just as it is often hard to tell a toadstool from an edible mushroom, so too it is often very hard to recognize the Jew as a swindler and criminal” (Streicher 7). After the mother goes on to explain that poisonous mushrooms are sometimes hard to identify, she asks if her son knows how to identify the “poisonous mushrooms of mankind.” To the mother’s pride, her son Franz slaps his chest and loftily exclaims, “Of course I know, mother! They are the Jews!” (9). The following sections are filled with similarly disturbing rhetoric: how to properly identify Jewish people by physical characteristics and how the Talmud encourages unethical and dishonorable behavior. However, most of the book
contends that Jewish people are simply bad people—*Der Giftpilz* portrays them as greedy, distrustful, lazy, sneaky, and even murderous (Hiemer 16). There is no question that this German author used the children’s literature genre to promote damaging ideologies to impressionable children about Jewish people. And while this book’s intent is clearly to recycle prejudicial ideologies, other children’s texts operate similarly, only less forthrightly.

Children’s literature conveys sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit prejudices and biases, and locating and exploring children’s texts that destabilize damaging prejudices and biases that tend to reenforce existing power structures can be a curative and inclusive way for children from multiple cultures with diverse backgrounds to engage with literature and developed empowered literacy practices. Rather than recycling ideas rooted in white supremacy, misogyny, and other oppressive structures, we should seek books promoting inclusive and curative ideologies, and then ask ourselves how these texts are successfully accomplishing these challenging tasks? How is highlighting “othered” and marginalized voices useful in seeing beyond those problematic lenses so dominantly offered by existing power structures? How can we identify those authors in children’s literature who “explode” and “undermine” the dominant gaze to thus understand how children’s authors have used the genre as a vehicle for changing attitudes about identity? For example, Schrank and Engels (1981) find that guided reading with the right texts can bring about “attitudinal change,” particularly for children with marginalized identities.

The Utility of Ethnographic Texts & Intersectionality

To help identify diverse gazes, intersectionality theory will be defined and ultimately suggested as a helpful metalogical tool in finding authors who are working to “explode” and “undermine” the dominant gaze—as Morrison noted. Intersectional theoretical frameworks, such as those explored by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 study titled “Demarginalizing the
intersection of Race and Sex,” provided by women of color are particularly powerful tools in the conversation of understanding how representation fosters ideas of identity (Crenshaw 9). Intersectionality provides a valuable methodology for connecting the study of diversity in children’s literature to activism related to positive social change in literacy, education, and health care. An intersectional approach to multiculturalism in children’s literature assists in creating inclusive spaces for diverse identities and advances the project of decolonizing American children’s literature.

Borrowed from anthropological studies, ethnography refers to research of culture (ideas, values, concerns, languages, etc.) regarding a specific group of people. Similarly, literary ethnography has long been used by social scientists and scholars as a form of qualitative analysis via narrative to make inquiries and comments about a specific group of people, particularly vulnerable populations. For this project, “ethnographic children’s literature” will be defined as narratives of the children’s genre that uplift the voices of authors from diverse populations as identified through an intersectional lens. The objective of this approach is to—as Morrison would note—remove the narrative’s gaze away from privileged perspectives in hopes of empowering the voices of those from vulnerable populations.

At its core, intersectionality theory is a tool that can be used as a vehicle to discuss human identity more systematically. In other words, it can be used to understand individual identity, but it can also be used to explore larger systems of oppression—colonialism, racism, classism—and examine how these systems function and replicate further systems of oppressions they uphold. Although this project will use the term “intersectionality” because it is most popular, it should be noted that this project borrows ideas about intersectionality utility from Patricia Hill Collins’ *Social Critical Theory*, which argues that Crenshaw’s work on
intersectionality is “far broader than what most people, including many of its practitioners, imagine it to be” (Collins 14). Collins argues that intersectionality is a “tool for social change” and that scholars “have yet to fully understand the potential of the constellation of ideas that fall under the umbrella term.” In addition to noting the depth of the term, Collins argues that intersectionality could become a critical social theory that could keep “critical analysis and social action in play.” She also notes that although “intersectionality is doing substantial work within research, teaching, and administration,” there is little agreement within the academy of what it is. Collins writes that intersectionality “at its heart” is a set of ideas “that is critical of the established social world” (51). Collins’ work is conducive to transferring discussions on intersectionality from just a theoretical discussion to a framework that can actually promote change. She explains that intersectionality can help us aspire “to resist the social inequalities within intersectioning systems of power” (96). It is through Collins’ work that this project explores intersectionality as a tool for social change. After all, Collins’ *Social Critical Theory* explains how intersectionality does matter outside of academia and in the real world—and therefore can achieve its potential as a tool for social action that can improve our world.

**From Theoretical to Activism and What’s at Stake**

Although common, ignoring the intersectional lens brings many problems by oversimplifying identity, and this has played out repeatedly throughout history. For example, looking at the advocacy efforts of feminists throughout the United States serves as a model to illustrate a.) how convoluted human identity is and engages with power structures and b.) how neglecting an intersectional lens can only further weaken and fragment a large group of already marginalized individuals in society: women.
An example is described in Benita Roth’s *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave*. Roth describes an intermovement where the three groups above worked separately in organizationally distinct feminisms in the 1970s. Throughout the movement, because racism was a problem within white feminist groups, race and gender pushed against one other. Roth writes, “I argue that we need to understand that these dynamics were not solely about interpersonal interactions but also about the overall structure of the social movement sector, that is, the intermovement political field of the era, and about the overall structure of inequality in the United States” (Roth xii). Roth describes how the groups organized separately, how each group addressed needs specific to race, and how each group brought unique contributions to the table.

Additionally, look at the United States’ 2008 Presidential election when Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton both fought for the Democratic nomination. While many African Americans rallied behind Barack Obama and many women feminists supported Hillary Clinton, women of color were put in a particularly unique bind as they were pressured to side with either their *race* or their *gender*, as if these layers of identity can be separated as easily as oil and water. A group of feminists responded to this phenomenon with concern via letter to *The Nation* that “historic breakthrough” that the world had been waiting on forever turned into an ugly battle where people were choosing between race and gender cards (“Morning in America”). The letter asks, “What happened, we wondered, to the last four decades of discussion about tokenism and multiple identities and the complex intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class?” (n.p.)

More recently in 2017, history repeated itself when similar concerns were voiced again as thousands of women across the United States organized the Women’s March, a massive cluster of protests to voice concern and outrage regarding the winning of the presidential election by
Donald Trump over Hilary Clinton. According to some intricate math by The Washington Post, the Women’s March of 2016 was likely the largest single-day demonstration in recorded U.S. history, as there were reportedly 635 marches organized across the United States and numerous other sister marches organized around the globe, ranging from Antarctica to Zimbabwe (Goldman 23). However, as often noted in history, many women of color did not feel the march was inclusive of racial diversity but rather only reflected white feminism and thus boycotted the march. Critics claimed the march prioritized celebrity voices and agents of capitalism, while silencing the platforms of marginalized women. Other groups of women—who were white but marginalized in other ways—came forward with concern. Lala Zannell, a transgender activist from Detroit who pleaded, “Include us in everything. The whole program. The planning, all of that, because when you don’t do that, you forget something” (Goldman 45). The necessity for feminism to be intersectional has been argued time and time again by groups with important perspectives including women of color, women with disabilities, and women identifying in the GLBTQIA community.

And yet, ironically, as fragmented as feminists women are among themselves, feminists around the globe have their own unique critique of feminism by Americans in general. Mallika Dutt’s article “Reflections on US Women of Color and the United Nations Fourth World Conference” describes a lack of intersectional thinking at a conference where over 40,000 women met to discuss issues surrounding women of color in Beijing, China. Dutt describes several interesting conflicts that surfaced between feminist women of the United States and feminist women in the rest of the world—a large part of that was directly correlated to American feminist women who had not listened to or were not listening to the voices of the other women around the globe.
One example Dutt describes is how women in the United States were “saddled with years of imperialist history along with its corresponding baggage of U.S. superiority, racism, xenophobia, and insularity” and unfairly considered women in other parts of the world as “more oppressed, less organized, less vocal,” and less feminist than those women from America (Dutt 520). The American women were surprised to learn that some of these women’s movements were more powerful than the United States’ women’s movement during the 1990’s.

Furthermore, not only did Dutt observe that some of the American feminists did not listen to feminists from other parts of the globe, but also that American feminists were more likely to speak for others also. Dutt observed that the “U.S. had been involved with women in the other countries of academic research” and “hundreds of dissertations had been written about the Third World” (Dutt 523). Dutt discovered that the reverse of that was not true, however. Overall, women in the Third World did not presume to speak for American women, define their agenda, or attack practices in their country, such as abortion. But as complicated as all this seems, looking through an intersectional lens is nonetheless an effective way to find footing in a tangled mess of pluralized fluid identities for the sake of working toward inclusion. Attending to intersectionality can promote inclusion for children within the children’s literature genre by not just diversifying the characters and identities in the books—but by more importantly—diversifying the identities of those people who create them.

Journalist Robertson, a Sidney-based feminist author, discusses the “hijacking” of intersectionality in a quarterly literary journal in Australia titled Meanjin. Robertson notes in her article “Intersectional-what?” that feminism’s problem with jargon is that meanings change depending on who is using “intersectionality” and in what context, which further exacerbates the
Yet, despite the term being controversial, it continues to be utilized in numerous fields, even if it is, as Crenshaw notes, both “over and underused.” There are substantiated advantages and disadvantages of utilizing Crenshaw’s term by examining its intended use for black feminism and by also reviewing expansions and criticism of the term’s expansion—particularly in the way it replicates oppression. Robertson explains that Crenshaw took a basic observation that “black women are subjected to racism by a predominantly white feminist movement, and sexism by male-dominated anti-racist organizations” to inquire why and how the dynamic continues in larger systems of oppression. Robertson argues that if Crenshaw “were the final word” on the term, it would be “a useful metaphor to capture the awful real-world shortcomings of anti-oppression efforts based on rigid categorical abstraction.” However, Robertson leaves the reader with multiple questions. In other words, the paper asks, “Can we borrow intersectionality responsibly? And if so, how? How might understanding the problems with the term help us to use it responsibly? And lastly, is the benefit worth the risks?”

These questions have been asked before and by numerous scholars. For example, in “Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era,” Alexander-Floyd focuses her analyses on the work of two different scholars: sociologist Leslie McCall and political scientist Ange-Marie Hancock. Alexander-Floyd selects their work because they “exemplify these rhetorical strategies” and because their work is considered “among the most well-known social research on intersectionality emanating from the social sciences” (Alexander-Floyd 3). Both researchers are well known for their work on intersectionality.

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1 Robertson bluntly writes. “Nobody knows what intersectionality means. I certainly don’t, and the more I read about it the more confused I become.” Robinson elaborates later in the article by discussing the evolution of the term, “Every time I feel I’m getting closer to an acceptable definition I find someone using a different one, usually to defend or condemn their particular version of the concepts (Robinson). Both Crenshaw and Robinson’s concerns have palpable value. The term intersectionality has become so popular that you can order t-shirts and stickers online with the term written on them.
intersectionality, yet they also approach the term differently, causing the critiques of their work to ricochet in various directions for unique reasons. Although most of Alexander-Floyd’s article describes how people have attempted to “disappear” black women from the center of the conversation, she concludes by offering three important suggestions for others to maintain the integrity of intersectionality, which is described below. The muddling of the term among researchers today only further makes it necessary to look at its origin and start with Crenshaw’s intentions and interpretations.

Among little debate is that Crenshaw’s coinage of intersectionality changed the way people thought and talked about identity-based politics. Crenshaw defined the term as a way to “describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ with one another and overlap” (Crenshaw 13). She originated the term when thinking through a case from 1976, DeGraffenreid v General Motors, where a group of black women sued GM St. Louis. Crenshaw noted that the plaintiffs lost because the plant “could show it hired black men and white women,” despite the lack of inclusion of black women. Citing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Robinson explains that the court was unable to “examine a combined claim of race and sex discrimination, and so could not offer a remedy specifically for black women” (Robinson). There should be no confusion or debate about the fact that the term intersectionality was developed by Crenshaw to talk about the identities of Black women, and furthermore, it was “part of the larger body of work on theorizing black women’s oppression and the relationship among race, class, and gender” (Floyd 9). This is an important notation, as Floyd claims “these two dimensions of its usage are collapsed” (Floyd 9). First, opponents who criticize intersectionality and dislike identity politics view Crenshaw’s coinage of intersectionality to focus on layers of identity like race, class, and gender. Floyd explains that while scholars may
utilize the basic definition of the term created by Crenshaw, they do not acknowledge the depth of the term regarding its application.

For example, scholars are quick to use Crenshaw’s famous analogy liking a vehicular accident at an intersection to the interplay of racism and sexism. However, these same individuals ignore other essential pieces, including a.) her insistence that scholars focus on those experiences of women of color b.) the various types of intersectionality she discusses, and c.) the unique rhetorical strategies she critiques as ineffective and ineffectual. And thirdly—and perhaps most importantly—scholars frequently ignore the ideographic element, which has long been pondered by women of color relating to identity. This distinction is equally helpful when categorizing intersectionality as either an idea or an ideograph. In 2002, interdisciplinary studies expert Linora Salter suggests that interdisciplinarity is more of an ideograph as it serves as “term that stands in for a larger ideological imperative.” Alexander-Floyd argues that intersectionality can be used similarly—as an ideograph—and thus challenges “the intellectual priorities of the university” and is “often resisted on this basis, not on the idea of interdisciplinarity.” Other scholars, like Michelle Fine, also warn about the “flattening of intersectionality,” because, as Crenshaw herself notes, the flattening results by “just multiplying identity categories rather than constituting a structural analysis or a political critique.” Again, these interpretive questions cause controversy, asking yet again: How can intersectionality be used and by whom? Who decides how it can be used and when?

Who Uses Intersectionality and Why?

Part of Alexander-Floyd’s concern is that everyone has picked up Crenshaw’s term. As Helma Lutz reiterates in her work “Intersectionality as Method,” “Intersectionality has long left the field of gender studies; it is used by sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, political
sciences, law and literary studies, health studies and social work and many other (sub) disciplines dealing with social inequalities and identities. But what exactly is intersectionality? A buzzword? [as Davis suggests in 2011] A concept? A heuristic device? A method? An analytical tool for textual analysis? A living practice?” (Alexander-Floyd 21). When considering the handsome quantity of researchers and disciplines borrowing Crenshaw’s term, there are absolutely some offenders who are using it loosely and without vigilance or much thought. But others, like Lutz, consider the term “a method that is particularly helpful in detecting the overlapping and co-construction of visible and, at first sight, invisible strands of equality” and ultimately allows thinkers to take variety in power contexts into account” (39). Granted, Lutz cautions users about the perceptions of removing gender and race from the center and thus making the term “superfluous,” and then notes Kathy Davis’ advisement to “start with intersectionality’s premise that gender as the theoretical mainstay of feminist research needs to be complicated, that is, that it should never be treated as a standalone category, but is always everywhere related to other differences and mutually constituted by those differences” (Davis 12). Moreover, Davis and Lutz both advise to use Mary Matsuda Gruenwald’s famous “other question”:

The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call ‘the other question.’ When I see something that looks racist, I ask ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something sexist, I ask ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask ‘Where are the class interests in this?’ (Lutz 40).

At the onset, this methodology might appear simple, but as Lutz concludes, it instead creates a complicated web of perceptions and considerations. She elaborates that it “offers the tantalizing
possibility of exposing multiple positions and power inequalities as they appear in any social practice, institutional arrangement, or cultural representation” and functions as a “directive to focus on various levels of the analysis” (Lutz 52). Ultimately, Lutz concludes that intersectionality is a useful method that allows researchers to move beyond simply reducing the analysis of gender, class, and race “to oppression and discrimination” by also considering the “‘privileged’ positionings within and between them, as many intersectionality scholars implicitly and explicitly cherish a master category of oppression” (Lutz 9). Lutz concludes that intersectionality as a method helps us to avoid this trap, and she is certainly not alone in this argument.

Like Lutz, esteemed American writer Allan Johnson—author of *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy*—values intersectionality as a method for analysis of privilege. In the most simplistic explanation, intersectionality refers to those points in which layers of identity “intersect” or meet. In Allan Johnson’s *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, he similarly describes identity via The Diversity Wheel, a chart that comments on the “social reality that shapes everyone’s life in powerful ways” by categorizing important layers of human identity: race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, income, geographical location, etc. (18). The Diversity Wheel—which has since been edited, revised, and critiqued by various scholars—notes substantial ways in which humans are different and can further be used to tackle problems of privilege. Johnson writes that the trouble regarding diversity is “produced by a world organized in ways that encourage people to use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue, leave alone or harass” (19).

Privilege exists in various forms, affects numerous aspects of life, and bestows power. Johnson encourages the reader to look at the wheel and see individual categories where they also fit, and
then challenges the reader to imagine waking up as a different race the next morning, as in the plot of the 1970 film *Watermelon Man.* Then, he asks the reader to imagine they wake up and have a different gender or sexual orientation, as happened to the main character in Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando.* Johnson brings up these hypothetical questions to ask intriguing questions about identity and intersectionality: How would these changes influence how others treat you and how you see yourself? How does it change material circumstances, including where you live and how much money you make? Would more opportunities appear, or would they close? Would these changes ultimately make your life better or worse? Does it offer you more or fewer privileges in life? For a majority of people, even small shifts on the diversity wheel would significantly change their lives.

Johnson further comments on the complexities of identity by discussing what he coins the “privilege paradox.” First, Johnson defines privilege itself in various ways, arguing that privilege ultimately “allows people to define reality and to have prevailing definitions of reality fit their experience.” Johnson elaborates also that it “grants a presumption of superiority and social permission to act on that presumption without having to worry about being challenged” (10). After defining the term and listing numerous examples of how privilege might impact different identities on the diversity wheel, he describes privilege as a “paradox.” Not only are there multiple, intersectional identities existing simultaneously, but Johnson explains that privilege is “defined in relationship to a group or social category” (10). In other words, one does not truly have to belong in a category to reap its privilege; one simply needs to be viewed by others as being in the category. For example, in the film *Shakespeare in Love,* which is set in Elizabethan England, the character Viola dreams of performing onstage in the theater, a privilege
only afforded to men at the time. Ultimately, Viola can make her dream come to fruition—not by becoming a man, but by presenting herself as one in costume.

On the flipside of privilege exists oppression. Intersectionality provides further clarity on how one might be privileged in one way but not in others. Johnson uses the metaphor of someone holding an umbrella in the rain. A person might be “in the rain” because of a less privileged part of their identity (e.g., living with a disability), but at the same time, if that person has an aspect of identity that is quite privileged (e.g., being wealthy), then that person might not get as “wet” as the next person. In a sense, the privilege of wealth acts like an umbrella for this person, helping them access more resources and opportunities. But that does not mean it is not actually raining for others. This metaphor helps explain why someone like Oprah Winfrey is not the typical example of what it is like to live as a Black woman in America.

Because these models for thinking about identity lend significant insight, multiple fields have borrowed intersectional methodology to make substantial change. In *Intersectionality as a Social Movement Strategy: Asian Immigrant Women Advocates*, the authors describe the social movement of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) in action and argues how it helps Asian women of color “invent and inhabit identities that register the effects of differentiated and uneven power, permitting them to envision and enact new social relations grounded in multiple axes of intersecting, situated knowledge” (Lang 34). More than just ideology, intersectional thinking provides an inclusive model that has allowed Asian immigrant women tangible opportunities to change their lives, encouraging them to become active leaders and agents of change in their communities for both social and economic justice (Lang 38). Specifically, AIWA is convinced that women’s experiences at the intersections of sexism, racism, class oppression, nativism, and language discrimination ultimately help “equip them with evidence,
ideas, insights, and ambitions that can solve serious social problems” (Lang 52). And while the group nods to the complexity of defining the term, especially among academics, they contend that “the actions imperatives of intersectionality” among activists “have not always been well understood in the academy have enjoyed a rich and flourishing existence inside social movements—especially those organized by women of color” (Lang 57). In other words, from the perspective of an activist, there is absolute merit and advantageousness in using the oppression of one group as “a point of entry into a larger struggle” (Lang 58). The group points to Crenshaw’s original coinage of the term to further argue its utility and explains how her work was not merely philosophical ruminations about identity but rather real-world critiques of how antidiscrimination law ultimately made employment opportunities more difficult for women of color.

Just as AIWA borrowed Crenshaw’s term for purposes of activism, a parade of other marginalized groups has joined suit. Using the grievances of one group to shed light on your own group’s grievances is a helpful strategy for marginalized individuals of all identities. In Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research: Inclusion, Reflexivity, and Anti-Essentialism, researchers utilize intersectionality to respond to society’s tendency to lump all people with disabilities together, giving primacy to the word “disability” over other key elements. The researchers view intersectionality to challenge to “accept uncertainty, and to challenge the tendency of certain grand narratives to masquerade as truths in the postmodern era” (Goethals et. al. 24) Borrowing from thinkers like Crenshaw, Davies, Braidott, Deleuze, and Guatarri, Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research employs feminist disability theorists to “challenge dominant assumptions about living with a disability and constitute disability as sites of construction and creativity rather than determination” (76). By developing
three concrete, intersectional methods for disability studies, they aim to give autonomy and voice to people living with disabilities for the purposes of activism. They also note that people with disabilities account for up to 15% of the world’s population, according to the World Report on Disability in 2011, and these individuals simply cannot be lumped together. For this reason, the group aimed to create a “discursive space where we could think and act with one another, doing research with rather than on or for people with disabilities, and co-constructing research where people don’t get alienated from the process” (81). Whether or not it was Crenshaw’s original intent, other marginalized groups have borrowed her methodology to employ intersectionality as a tool for activism to promote inclusion and change.

Closing Reflections

The need for an intersectional lens is clear: the white gaze is dominant and problematic in literature because it is dominant and problematic in society. Oppressive systems exist to enforce existing hierarchies of identity, leaving othered, marginalized groups with less power and less voice. However, when intersectionality is considered—especially when it is considered as Patricia Collins outlines as a vehicle to promote social change—marginalized voices are uplifted and highlighted. American literature—much like the country itself—should be representative of a diverse chorus of voices because it is a place with beautiful people of varying races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, and classes. The consideration of intersectionality when selecting texts for American readers—including young, impressionable Americans who read texts from the children’s literature genre—helps ensure that readers are exposed to different points of view, cultures, and perspectives, which is particularly important for children, as it ultimately creates spaces of inclusivity, safety, and belonging.
Chapter 2

Raising Strong Children: Mirrors, Windows, Lamps, & the Crisis of the Zero Image

“It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men.” -Frederick Douglass

Pedagogically, the crisis of representation—or lack thereof—for populations of color has long been documented, not just by scholars and theorists, but also often by educators and advocates who work with children in the population. For example, the famous character “Franklin” from Charles Shulz’s Peanuts comic strip was inspired by a teacher named Harriet Glickman. In 1968, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Glickman noted the lack of tolerance and unity within the United States—a nation that even segregated its cartoons. Upon observing the lack of diversity within the Peanuts cartoon characters, Glickman wrote Shulz and pleaded, “I’ve been asking myself what I can do to help those conditions in society which led to the assassination, and which contribute to the vast sea of misunderstanding, hate, fear and violence” (Florido 3). Surprisingly, Schulz wrote back immediately and noted his concern—as a white man—in creating a black character. Glickman reached out to some of her black friends to get their input, and within a few weeks, Franklin was born. However, there remains some criticism around Franklin’s character. Some people argue that he is not as complicated as the other characters and that the commentary is sometimes controversial. For example, numerous fans accused the comic strip of racial insensitivity after a strip from November 6, 1974, was featured showing Peppermint Patty skating with Franklin. After Franklin confides that he is practicing becoming a “great hockey player,” she responds, “How many black players in the NHL, Franklin?” Although people
criticized the strip, Shulz shot back to remind fans that he drew the strip “fifteen years ago” and said, “I believe there was only one black in the National Hockey League. Does pointing that out make me racist?” (Florida 5). To which his fan “Randee” responded, “The thing is, there wasn’t anything funny about pointing it out, either” (Barrier 3).

 Granted, not all fans agreed with Randee’s criticism. Some appreciated Schulz’s attempt to “desegregate” the cartoon characters; fans argued that Shultz was attempting to fill a
representative void within the comic strip. For example, Maria Popova’s article “Charles M. Schulz, Civil Rights and the Previously Unseen Art of Peanuts” published an important document from Shultz’s past. On June 6, 1968, Shultz received a letter from another fan, Kenneth Kelly, who encouraged his creation of a Black character. Kelly wrote, “I’d like to express an opinion as a Negro father of two young boys.” He contended that America is in a place in which “racial enmity is constantly portrayed. The inclusion of a Negro supernumerary in some of the group scenes in Peanuts would to two important things. Firstly, it would ease my problem of having my kids seeing themselves pictured in the overall American scene. Secondly, it would suggest racial amity in a casual day-to-day sense” (Florido 9). Like Kelly, most people agreed that the creation of Franklin—even if by a white man and thus possibly problematic at times—was overall a positive step towards inclusion of Black people. All of which can be credited to a teacher who noticed the power of diverse representation in prominent spaces.

In a similar wave of criticism, viewers were frustrated about what critics called the “segregation of Franklin” in “A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving,” which ran on CBS from November of 1973 until 2001. Several people demanded to know why Franklin was positioned on one side of the table all by himself, and others called for boycotts of the cartoon.
But despite ongoing criticisms, Schulz’s attempt to fill a representative void within the comic strip was appreciated by most and the reaction to Franklin was largely positive. Franklin first debuted in 1968 with a simple comic where he was returning a beach ball to Charlie Brown. Charlie thanked Franklin and the two exchanged a few pleasantries, but there was no larger storyline or punch line to be discovered. Although the comic might seem unextraordinary to some, Franklin’s inclusion made an enormous impression on 6-year-old Robb Armstrong, a young Black man who aspired to be a cartoonist himself. When much older, Armstrong set out to meet Schulz, a man he still refers to as his “childhood hero” (Lei 8). Years later in the 1990’s, Schulz called Armstrong while working on a Peanuts project. He realized Franklin didn’t have a last name, so he asked Robb for permission to use his: that is how Franklin Armstrong was officially named. Armstrong recalled the honor as “moving” and commented, “He inspired a kid. I don’t think there’s a higher calling in this life” (Lei 8). Armstrong defended critics of Shultz’s depiction of Franklin, arguing that Schulz’s inclusion of Franklin was inspiring and important for children like him who were not used to seeing themselves represented in cartoons.

The Power of Ethnography

Although Shultz’s creation of Franklin came from the desire to provide representation for Black children, there are still critics of Franklin’s representation of Black people—largely because Schulz himself is not Black and thus might be unconsciously injecting bias in his cartoons. When considering the problematic side effects of society’s fondness for the “white gaze” as described by Toni Morrison, it is not difficult to understand why white people’s creation of marginalized characters can be problematic, at best, but also quite dangerous. Again, although the example used above is regarding race, intersectional thinking helps us understand why this might be true among other marginalized groups. For example, what are the limitations of gaze
for a white man creating a character who is in fact white, but also a woman? Or furthermore, what are the limitations of gaze for a white man without disabilities to write the experiences of a deaf man—or deaf woman? It is important to note that this project is certainly not arguing that narrators should never creatively experiment with the creation of narratives outside of their own experiences. However, the project argues that the white gaze has done this for us repeatedly in children’s literature and thus ethnographic texts offer marginalized communities the chance to create their own gaze, one that might be more representative of their own unique identities. In other words, it is not only helpful—but it is indeed powerful and empowering—to allow marginalized group to define themselves and express their own beliefs and values through children’s literature.

Anthropologists and critical scholars caution against over-relying on ethnography because individuals are complicated with various experiences. Considering intersectionality helps us understand how gravely problematic it is to assume that people belonging in certain groups have the same experiences. For example, a poor woman living in rural Arkansas would have experiences dramatically different than another poor woman living in Hong Kong. Or, similarly, a poor woman living in rural Arkansas with HIV would likely have a dramatically different experience than someone else living in her same town without the virus. Anthropologist Paul Rabinow’s essay “Discourse and Power: On the Limits of Ethnographic Texts” from the book Essays on the Anthropology of Reason takes on some of the limitations of ethnographic texts. Rabinow reminds that “those of us who produce texts must face up to the fact that we can never avoid the author function. There are no transparent ethnographies” (8). Although it is common practice for scholars to review the text itself as a stand-alone artifact, it truly is impossible to completely escape the function of authorship because all authors come to
the table with their own ideologies, contexts, and prejudices. While scholars are certainly encouraged to explore a text as an artifact by itself—or connect its ideas to new ones—the role of authorship is always tied to the text and ultimately shapes its meaning. There are countless articles and books on responsible readings of ethnographies—nothing should be read without question. Another example is social scientist John Brewer’s “The Ethnographic Critique of Ethnography” in which Brewer literally writes a “defense of ethnography,” where he outlines the need for ethnographer integrity, as well as a laundry list of duties responsible ethnographers should fulfill, such as “showing the multiple and often contradictory descriptions proffered by respondents themselves” and “avoiding the suggestion there is a simple fit between world under scrutiny and the ethnographic representation” (235). Regardless of these complexities, most scholars agree that ethnographies are valid artifacts and worthy of study. While critics note the limitations of ethnographers from the perspective of the author, others also provide guidelines for the reader as well. In “The Ethnographic Imagination,” Brewer describes the responsibility of scholars to have “an openness in people’s attitude toward ethnographic data in which their reliability, usefulness, and important is not immediately dismissed out of hand; those readers accept that ethnographic data have strengths rather than focusing entirely on their limitations” (236). To successfully make use of ethnographic texts to begin dialogue about the diversity of human experience and ideology, utilizing an ethnographic imagination is also essential.

In addition to exposing children to ethnographic texts that encourage thinking differently, it is also important that children are exposed to a healthy balance of people who look like them and people who look differently. The complicated relationship of art’s representation of reality is described by Blaska and Lynch:
Books serve as mirrors for children, reflecting their feelings, relationships, and experiences in their everyday environment. Books also act as windows on the world, inviting young children to look beyond the immediate and encounter new characters and circumstances. The images of characters and circumstances that children form from their earliest and emergent literary experiences are important for overall development. This fact highlights the need for the presence of similar feelings, experiences, emotions, and characters with whom they can identify. (12)

Blaska and Lynch’s metaphor raises a series of intensely complicated questions: what happens when books signify identities with which children cannot identify? What are the psychological and emotional manifestations for children whose identities are constantly portrayed as “the other” and whose mirrors reflect strange truths about who they are? How are social attitudes about marginalized children a larger conflict in the narratives of real children with marginalized identities, and how are these attitudes recycled through shallow literary portrayals and media? Representations in children’s literature are powerful significations. Although it is common for scholars to continue using the metaphor of mirrors to describe children’s literature, this project argues that children’s literature can in fact do much more. Rather than mirrors, Aristotle believed that artistic representations could act as lamps to shine light on ways to generate fresh perspectives (Halliwell, Stephen, and Aristotle 112). My project prefers this lens for viewing children’s literature because it does more than reflect imitations of life. Not only can children’s literature reflect what already is, children’s texts can also reflect what can be, as described earlier by Toni Morrison’s literary imagination. Children’s texts can be used as lamps to generate new ways of looking at the world and our place within it.
Frederick Douglass once wrote that “it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men,” which is perhaps the most compelling reason that the children’s literature genre is so worthy of this research, as it asks the question: What happens when children grow up with problematic or zero representations of themselves? Several authors have attempted to answer that question in their own narratives. For example, Carolyn Gerald’s “The Black Writer and His Role” is helpful here, as it parallels ideas from Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* and is incredibly relevant today. Gerald’s idea of the “Zero Image” rings hauntingly close to that of Toni Morrison’s conceptualization of the white gaze—or as Gerald refers to it, “the white shadow” (Gerald 83). Much like Morrison argument, Gerald argues that Black people’s lives are centered around whiteness, which ultimately hinders their ability to envision and eventually experience the actualization of their dreams.

As Gerald reminds us, image is central to a human’s self-definition, and it is apparent that images of Black characters are often produced by a dominant white gaze. Gerald argues, “Black counselors, teachers, psychologists, and parents must help Black youth and each other to sort through or scrutinize” negative images, but they must also respond to the Zero image by projecting “positive self-images essential for positive Black behavior” (16). The careful selection of ethnographic texts—authored by marginalized writers who are identified via an intersectional lens—can be used by teachers and psychologists to replace the Zero Image with something that can promote social change via affirming, positive representations.
A great example of the power of replacing the Zero Image can be better understood through the legend of Chadwick Boseman. On screen, Chadwick Boseman played a Black indomitable superhero and became an icon for children. Although known for popular representations of Black icons like James Brown, Jackie Robinson, and civil rights champion Thurgood Marshall, it was his portrayal of the King of Wakanda in *Black Panther*—Marvel Studios’ first ever Black superhero—that won the hearts and imaginations of children across the globe. Boseman emerged as a cultural phenomenon and a symbol of hope for the future. As noted by Clayton Davis in the *Chicago Tribune*, his “poise and command of the screen latched on to the zeitgeist of a world being divided by political social and cultural identities—as the United States was grappling with racism and xenophobia two years into President Donald Trump’s first term” (Davis). In 2018, Boseman became the hero the world desperately needed, and not just on screen—he transformed into symbol of hope for marginalized communities around the globe, especially within the Black community. He was a hero who looked like them and represented them and was even famously credited for advocating for the use of African accents in the film.

When the news broke on August 28, 2020, that Boseman lost his four-year battle with colon cancer, it was a shockwave felt across the globe. Journalist Michael Phillips reflected that his “loss is not like any other this movie century, not like Heath Ledger dying at 28, or Philip Seymour Hoffman at 46, or Robin Williams at 63” because the “cultural impact made by *Black Panther*, one of the Marvel movies that actually matter, changed young moviegoer lives the world over, by means of overdue representation and good old-fashioned quality” (Phillips 2). *Black Panther* co-star Danai Gurira asked “How do you honor a king?,” while adding that Boseman was “perfectly equipped to take on the responsibility of leading the
franchise that changed everything for Black representation” (Ramos 11). Similar comments were made by numerous American celebrities and political leaders, including President Barack Obama, John Legend, Sterling Brown, Senator Kamala Harris, Oprah Winfrey, and Denzel Washington, who once funded an acting scholarship to the British American Drama Academy for young Bozeman and other Black classmates at Howard University who were unable to afford tuition. But perhaps the most moving tribute of all came from the children who loved and honored Bozeman with action figure funerals and memorials. Photos popped up across social media of children lamenting their hero, someone taken from them almost as quickly as they received him. The photos depicted children in tears lamenting the loss of their beloved friend and serve as a powerful testament to the impact Boseman’s character had on the children who loved him and saw themselves in him. Other families memorialized Boseman by posting pictures of their children in costumes dressed as their idol.

Boseman’s influence over children is powerful and moving through a deliberate effort to represent those typically under or misrepresented. In 2019, Boseman accepted the award for Best Performance By a Cast in a Motion Picture at the 2019 Screen Actors Guild Awards. During his acceptance speech, he explained his vision of inspiring and empowering children by quoting Nina Simone’s poem “Young and Gifted.” Boseman spoke to what Black Panther represented to our culture, “All of us up here know—to be young, gifted and black—we all know what it’s like to be told that there is not a place for you to be featured, yet you are young gifted and black. We know what it’s like to be told there’s not a screen for you to be featured on, a stage for you to be featured on. We know what it’s like to be the tail and not the head. We know what it’s like to be beneath and not above” (Sheffield 10). Boseman explained that his work
represents “something special he wanted to give the world. That we could be full human beings in the roles that we were playing. That we could create a world that exemplified a world that we wanted to see” (Sheffield 8). Black Panther’s reach extends well beyond the screen—it is depicted in children’s books, graphic novels, movie posters, and on t-shirts. But more importantly, Boseman’s role as King of Wakanda inspired children—especially Black children who are not commonly positively represented—to hope for a brighter, more inclusive future and to see heroes within themselves. On May 26, 2021, after Boseman’s death, Howard University announced plans to rename the College of Fine Arts after alum Chadwick Boseman. President Wayne Frederick explained that Bozeman had called Howard University a “magical place” for Black people, not unlike the world of Wakanda featured in Black Panther (Christian 2). Frederick explained that Bozeman announced plans to support a reestablishment of the College of Fine Arts during his visit in 2018. He also explained, “Chadwick’s love for Howard University was sincere,” and thus it is the college’s “honor to ensure is legacy lives on through the Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts” (Christian 3). This honor is especially of interest because Boseman, as a student from 1997-2000 at Howard, led protests against plans to absorb the College of Fine Arts into the College of Arts & Sciences. It was not until Boseman returned in 2018 amid the success of Black Panther that the College of Fine Arts was restored as an independent college.

Boseman’s influence does not stop with children and college campuses. His success further encouraged other artists to also create depictions of underrepresented populations. For example, on November 18, 2020, an important new series titled “Marvel’s Voices: Indigenous Voices,” created by Native American artists and writers, features new Indigenous heroes and their roles in the X-Men adventures. One of the contributors, Keith Jim, commented,
“Sometimes I feel like we’re forgotten. We are still here, so it’s important to stand up.”

Anthropologist Anthony Thibodeau has long studied the Indian arts and cultures and works as the curator at the Museum of Northern Arizona—and he sides with Jim. Thibodeau says, “Any character that was a non-white character, they were usually represented in a very stereotypical way,” such as through “their clothing, a lot of times how they talk or through their accent” (Messiah 4). Both men hope the new Marvel comic book heroes will help decrease the misrepresentation of Indigenous people. They also believe the series’ more authentic portrayal of Indigenous people will encourage underrepresented adults as well, citing the popularity of Danielle Moonstar among Indigenous women. Charles comments that he hopes “Dani” inspires women, includes them, and even offers them an escape. But then he added, “The most important thing to me is them seeing this and saying, ‘That’s me, I am that character’” (Messiah 3).

The approach taken by the creators of “Marvel’s Voices: Indigenous Voices” contrasts greatly with other images of Indigenous people that are also designed for children’s consumption, such as various adaptations of the tale of Peter Pan. In 1953, the release of Disney’s adaptation of Peter Pan only further reinforced these stereotypes. In fact, the offensive imagery is so blatant that Disney added a disclaimer to the film before uploading it to Disney Plus, the American subscription service on-demand that has accrued more than 86 million viewers by the end of December 2020. The film now warns viewers of stereotypical depictions that mistreat people and cultures. The final warning adds, “These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together.” Disney continues to make these films available while issuing warnings about their racism, stereotypes, and bigotry. Viewers are also given a website to read more information that help explains the
film’s dangerous depictions as part of Disney’s “Stories Matter” program, which aims to discuss social responsibility and encourage society to “relentlessly champion the spectrum of voices and perspectives in our world.” (Storiesmatter.thewatdisneycompany.com) Other popular children’s films to which Disney has added warning disclaimers include Aristocrats, Dumbo, and Swiss Family Robinson. Needless to say, the process that created these stereotypes—as well as the storyteller who tells about them—are significantly different than the model that the Indigenous contributors used when developing “Marvel’s Voices: Indigenous Voices.”

Sesame Street: The Hidden Curriculum of Inclusivity that Replaced the Zero Image

Boseman’s legacy highlights the power and necessity of inclusive, diverse representation for images aimed at children. Granted, these efforts have been championed before, and like the magical world of Wakanda, another important place on television has profoundly influenced children in this way—Sesame Street. Much like Boseman’s role on the screen, Sesame Street has quite consciously produced characters to replace the Zero Image often prevalent in children’s lives. Without doubt, the purpose of the beloved television series was to help level the playing field for disadvantaged youth in early education. Very specifically, the show’s target audience was set for lower income families with children 2 to 5 years old—and the show’s set specifically was designed to mimic diverse neighborhoods in New York, such as Harlem and the Bronx, even to the detail of intentionally including garbage cans and rows of brownstones. Last year—and forty years before Chadwick Boseman’s moving acceptance speech about the importance of representation—cultural theorist Bryan Greene, most notably recognized for his work in Poverty and Race, wrote an incredible summation of Sesame Street’s history for Smithsonian Magazine
titled “The Unmistakable Black Roots of Sesame Street.” Greene playfully observed that the
diverse neighborhoods of New York City “played such an outsized role in the department of the
program—from set design to casting and marketing—the answer to the question from the
Sesame Street opening song, ‘Can you tell me how to get to Sesame Street?,’ ought to be Duke
Ellington’s ‘Take the A Train.’” Greene tells the story of Sesame Street’s origin, how it all
stemmed from President Lyndon Johnson administration’s Great Society agenda, a noble pursuit
to eradicate racism and poverty (Greene 9).

In addition to kickstarting the creation of Headstart in 1965, Lyndon Johnson believed
that early education was the key to his vision of disrupting multi-generation cycles of poverty.
The creator of Sesame Street, Joan Ganz Cooney, had a background in education and a passion
for helping marginalized communities out of poverty, and she attributes much of Sesame Street’s
success to President Lyndon Johnson’s Head Start program creation, because the world “was
very attuned to poverty problems at that time” (Greene 5). Cooney remarks, “It was financed in
such a way that it caught the attention of the world. Eight million dollars would be like thirty
million or more today, and nothing like that had ever been spent on a children’s program.” She
continued, “there was still hope in the air that you could make a big difference in the inner-city
problems with government programs” (Greene 3). Cooney collaborated with a diverse field of
experts in education, including “child development, psychology, medicine, the social sciences,
the arts” and prioritized the inclusion of Black perspectives.
In January of 1970, a photo ran in *Ebony* magazine with Cooney among a group of talented Black women who were advisers for Sesame’s Street representation of youth. Additionally, among the minds Cooney collaborated with was Chester Pierce, an esteemed Black professor of psychiatry and education at Harvard University. Pierce collaborated with the advisers to create what was known as Sesame Street’s “hidden curriculum,” a narrative designed to “build up the self-worth of black children through the presentation of positive black images” and to “present an integrated, harmonious community” in juxtaposition against the typical marginalization children saw on television.
Inspired after the assassination of Martin Luther King to combat racial injustices, Pierson started the Black Psychiatrists of America, a group promoting a new look at racism. Pierson believed that racism did not simply stem from hateful people, and thus veered away from looking at the mental pathologies of individual racists. Instead, Pierson encouraged people to look at racism as a problem systematically rooted in America.

When Pierson created the Black Psychiatrists of America in 1969, the television set was a staple for families of all races. And as Dr. Anne Harrington—the Franklin L. Ford Professor of the history of science and medicine at Harvard University—explores in her research, the prevalence of the television in American homes concerned Pierce, as both a psychiatrist and specialist in early child education. Furthermore, Pierce believed that “television was a prime carrier of demeaning messages” that only hurt the mental wellbeing of vulnerable marginalized communities (Greene 4). In fact, Dr. Harrington contends that it was Pierce who first coined the term “microaggresssion” while studying stigmatizing representations of Black people in television throughout the 1970’s. But despite Pierce’s concerns, Dr. Harrington explains that Pierce concluded that “the same technology that risked creating another generation of physically
damaged black children could also be used as a radical therapeutic treatment” via Sesame Street’s hidden curriculum. Pierce would tell his colleagues within the Black Psychiatrists of America, “Many of you know that for years I have been convinced that our ultimate enemies and deliverers are the education system and the mass media. We must without theoretical squeamishness over correctness of our expertise, offer what fractions of truth we can to make education and mass media serve rather than to oppress the black people of this country” (Harrington 7). With this context and background, it is not at all surprising that Pierce collaborated tightly with Cooney to create Sesame Street, which first aired in 1969, and would go on to become arguably the world’s most successful children show of all time.

Some still refer to Sesame Street as the “radical experiment” because nothing of its kind had ever aired previously. In a 1998 interview with Joan Cooney, she describes the program’s uniqueness as “constructive” rather than just educational and distinguishes it from other programs at the time. Cooney argued, “I believe the only one that you could call constructive, not educational, but really constructive as we would understand that term was ‘Captain Kangaroo’” and it “had no followers in the networks” (Greene 17). Cooney argued also that Captain Kangaroo’s primary audience was the middle class. When asked to elaborate more on the difference between “educational” and “constructive,” Cooney explained, “Sesame Street had, beneath the form of merriment and entertainment, a very well-constructed curriculum, and we had a board of advisors, and we had constructed a curriculum that was laced all the way through the program. Almost everything that was done on Sesame Street was done for an educational reason” (Greene 18). But truthfully, Sesame Street’s educational goals and “hidden curriculum” were not too terribly hidden.
In May of 1970, Mississippi’s state’s commission initially voted to not air Sesame Street on its public network, arguing its constituents did not want to see such an interracial cast. However, the decision was reversed 22 days later after the show made national television. Sesame Street’s vision of an integrated society was controversial but continued to thrive. Shortly after its original airing, characters of Hispanic descent moved into the neighborhood. From 1970-1974, “Miguel” was the first Latino on Sesame Street, played by Jaime Sanchez, a Puerto Rican born Broadway actor who also famously played the original role of Chico in *West Side Story*.

The show would later cast more Hispanic characters, as well as others who would contribute to its diversity. For example, Sesame Street certainly worked to represent children with disabilities. Although parents of children with Down Syndrome in 2020 still advocate for public representation, Sesame Street did so back in the 1970’s. One of the writers for the show, Emily Kingsley, advocated for more inclusion of kids with disabilities on the show, which opened the gate to allowing her own son, Jason Kingsley, who had Down Syndrome, a spot on the show when he was only 15 months old. In a profile piece, Emily recalled the day after Jason was born, where she was “sitting in bed, looking at magazines and watching television and feeling as if I had fallen off the end of the earth. No one looked like my family. They were all so healthy, so perfect. I felt totally isolated, like I had just disappeared. It was something I wanted to change” (Riley 108). Premiering Jason on television was a dramatic change from the doctors’ encouragement to have him institutionalized. Instead, Emily brought Jason home, and he became a regular part of Sesame Street’s cast and appeared in more than 55 episodes of the program.
But Kingsley did not end her advocacy at children with Down Syndrome. Kingsley became a champion for the inclusion of children with various disabilities and would eventually be identified as a leading influencer of change for how they are represented; she would go on to receive dozens of Emmys for her work. Using intersectionality theory to think about the significance of uplifting marginalized children with disabilities is helpful and a significant piece in the narrative about uplifting children. Numerous researchers within Disability Studies write extensively how children with disabilities—much like Black children described earlier in the chapter by Carolyn Gerald’s Zero Image—are notoriously underrepresented. In Charles Riley’s book *Disability and the Media: Prescriptions for Change*, Riley describes how Kingsley changed the children’s industry from within: “She committed *Sesame Street* to a reality check, bringing guests with disabilities, including Itzhak Perlman and the Little Theater of the Deaf, to do star turns. Casting for diversity in racial as well as disability terms, brought a regular member of the show, Tarah Schaeffer, who uses a wheelchair due to osteogenesis imperfecta” (Riley 9). A popular song was released in 1993 showcases Schaeffer explaining the different parts of her wheelchair using the tune “Wheels on the Bus.” Similarly, another person Kingsley recruited for the show was a young man in a wheelchair named Italo Alexander Martinez.

Riley argues that Kingsley was able to pioneer “work in the medium that accomplished the one thing that no other show or movies had done: regularly casting people with disabilities to represent themselves and their disabilities instead of watching others’ imitations” (Riley 87). Kingsley’s inclusion of children with disabilities surpassed even that of television and movies today. Kingsley explains, “We include kids with disabilities just as part of the gang. Children in the audience get validation when they see others like themselves. Their siblings receive gratifying reinforcement seeing kids like those in their own families. We take the strangeness
out of it. Why should difference be equated with fear?” (Riley 108). The commitment to the inclusion of children with disabilities by Sesame Street’s writers can be seen in numerous ways. For example, in 1972, Linda Bove, a woman with hearing loss, first played Sesame Street’s librarian and introduced children to American Sign Language (ASL). In 2003, a puppet named Kami was the first HIV-positive Muppet, whose name means acceptance in Tswana. Kami first appeared in the South African part of the show and was used to teach children about the disease’s transmission, dealing with grief, and so forth. Kami the Muppet evolved into a posterchild for HIV awareness, raising awareness with prominent figures, including Bill Clinton, Desmond Tutu, and Laura Bush. Additionally, in France’s version of the show, Rue Sésame, a puppet named Griotte, who depended on a wheelchair for mobility, appeared.

Sesame Street’s historical commitment to diversity has continued throughout the years. More recently, in 2015, Sesame Street unveiled Julie, a puppet representing neurodiversity and introducing viewers to autism. An essay by Zac Hyman, the parent of a child with autism, explores the impact Julie had on his own child. At first, he describes his son’s concern and anxiety and says he initially asked with frustration, “Are they even allowed to do that?” (Riley 92). But Hyman was relieved to see his son accept Julie via Sesame Street’s sensitive portrayal of autism, seeing her as a little quirky but not controversial or bad. Like the other Muppets, Julie participates in normal activities, like finger painting, but she might do so a little differently. For example, in Sesame Street’s “Meet Julie” episode, all the Muppets are painting together, except Julie is using her paintbrush because she doesn’t like the feeling of paint on her hands, a typical concern of children with autism who might be over-sensitive to sensory textures. Although Hyman argues that Julie’s depiction is not without her flaws, but he also says her appearance is long overdue. Hyman writes, “Her introduction represents an encouraging cultural shift. Arts
culture, including picturebooks and television, if managed appropriately, can have a positive effect on the psychosocial development of children, teaching them how to empathically interact with peers on the spectrum. The arts can also help children with difference to identify with likeminded characters, engendering a sense of connection and wellbeing” (Riley 94). Hyman’s inclusion of picturebooks in his reflection is justified, as they—as the Harvard psychologist would say—are also “carriers of representation” that can either be stigmatizing or positive.

Most recently, in March of 2021, Time Magazine featured an article about Sesame Street’s continued efforts at negating the Zero Image in a piece titled “Sesame Street is Talking More Explicitly About Race—and Welcoming Two Black Muppets.” Although Sesame Street has a history of intentionally including diverse characters to promote inclusion, there skits are increasingly addressing racism more directly. Lang notes that while the television show “has always highlighted the importance of multiculturalism and inclusivity—and featured a racially and ethnically human cast—it has never really tackled race and racism head on” (3). In 2019, Sesame Street partnered with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC)—a nonpartisan and objective research organization founded in 1941 affiliated with the University of Chicago. In their partnership with Sesame Street, NORC found that parents rarely or never discuss race or ethnicity with their kids, although research shows us that people as young as infants start noticing racial differences. This research pushed for the creation of Elijah and Wes—two puppets who specifically are designed to navigate conversation about what it’s like to live as a Black American. Kay Stallings, the executive vice president of creative and production for Sesame Street Workshop, explained that the racial unrest that happened after the murder of George Floyd was the real trigger that showed the need for Sesame Street to be bolder in their explorations of race. She explains, “People were working remotely. People were feeling a lot of
emotions, and it’s like everyone had the same realization. If not Sesame, who’s going to address this?” Their team concluded that someone had to do something about it and that specifically started with defining racism for 3-year-olds (Lang 3).

Creating an image for children who are Black Americans navigating racial inequality is extraordinary, although others note there is still room for growth. For example, Calvin Gidney, Tufts University’s associate professor of child development, notes that he is glad that Sesame Street is addressing racism but adds that “if the organization really wants to confront structural racism, white characters must explore their racialization too” (Lang 6). In a sense, Gidney is pointing out a different kind of Zero Image—the missing white character who explores implicit and explicit participation in white supremacy. Gidney explains that omitting this group “can sort of make whiteness absent in the conversation, whereas I think whiteness is at the center of the conversation” (Lang 6). This form of “Zero Image” is equally, if not more important, to acknowledge, as it helps families model thinking and conversing about race with children. Sesame Street’s creators agree and have plans for development on these issues for the next several years.

Although Sesame Street remains celebrated for its conscious depictions and explorations of race, the criticism that the organization has not explicitly addressed racism is certainly fair. A good example of this is the 2005 picturebook titled Red or Blue, I Like You! By Sarah Albee. The story begins with the character Elmo—a small red furry monster—befriending Angela, a small blue furry monster, while in the waiting room at the dentist office. The two monsters befriend one another easily and their parents agree to a playdate. It is when Elmo visits Angela’s neighborhood that the reader can see how the narrative can be viewed metaphorically about the dangers of stereotyping. Elmo is surprised to visit Angela’s neighborhood because it is full of
blue monsters, not red ones. And when Angela’s brother, Tony, asks Elmo to join them in watching a show called *Supermonster*, he is surprised when Elmo declines and retorts that he “thought all red monsters loved that show!” (Albee 6). Similarly, the blue monster family is again surprised at lunchtime to learn that Elmo also enjoyed eating spaghetti. Tony reflects, “So you red monsters like a lot of the same stuff we blue monsters do, huh?” to which Elmo explains that red monsters eat all kinds of foods, too. It is not difficult to see how the blue monsters’ preconceived beliefs about red monsters is symbolic of people of different races not understanding each other and not conversing with one another.

But Albee’s *Red or Blue, I Like You!* does not go much further than these surface stereotypes. There is no explanation about why the blue monsters believe these ideas about red monsters and there is no hint about how dangerous this can be. Moreover, it certainly doesn’t explore power differences between the blue and red monsters—not in the ways in which the new puppets like Elijah and Wes do. In fact, the narrative turns the table to show that red family is also not immune from stereotypical thinking. The next day, Angela visits Elmo’s family and once again the reader observes stereotypes asserted by the characters, except this time by Elmo’s family. Elmo’s aunt immediately corners Angela to let her know she made spaghetti especially for her, since Elmo said she liked that. Confused, Angela also informed them that she likes other foods too, like chicken and fruit salad, while motioning to the table full of different foods. Elmo’s aunt responds with surprise that she “didn’t realize that blue monsters like that kind of food” (Albee 9). The story wraps up shortly thereafter, depicting Elmo and Angela playing and discussing how welcoming Sesame Street is. While Albee’s narrative certainly does an interesting job of introducing ideas about stereotypes and showing the importance of diverse
groups interacting together, it certainly does not address racism heads on, the way some of the writers at Sesame Street are hoping to do more of in the future.

When thinking of symbols to replace the Zero Image as described by Carolyn Gerald, the thoughtful and brilliant creation of Sesame Street serves as an exceptional example. Critical theorist Robert Goldman used Gerald’s theory to make a significant argument—that Gerald’s rhetoric argues with great perceptiveness that there exists a “cause and effect relationship between image and self-concept” (Goldman 5). Furthermore, Goldman argues that Gerald is essentially ascribing a role for Black writers that is significant to counseling psychologists and educators. As Gerald suggests, Sesame Street creates a necessary safe space—a space that has scrutinized “more carefully the images projected on their sensory mechanisms” with the purpose of creating positive self-images essential for Black behavior” (11). Similarly, the history of Sesame Street highlights the importance pieces that lay at the core of intersectionality, as it was not surprisingly developed by women of color. Historical and cultural scholars have long argued that women of color have been the most marginalized group of society, and thus they have had to fight the hardest to get their voices heard. As my project illustrates, women of color have been the trailblazers for inclusion—and they have thoughtfully included marginalized groups to their efforts for change, including people with disabilities.
Chapter 3
Creating A New FishBowl:
Picturebooks by Grace Lin, Ashley Franklin, Gabi Garcia,
Malala Yousafzai, and Gloria Anzaldúa

“If there’s a book you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.”
-Toni Morrison

When Morrison wrote the fishbowl metaphor in *Playing in the Dark* in 1992, she was making an analogy about the limitations of the Black gaze due to the oppressive dominance of the white gaze. She develops a literary criticism of the way canonical white authors—literary legends like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ernest Hemingway, and Edgar Allan Poe—handle Blackness. Linda Krumholz described Morrison’s work as an “analysis of whiteness to propose the ways that black people were used to establish American identity” (2). But Morrison is doing something much more exciting than only criticizing the limited gaze of the white fishbowl. It is “not a mere denunciation of white culture,” writes Wendy Steiner in a 1992 review in the *New York Times*; it is a work that is meant to “map out new critical territory and to rearrange the territory within” (1). In addition to describing how the fishbowl was created and by whom, Morrison invites writers to construct worlds beyond the gaze of the white fishbowl, and in a sense, create their own fishbowl—one that is not constructed by white people and did not center itself around whiteness. A common response by scholars when observing prejudicial artistic representations of marginalized communities in literary works is to call out the work’s creator: critical theorists and scholars are understandably quick to point out dangerous misconceptions and biases promoted about their communities. But another response is when Black people, or people of other marginalized positions, decide to ignore problematic narratives and instead write the narrative themselves, ultimately making their own fishbowl to explore new territories.
In addition to Morrison, numerous scholars, including writers Audre Lorde and Kwame Appiah, have written about the importance of facilitating and highlighting conversation among people of marginalized identities. The dialogue allows typically silenced communities a chance to vocalize their own truths about their communities, while simultaneously allowing others outside their fishbowl an opportunity to “trespass” into the perspectives of individuals who are different from themselves. As discussed in the last chapter, Black activist scholarship recognizes the threat of the white gaze and intentionally creates narratives to disrupt the status quo. Morrison explains how various artifacts—dolls, toys, television images, books, etc.—not only profoundly influence the self-esteem of vulnerable children, but also serve as instruments of dialogue regarding difference.

The rest of the scholarship in this chapter will work to complete two important tasks. First, we will look briefly at the scholarship of theorists Audre Lorde, Kwame Appiah, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari that urges the exploration and critical necessity of looking at gazes beyond those centered in whiteness. Their scholarship helps give readers a vehicle to explore the new “fishbowls” created by marginalized authors by looking at important terms: deterritorialization, trespassing, and cosmopolitanism. Then, we will look at how five children’s authors are exploring new territories outside of the white gaze and facilitating dialogues via the children’s literature genre, which ultimately perpetuate ideologies embracing diversity and inclusion: Grace Lin, Ashley Franklin, Gabi Garcia, Malala Yousafzai, and Gloria Anzaldúa. These contemporary authors use children’s texts as a vehicle for change—one that creates new territories outside of the white fishbowl. The five children’s authors explored in the latter part of this chapter highlight voices in the beautiful way that Morrison described: the explosion and undermining of the fabric of racism and other oppressive power structures.
Theoretical Tools to Explore New Territories

There are obvious benefits to using literature to learn about the experiences of those different from we, as Audre Lorde brilliantly argued in her 1984 collection of essays titled *Sister Outsider*. Literary giant and activist Audre Lorde—a black immigrant lesbian poet, who is also a warrior against cancer, and is often considered in academia as the “ultimate other,”—wrote a powerful essay titled “The Tranformation of Silence into Language & Action,” in which she urges others not only to speak out and tell their own stories, but to actively seek out the stories of other different people via what she refers to as “trespassing.” Specifically, she implores that we do “not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own” (44), and she urges women to cross over—or “trespass”—racial lines and push beyond the boundaries that society has set to dissolve solidarity among women. Her essay powerfully forebodes against such senselessness, describing it as “endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other” (44). Lorde warns that women particularly must not “rob ourselves of ourselves”—and that sharing diverse narratives is crucial to not doing this. Lorde elaborates by citing non-Black women who refuse to teach Black literature. Although these women contend that they cannot teach Black literature because they cannot understand the experiences of Black people, Lorde points out the hypocrisy of the argument. She asks, “Yet how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust?” (46). And Lorde does not stop there—she likewise questions Black women’s avoidance of reading work by white women and how others similarly neglect the work of lesbian women.

Lorde’s essay warns that we have been “socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (44). I She begs others, especially women,
to ask themselves, “What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?” (44).

Utilizing children’s books to teach about the diverse experiences of “othered” cultural identities is a way to transform silence into language and action for younger generations. In addition to voicing their own cultural values and ideologies, Lorde urges readers to not only tell their own stories, but to actively seek out the stories of others unlike themselves. She pleads that we “not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own” (43). She urges readers to cross over the various layers of identities unlike our own and push away the boundaries that society has set to dissolve solidarity in marginalized groups. According to Lorde, to not “rob ourselves of ourselves,” sharing diverse narratives is crucial.

An urge for dialogue is not championed by women alone, of course. Princeton Professor Kenneth Appiah shares similar views in his 2007 book Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers. Appiah has the “belief in having conversations across boundaries, and in recognizing our obligations to other human beings, [which] offers a welcome prescription for a world still plagued by fanaticism and intolerance” (42). Appiah points to globalization’s role in the world and comments, “I think what goes on is that people interpret these things and make sense of them in their own cultural context. I would like a world in which there was more exchange because I think some of the most vital cultural moments, human cultural moments, come when that exchange happens” (65). Acknowledging human differences and conversing about them not only may lead to understanding but may also lead to shared values. Appiah urges that we work harder to “learn more about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but
because it will help us get used to one another “(26). Historians have documented numerous times that the core of many cultural conflicts is misunderstandings, ignorance, and xenophobia.

Appiah works to analyze the values and traditions existing among various communities. In an age where globalization and technology transform numerous aspects of our lives, many scholars are noting that, despite communities being more connected than ever before, people continue to struggle with feelings of isolation. It is with this background that Appiah takes up cosmopolitanism, which is the “simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association” (34). Cosmopolitanism at its root is a form of humanism—the notion that humans share enough to begin a conversation—and from there, perhaps, maybe, we can reach for understanding of things we do not yet understand about one another. Appiah elaborates:

The conclusion is obvious enough: the points of entry to cross-cultural conversations are shared by those who are in the conversation. They do not need to be universal; all they need to be is what these particular people have in common. Once we have found enough, we share, there is the further possibility that we will be able to enjoy discovering things we do not yet share. That is one of the payoffs of cosmopolitan curiosity. We can learn from one another; or we can simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. (89)

Appiah makes an argument describing the benefit and power of human dialogue and contends that understanding can be found through shared commonalities. His use of “cosmopolitan curiosity” is helpful throughout this project because it, too, seeks to encourage dialogue among people who are different. Specifically, my project urges for the use of Appiah’s
“cosmopolitanism curiosity”—the process of discovering things we do not share while dialoguing about things we do—while utilizing ethnographic texts for children. In many ways, although Appiah’s theoretical groundwork is rooted in complicated philosophical history, his ideas are also somewhat simple and have been spoken before—by experts in children’s literature and by children themselves. In a 1998 study led by Badleley and Eddershaw, that used picturebooks to explore characters who had difficulty understanding the point of view of others, the children of the study concluded their own theme—they “passed over the intended theme but proposed their own—that people do not understand each other because they do not talk, so they help in the wrong way” (Saunders). Although the study’s findings seem obvious, they remain profound and helpful.

As Lorde and Appiah urge adults to exchange pieces of themselves with others who are different from them, my project also argues that children’s books—when carefully selected with certain criteria—may serve as tools for creating spaces outside of the white gaze, which promotes inclusion, while also facilitating difficult conversations that allow children to trespass into identities unlike their own. Inclusion of these theoretical frameworks—the use Lorde’s “trespassing” and Appiah’s “cosmopolitanism curiosity”—help to build an important foundation for explaining the significance of dialogue via reading and discussing children’s literature, and furthermore, how it can have powerful cultural ramifications.

Grace Lin: Reterritorializing Children’s Literature & Representing Chinese Identity

Audre Lorde and Kwame Appiah both urge readers to use their voices both to create a space for others to trespass into their own experiences and to start a dialogue about important similarities and differences among human beings. An excellent example of a children’s author utilizing her voice to create dialogue about different cultures and the importance of inclusion is
Grace Lin, who originally did not begin her career with an interest in creating representations of Chinese identity—in fact, it was the opposite: she intentionally avoided learning anything about Chinese culture. Although Lin grew up an avid reader and created books as a child, she recalls in a 2016 Ted Talk that “the characters were never, ever Asian” (“Windows”). As an adult, she continued to enjoy creating narratives for children, and she formally studied in Rome, Italy. Lin recalls a powerful conversation in an Italian café, where someone innocently inquired about her familial background, “Here I was, in Rome, having a conversation in Italian, yet I could not speak one word of my parent’s mother tongue. I realized that I could tell him how long it took Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel. I could tell him what the mascot of Rome was. I could tell him how ancient Italians dyed their hair! But I could not tell him why my own parents immigrated to the United States of America” (“Windows”). This epiphany conjured powerful questions for Lin, both about her heritage and her role as an artist: “Here I was trying to be an artist, and when you’re trying to be an artist, what you’re really doing is trying to create a vision to share with the world. But how could I create any vision to share with the world when I had not ever even looked at myself?” (“Windows”). Lin’s actualization inspired her to learn about her Chinese heritage, while also opening herself up as an artist to produce more authentic, ethnographic texts for children about Chinese identity. She is a great example of an author inviting readers to “trespass” into her children’s books with a “cosmopolitan curiosity.”

Lin’s struggle for harmony between her role as a minority and her role as a creator is one paralleled among other marginalized artists and thinkers. W.E.B. Dubois’s infamous “Criteria of Negro Art” contends that beauty and truth “is brought to us peculiarly when as artists we face our own past as a people” (Du Bois 189). Comparable to Lin’s epiphany, Du Bois demands that there must be “a realization of that past, of which for long years we have been ashamed, for
which we have apologized. We thought nothing could come out of that past which we wanted to remember, which we wanted to hand down to our children” (195). Lin’s epiphany in Rome caused her to confront her avoidance of heritage and recall painful events of her own past, like a time when her peers laughed at her for wanting to play the role of Dorothy in a school performance of the *The Wizard of Oz*. “But you can’t be Dorothy,” one girl taunted, “Dorothy’s not Chinese!” (“Windows”). Understanding “the white gaze” helps us to understand how Lin’s white peer could not perceive of a non-white Dorothy in a culturally popular narrative like *The Wizard of Oz*. The “white gaze” is described by George Yancy as “looking at the world through the eyes of a white person who has undertones of, or is blatant in, their racism” (43). A series of events in Lin’s life—all of which comprised of the white gaze’s privileged authority in commenting on all cultures and identities—encouraged Lin to actively avoid her own heritage.

Because of the oppressive prevalence of the culture’s dominant white gaze—even in children’s literature—ethnographic texts for children are able to reterritorialize literature. “Reterritorialization” is a term coined by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari in their 1987 text, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In an anthropological sense, “reterritorialization” is a response and restructuring to “detrerritorialization,” where people begin constructing by themselves a popular aspect of culture. Rather than merely eliminating an aspect of culture that is no longer favorable like with detrerritorialization, reterritorialization is the process of building something to replace what previously existed. Reterritorialization via critical literacy reinterprets the borders of “knowledge and power by making a space for oppressed voices to name their experience, reclaim their history, and transform their future” (Adkins 67). In “reterritorialization,” people are creating in their own space and on their own terms, not necessarily the majority’s. For example, consider all the layers of identities included in
intersectionality. Should a small, marginalized group disagree with an aspect of culture, they can work to eliminate that aspect via reterritorialization of something new—something that is more favorable to their group. Very simply, deterritorialization is the process through which to undo what already has been established, while reterritorialization replaces the existing structure. Numerous systems of power have designed social constructs and titles to “undo” the basic civil liberties attributed to human beings at birth. Rather than acknowledge equality and merit among all individuals, society has worked to undo these beliefs with racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, and other means of oppression. Reterritorialization often follows this process with the attempt to re-do what has been undone and empower new systems. A pragmatic example of reterritorialization is the GLBTQIA community’s victory during the summer of 2015 when the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor for marriage equality. For the first time in the history of the United States, despite prevalent American beliefs of homophobia, courts could not legally keep same-sex couples from marrying and were forced to recognize their union (Capella).

Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that “minority” is a complicated term, and that the “opposition between minority and majority is not simply qualitative” (Adkins 105). The term “majority” “implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it” (Adkins 105). They explain that one “reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in becoming one is deterritorialized” (Adkins 291). In this sense, as Grace Lin confronts her heritage and then creates children’s books representing her heritage, she is both withdrawing from the majority and rising from the minority and ultimately becoming-minority, or rather, becoming-Chinese.

Understanding Deleuze and Guattari’s “minority” is helpful when thinking about the role of the white gaze in culture and literature. As Lin elaborates on a metaphor comparing a
book to a window and mirror, she asks, “A book can show you the world, but it can also show you a picture of yourself. But what happens when you never see anyone in a book that looks like you?” (“Windows”). Other marginalized artists beg similar questions and inquire about systems created to maintain the white gaze. As Zora Neale Hurston observes in her 1947 essay “What White Publishers Won’t Print”: “I have been amazed by the Anglo-Saxon’s lack of curiosity about the internal lives and emotions of Negroes, and for that matter, any non-Anglo-Saxon peoples within our borders, above the class of unskilled labor” (54). Hurston’s response to this answer sheds light on perhaps why Grace Lin’s classmates could not even conceive of a Chinese Dorothy:

The answer lies in what we may call THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF UNNATURAL HISTORY. This is an intangible built on folk belief. It is assumed that all non-Anglo-Saxons are uncomplicated stereotypes. Everybody knows all about them. They are lay figures mounted in the museum where all may take them in at a glance. They are made of bent wires without insides at all. So how could anybody write a book about the nonexistent? (55).

Hurston’s discussion of stereotypes helps explicate Lin’s experiences. How could Lin’s classmates fathom of a Chinese Dorothy, when that idea challenged the box of identity in which all people of Chinese identity were placed? How could a Chinese person know anything except the limited landscapes on which the white gaze had bestowed them?

To answer Hurston’s question, “So how could anybody write a book about the nonexistent?,” Grace Lin embarked on an artistic adventure to depict children’s books with Chinese characters that represent more authentic representations of Chinese people. “After a
lifetime of denying my heritage, I was suddenly starved for it, “said Lin. “I began to look at Chinese art, and I fell in love with Chinese folk art, especially its bright colors and patterns, and I began to paint the same way. And when my books were finally published, they featured Chinese culture and Asian characters” (“Windows”). Lin began producing a series of children’s books—Dim Sum for Everyone, The Ugly Vegetables, and Fortune Cookies Fortunes.

In Lin’s The Ugly Vegetables, a young Chinese girl laments over her mother’s insistence on growing Chinese vegetables in their garden, when all of their neighbors grew beautiful flowers instead. The young girl asks her mother multiple times about the “ugly vegetables” that were growing in the family garden and notes, “Sometimes I would go over to the neighbors’ and look at their pretty gardens. They would show the poppies and peonies and petunias to me, and I would feel sad that our garden wasn’t as nice” (The Ugly Vegetables 7). Although the narrator initially felt shame about the Chinese vegetables, like xiao hu gua and tong hao, the little girl quickly changes her mind when it is time to harvest the vegetables, and her mother makes a delicious soup that enticed people from all over the neighborhood to come for dinner. At the end of the story, the little girl is proud of her “ugly vegetables” and her mother’s Chinese cooking, and soon people around her neighborhood began growing Chinese vegetables, too.

Grace Lin’s ethnographic text is special—it invites the reader to see Chinese culture without the white gaze and it cultivates a pride in Chinese heritage that is too often missing from dominant childhood texts. As Grace Lin writes, “My books are the books I wish I had when I was a child” (“Windows”). As an added layer of complexity, the end of The Ugly Vegetables includes he entire recipe for the Ugly Vegetable Soup at the end of the book, along with a list of ingredients with Chinese spellings and English descriptions. The recipe invites the reader to experience the soup, thus indulging in Chinese culture in a way that is significant beyond the
text. This text does more than nurture a pride in Chinese heritage—it also combats the stereotypical box that Hurston described that dominant culture often puts non-Anglo-saxons into. Other texts by Lin with similar aims include *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon, Starry River of the Sky*, and *Dim Sum for Everyone*—the latter book that reterritorializes the dining experience via explaining and celebrating the Chinese custom of dim sum.

Ethnographic texts—such as the children’s series by Grace Lin—undermine the “fabrication of racism” and stereotypes. By offering a non-white gaze, Lin deterritorializes Chinese identity by broadening the overall landscape of American literature and identity. Granted, it is not only Chinese students who benefit from the readings of Lin’s work—intersectional thinking reminds us that other children might relate to their families’ foods seeming “othered” when compared to standard American foods served in American school cafeterias. Also, Lin’s texts invite other children to develop understanding of one another as described by Appiah’s cosmopolitan curiosity. For example, a child might connect with the characters in *The Ugly Vegetables* initially because of their own personal interest in cooking or
gardening—and through that shared experience, they might begin to find other ways they connect to Lin’s characters that were less obvious.

More than just mirrors, Grace Lin’s personal narrative and the children’s texts she create change perceptions and identities, ultimately creating a healthier, more inclusive world for children “becoming-Chinese.” The significations of Lin’s texts extend well beyond the page. After winning a Newberry Honor for her novel Where the Mountain Meets the Moon, Lin was surprised to hear people refer to her book as a “Chinese Wizard of Oz,” who Lin later admits was really “an Asian Dorothy,” a girl who Lin’s “a girl that my 5th grade self would have loved to see herself as” (“Windows”). Lin’s readership exploded throughout the country, and she was invited to speak at schools all over the world, where teachers and librarians discussed how Lin’s books changed the ways other children saw Asian students. Lin reflects, “And this made me realize that as much as kids need books to be mirrors, they also need books to be windows. Kids who always see themselves in books need to be able to see things from other viewpoints. How can we expect kids to get along with others in this world—to empathize and to share—if they never see outside of themselves?” (“Windows”) In this sense, Lin’s books function more like windows or lamps than mirrors, because they encourage readers of various cultures to trespass into the ideologies of others armed with a cosmopolitan curiosity.

Unfortunately, Lin is not alone in experiencing racism while dreaming of being Snow White in the class play. As recently as 2019, a popular children’s book was written by Ashley Franklin titled Not Quite Snow White. Hauntingly like Lin’s actual experience, the narrative’s protagonist—a spirited, talented young girl named Tameika with brown skin and dark curly hair—is mocked by school peers for aspiring to play Snow White in the school play. Tameika overheard her classmates criticizing, “She can’t be Snow White” because she’s “too tall” and
“much too chubby” (Franklin 6). And another classmate added, “And she’s too brown.” She responds with numerous questions that challenge her ambitions and identity. Tameika wondered if a princess “shouldn’t be taller than her prince,” nor could she “remember any chubby princesses” (7). The narrative then describes Tameika internalizing negative, racist ideas about her identity, “Tameika looked at her skin. She was brown. How could a girl with brown skin play a princess like Snow White?” (7). As Tameika feels “othered” by her classmates, images depicting isolation, rejection, and loneliness increase.

Thinking about Audre Lorde’s ideas on trespassing—being able to enter within a new territory or identity—is helpful here. Earlier in the book, Franklin describes that Tameika has been able to “trespass” into a lot of interesting identities. There are examples of her trespassing into a performance of various other interesting things for the theatre, including a cucumber, a space cowgirl, a dinosaur, and singing mermaid. Franklin’s exposition about Tameika’s past performances begins to ask an important question: if society has no trouble allowing her to trespass into these fictional identities, why is it so hard for society to allow her to trespass into the identity of a young girl?

As the narrative unfolds, something quite amazing happens. Tameika is able to reinvent herself—both her present and her future—by taking apart stereotypical truths about herself and replacing them with ideas that are affirmative. As Tameika speaks with her parents—both people who love and support her as she is—she develops a more assuring self-image and rejects the stereotypical “truths” regurgitated by her peers. Eventually, Tameika’s father assures Tameika that her identity is not actually based on the perceptions of others, ultimately encouraging her to build her own “truth” about her identity. In fact—and perhaps a bit on the nose—he tells her that Snow White is “pretend” and that she is his “real princess.” Her father’s
use of words like “pretend” and “real” hints that her classmates prejudiced assumptions about who and what his daughter can and should be are constructs that are rooted in fictitious beliefs.

Through conversations with her parents, Tameika begins questioning the student’s conclusion that cannot play Snow White, who is traditionally a white girl. As her confidence grows, so does her questioning the statements spoken by her classmates to claim she cannot perform as a brown Snow White. Eventually, Tameika’s confidence grows so much that she not only opted to try out for the role of Snow White, but she imagined herself performing for “her favorite audience of friends (stuffed and unstuffed)” rather than imagining a performance in front of her white classmates who doubted her right to trespass. Tameika killed the performance! And the answer to her doing so is written plainly at the narrative’s conclusion. Franklin describes how Tameika’s newfound confidence had transformed into self-love: “She loved herself as much as she loved music and movement” (17). By loving herself and rejecting the racist beliefs of her classmates, Franklin was able to—just like Grace Lin—reterritorialize a new depiction of Snow White.

Outside the Gaze: Why the Narrator Matters

Tameika’s father is doing much more than merely encouraging his daughter. Essentially, Tameika’s father is asking some challenging questions about truth, while encouraging his daughter to do the same: Who is the narrator or our individual stories? Who gets to determine our merit as individuals and essentially the roles we play in the world? Whose voices more important in deciding what prescribed beliefs are ‘real’ versus which are ‘pretend’—and why? And lastly, are we free to reject existing labels or “truths” about our current identities, and ultimately build a new “truth” to re-envision ourselves into new roles? These are complicated questions that philosophers have asked for hundreds of years. In the example of Not Quite Snow
White, it seems obvious that the “truths” echoed by Tameika’s peers about who and what Snow White can be was created by biases rooted in existing systems, including white supremacy and unfair demands on the size of the female body.

Although Tameika eventually regains the courage and strength via her parents to try out for the role of Snow White, which she is awarded, the reader is left wondering if the children reading the story receive as positive and reaffirming outcomes. After all, *Not Quite Snow White* is a fictional text—and not all stories in real life have happy endings. Not all children have two parents—let alone two parents with the tools, ability, or time—to address the racist comments made by Tameika’s peers. Not all children would have the theatrical talent to land the lead, either, which ultimately helped affirm Tameika’s identity. In short, many children are not equipped with the tools or resources to question dominant “truths” about identity or to challenge representations of themselves that is represented for them, but Tameika’s character is able to be reflective. The illustration on the book’s cover includes a photo of Tameika literally looking into the mirror, which can signify reflection as a metaphor about cultural identity, as well as the purpose of art’s function and purpose.

Much like Grace Lin, Ashley Franklin uses her own experience with racism to write narratives for children. As a Black Muslim mother and teacher, Franklin understands the need for Black children’s populations to be championed. In a 2019 interview, Franklin explains her reason for writing: “Kids are just filled with hope, potential, and imagination. To me, that’s a magical foundation. It’s something that we adults have been blessed with the task of nurturing—whether that be as a parents, educators, and family” (Stilborn). Franklin adds, “I hope to write stories that truly resonate with children that help them to see that they can shine brilliantly regardless of their situation. Particularly for children who may not come from ideal situations,
they especially need to trust and believe in themselves. They need to know that there’s something special inside them, something magical if you will, that gives them the ability to succeed” (Stillborn). As noted, Franklin’s ambitions are well beyond simply writing an entertaining narrative for children. Instead, she is joining other authors in taking on the immense task of helping children cultivate a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Furthermore, Not Quite Snow White works as a vehicle of activism against white supremacy because it encourages readers to question cultural truths about identity that are rooted and racism and then replace those truths with their own.

Remaking Snow White and Remember Intersectionality: Continuing the Controversy

In 2021, Disney announced remaking the 1931 classic film Snow White into a live action movie. Creators of the new film were proud to announce that the actress playing the lead was Rachel Zegler, a Colombian American actress who gained popularity when playing the role of Maria in the 2021 remake of West Side Story. Zegler commented, “As a Colombian-American woman growing up in this day and age, strong roles like Maria are so important. To be able to bring that role to life—a role that means so much to the Hispanic community—is so humbling” (Gaspar 3). Despite Disney’s attempt to reimagine the 1931 classic, others continued to criticize the narrative for discrimination, but this time the criticism was not about race. It is important to remember that intersectional thinking and inclusivity does not just consider race—it looks at various aspects of human identities, including gender and disabilities. American actor and producer Peter Hayden Dinklage spoke out against Disney’s remake of the classic altogether, citing its problematic representation of dwarfs. Dinklage’s stardom rocketed over the last decade and he has premiered in numerous popular films including Game of Thrones (2011–2019), The Chronicles of Narnia (2008), X-Men: Days of Future Past (2014), among numerous others.
Dinkage has achondroplasia, a common form of dwarfism, and stands 4 feet 5 inches tall. Unlike others who celebrated Disney’s progressive casting of a Latina to play Snow White, Dinkage still expressed concerns, “You’re progressive in one way and you’re still making that fucking backward story and seven dwarfs living in a cave together” (Stillborn). Dinklage’s comments made attracted attention online and a Disney spokesman responded to the concerns, "To avoid reinforcing stereotypes from the original animated film, we are taking a different approach with these seven characters and have been consulting with members of the dwarfism community” (Stillborn). Dinklage’s point is a good example of why intersectional thinking is important—just because one aims for a progressive representation of race doesn’t mean you’ll not exploit other identities in a stereotypical way.

Gabi Garcia

Gabi Garcia is another ethnographic author who encourages readers to trespass with cosmopolitanism curiosity. Perhaps one of the most intriguing things about Gabi Garcia’s books is the obvious bibliotherapeutic components to her stories. For example, as the world dealt with the global pandemic in 2020, Garcia wrote a new picturebook titled The Friend I Need: Being Kind and Caring to Myself to help children struggling with the anxiety created by a world dealing with COVID-19. The main character helps children explore an important question: “I’ve spent a lot of time learning what it means to be a friend to others, but what does it mean to be a friend to myself?” (Garcia 2). While writing largely about themes of resiliency for children, it is no surprise to hear that in addition to creating picturebooks, Garcia is also a licensed professional counselor and has served schools K-12 for more than twenty years. She now resides in Texas, but was born in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, where she remained until turning 5 and moving to El Paso. Garcia earned her Masters degree in Educational Psychology and specialized as a
bilingual special education counselor for children. Garcia’s identity and passion for serving diverse populations shines through her picturebooks, where she often writes about being resilient, the importance of self-love, and the beauty of diversity. She uses diverse characters to invite the readers to trespass into new identities or find pieces of themselves, while also developing skills to navigate hardships that often come with being marginalized. This section will explore three of her most popular children’s books and how that is done: *I Can Do Hard Things*, *Listening with My Heart*, and *Mateo Finds His Wow*.

**I Can Do Hard Things**

Garcia’s picturebook *I Can Do Hard Things: A Mindful Affirmation for Kids* is obviously about resiliency. The book begins by discussing various levels of insecurity—how it is difficult to be a leader and create your own path and how it is confusing to see multiple significations of who and what you should be. Early in the story, an illustration depicts a girl with a worried look on her face, imagining all the different versions of herself that she feels pushed into being. The book goes on with a list of powerful affirmations. For example, one page has an illustration of a child looking into the mirror with the words, “I can be a friend to myself” (*I Can Do Hard Things* 4). Another page depicts a young woman wearing a hijab with the text, “I can speak up when it would be easier to stay quiet” (*I Can Do Hard Things* 7). As the story goes on, Garcia outlines numerous affirmations for children to remember when navigating stressful or difficult experiences. These affirmations are often accompanied by a celebration of diversity—the characters can be observed to have various skin tones, cultures, and abilities with the blatant acknowledgement that humans are different and we “walk through the world differently” (*I Can Do Hard Things* 7). Woodson’s book depicts important diverse identities, including characters
of various races, characters wearing a hijab, and another character with a visible disability in a wheelchair.

The inclusion and representation of diverse characters in Garcia’s books are necessary—and numerous scholars and theorists have warned us against excluding diverse identities. As Appiah notes in *Cosmopolitanism*, “Once you start offering reasons for ignoring the interests of others, however, reasoning itself will usually draw you into a kind of universality” (89). Appiah explains that the reasoning “is an offer of a ground for thinking or feeling or doing something, which might have oppressive consequences for groups. If someone really thinks that some group of people genuinely doesn’t matter at all,” Appiah warns, then “he will suppose they are outside the circle of those to whom justifications are due” (128). Appiah’s explains how groups can experience oppression when society sends messages that the group does not matter or that they do not belong. This exclusion or dismissal can play out in numerous ways, including not representing the group in media, like television, toys, or children’s books. As Appiah notes, ignoring the group argues that the group does not really matter. Garcia’s books quite intentionally include representation of marginalized groups. Like Appiah, Garcia values the importance of people from diverse backgrounds to come together. The title page contains an important reminder: “We walk through the world differently” (*I Can Do Hard Things* 17). By representing these diverse identities of children and including them in her artwork, she is inherently arguing that *these identities matter* and thus should be protected from those “oppressive consequences” that Appiah warns us against. In addition to the positive messages and affirmations in *I Can Do Hard Things*, Garcia has created—as she has done with many other picturebooks—a curriculum for educators and counselors to use as supplements for her narratives. These supplements, which can be downloaded online for free, include writing
prompts, discussion questions, coloring pages, and other engaging activities to invite young readers into experiencing her books.

*Listening with My Heart*

Like *I Can Do Hard Things*, Garcia’s book *Listening with My Heart* encourages children to practice self-compassion by rejecting harsh outer views and instead focus on themes of self-compassion, empathy, and kindness. Garcia’s books encourage its diverse readership to explore self-love; she even writes that “It reminds us of the other golden rule—to treat ourselves with the same kindness that we give others” (*Listening with My Heart* 3). These themes are explored through the main character, Esperanza, who experiences intense self-doubt and negativity after being asked to participate in the class play.

The book begins with Esperanza finding a rock in the shape of a heart, and she later tells her mama that she thinks the rock is a significant reminder to spread kindness and love. The story follows her doing just that—she befriends a hungry kitten who seems to be abandoned and goes to extreme lengths to comfort a new kid at school who is Vietnamese and barely speaks any English.
But when the school play finally opens, and Esperanza trips on the stage and forgets her lines, she forgets about spreading love to herself. She is embarrassed and ashamed, harshly telling herself that she ruined the class play for her classmates. Eventually, Esperanza realizes that she was not being a good friend to herself. She recalls another incident where she performed poorly in a soccer game as the goalie, and completely missed a shot by the other team. Esperanza remembered the harsh words she said to herself at that time and realized that those words had only made the situation worse. With these epiphanies, Esperanza gives herself self-compassion and reminds herself everyone has accidents sometimes and that the views of other people do not define who she is. Rather than listen to others, Esperanza realizes she needs to listen to her heart. Garcia writes, “Listening with her heart wasn’t just about giving kindness and love to others, it was about giving it to herself too. I can be a friend to myself, thought Esperanza
With this realization, Esperanza decided to participate in the curtain call at the end of the play and take extra special care of herself when she got home. This book, like *I Can Do Hard Things*, uses narrative to encourage children to change negative thinking about themselves and re-train themselves to be more compassionate.

Malala Yousafzai

When thinking about intersectional identities who experience marginalization, it is helpful to explore the authorship of Muslim women. The writer of the children’s book *Malala’s Magic Pencil*, Malala Yousafzai, is not a typical children’s book author—partly because she does not typically write for children but also because she writes about her experiences advocating for women’s rights against the Taliban. Her activism work caused her to win the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate at only 17 years of age. She was the youngest Nobel Peace Prize Laureate in history. Malala Yousafzai grew up with her father in northwestern Pakistan, where he owned a school and was an advocate for education. Following in her father’s footsteps,
Malala loved learning and wanted to make education to everyone, including females. Her voice became so powerful that the Taliban attempted to assassinate Malala while riding the school bus home one afternoon. After numerous operations, Malala survived and continues to devote her life to women’s rights and educational equity. In 2015, she wrote a biographical account of her experience titled *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by The Taliban*. In 2017, Malala Yousafzai repackaged her story for kids between 4-8 years old via a children’s book titled *Malala’s Magic Pencil*.

The story begins with Malala dreaming for a magic pencil, where she could draw out all the things she wanted—create a lock on her bedroom door to get her brothers out, erase the odor from the trash dump outside her window, and design beautiful dresses to give her mother. One day, after dreaming of her magic pencil, she went outside to the trash dump to throw away potato peels. Malala recalls wrinkling her nose from the smell and avoiding the flies. But then, she spotted a young girl—about her own age—sorting through trash in the piles. Disturbed by seeing the girl, Malala later asked her father why the young girl was not in her class. Her father answered her, “Because, jani, in our country not everyone sends their daughters to school” (15) and then he explained that some families could not afford to eat if their children did not sell metal scraps. For the first time, Malala understood the privilege that going to school afforded her and she resolved to use her “magic pencil” to make a better world. Malala decided, “First, I would erase war, poverty, and hunger. Then I would draw girls and boys together as equals” (16). Malala continued dreaming, and she resolved to work hard in school and be at the top of her class. However, when Malala was 10 years old, the Taliban’s power increased and slowly girls were too afraid to attend school.
Malala Yousafzai used the power of her pen to begin telling her story to anyone who would listen with the hope that others might intervene to help the young girls. She began traveling around the country sharing her stories and talking to international reporters. Malala writes, “My voice became so powerful that the dangerous men tried to silence me. But they failed” (18). Malala took great comfort in knowing that her voice was heard all around the world by millions of people. She reflects, “I had at last found the magic I was looking for—in my words and in my work” (23). Not only does Malala’s story allow young readers around the world to trespass into imagining life under the oppressive forces of the Taliban, but she also consciously encourages young girls to share their own thoughts and stories. Perhaps the best part of the narrative is the last few pages *after* the story, where you can see photographs of Malala and read a letter that she has written specially for her young readers titled “Dear Friend.” Within the letter, Malala writes, “When we are young, we feel powerless” and must “rely on adults to do the serious work.” She describes how important it was that she was able to find her own voice and tells the readers, “I hope that my story inspires you to find the magic in your own life and to always speak up for what you believe in. Magic is everywhere in the world—in knowledge, beauty, love, peace. The magic is in you, in your words, in your voice” (25). Directly acknowledging the young readers of her book and urging them to consider the power of their own voice is remarkable and inspiring, especially for young girls wearing a hijab that might not see themselves represented culturally. Unsurprisingly, teachers around the globe use Malala’s story to inspire their own students to find their own voices and make the world a more equitable place.
Gloria Anzaldúa

Finally, the last ethnographic picturebook author discussed in this chapter is Gloria Anzaldúa, whose work is known for celebrating the plurality and complexity of identity. As Anzaldúa famously has declared, “Because I, a mestiza / Continually walk out of one culture / And into another/ Because I am in all cultures at the same time” (Borderlands/La Frontera 40). Rather than trespassing into a new identity, Anzaldúa explains in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* how she is constantly trespassing back in forth among various identities:

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is a queer of me in all races. I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 103).

By acknowledging these other identities, and explaining how they connect or disrupt our own, Anzaldúa is encouraging the reader to participate in the creation of a new consciousness—one that is just as complicated as people are. In doing so, she also is rejecting those incomplete, “untruthful” narratives thrust upon her identity as a lesbian Chicana woman who knows multiple languages. Anzaldúa’s conversations of identity are rooted in fluidity, flexibility, and inclusiveness. In addition to writing in multiple languages, Anzaldúa—similarly to Audre Lorde—celebrates the plurality and collectiveness of individual identity, as humans are comprised of multiple layers that are continually shifting. This multi-layered lens of thinking
about identity is echoed in Appiah’s *Cosmopolitansism*, which argues for focusing on highlighting similarities within identities, while also cradling a respect, acknowledgement, and celebration of diversity and complexity. And yet, as complicated as Anzaldúa’s ideas of identity are, she packages some of them in picturebooks for children.

Anzaldúa has not been shy to describe the role reading has played in her life, so it is not surprising to see she has reached out to younger readers through picturebooks titled *Friends From the Other Side: Amigos Del Otro Lado* and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, which will be explored in the final parts of this chapter. Anzaldúa once wrote, “Books saved my sanity, knowledge opened the locked places in me and taught me first how to survive and then how to soar” (Anzaldúa 120). What a beautiful and necessary skill to bring to children—helping them learn to fly and to soar.

*Friends from the Other Side: Amigos Del Otro Lado*

Several features seen in Anzaldúa’s writings for adults are mirrored within her picturebook. Of course, there’s the classic feature of mixing the use of both English and Spanish to tell the story, but there’s also deeper themes about boundaries, territories, and colonialism. Like other authors featured in this chapter, Anzaldúa uses personal experiences to craft her stories. She begins *Amigos Del Otro Lado* with a short description of her own life growing up in South Texas by the Rio Grande River. Anzaldúa recalls often seeing woman and children crossing the river at the Mexican-US border to look for work and explains that people who didn’t like them often called them “mojados” or “wetbacks”.

The narrative follows the protagonist Prietita, who newly befriends a Mexican boy named Joaquin from the other side of the river. Prietita asks the boy, “Did you come from the other
side? You know, from Mexico” (*Friends from the Other Side* 4). Although the question at surface might seem simple, it is no coincidence that the river emerges as an important symbol in the narrative, as Anzaldúa has often written about borders. In a sense, Anzaldúa has even argued that the border itself has formed “a third country” or “a border culture.” In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa elaborates on her thoughts on borders, specifically the US-Mexican Border, calling it “una herida abierta where the the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging” (96). Understanding Anzaldúa’s concept of the US-Mexican border underlines its significance for the setting of her children’s book—it is a unique place of trauma. Thus, it is not surprising to read the description of Joaquin by Prietita, who “noticed the large boils on his forearms” and how he kept his head down “ashamed of the sores” (*Friends from the Other Side* 8). It doesn’t take long for Joaquin to be noticed by some of the other neighborhood children, kids that Prietita had considered her friends. Her own cousin yelled, “Look at the mojadito!” and another boy asked, “Hey, man, why don’t you go back to where you belong? We don’t want any more mojados here” (*Friends from the Other Side* 5). The words of the boys mirrored Anzaldúa’s own personal writings about the border being a unique place—a place where people do not feel a sense of belonging on either side. A new separation happens too, as Prietita watches her friends bully Joaquin as she felt pulled between her new friend and her old friends. Although many ethnographic authors encourage us to trespass, nobody claims that doing so would be easy. Tensions heighten and a boy picks up a rock to throw at Joaquin. Prietita intervenes with the hope of helping Joaquin by demasculinizing the boys. She yells at them, “What’s the matter with you guys?” and mocks them, “How brave you are, a bunch of machos
against one small boy!” (Friends from the Other Side 6). Prietita’s plan works and the boys scatter, but that was only the beginning of the trouble for Joaquin.

Prietita walks Joaquin home to a “tumbledown shack with one wall missing,” and in place of the wall is a water-streaked tarp. Prietita sits on a straw mat that covered the dirty floor and refuses Joaquin’s mother’s offer of food. She “saw pride in their faces and knew they would offer a guest the last of their food and go hungry than appear bad-mannered” (Friends from the Other Side 12). The visit at Joaquin’s home further solidified their friendship, until one day, while playing a Mexican card game called loteria, an exasperated woman arrived yelling, “La migra! The Border Patrol’s coming!” (14). The characters are terrified of the patrolmen and are quick to hide Joaquin and his mother until they’re gone—and through the story of Joaquin, readers experience some of the the trauma that eixsts at the border as described by Anzuldua. In Borderlands/La Frontera, she further explains that borders “are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them.” She describes the border as “vague” and an “undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (178). The end of the story depicts Joaquin and his mother—safe from the border patrolmen—working in a garden to get herbs to make a paste to heal the injuries on Joaquin’s arms. Interestingly, the story’s ending portrays another dimension of La Frontera that only further complicates its meaning—by both highlighting the generosity of spirit by the Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants and the natural beauty of the landscape.

Prietita and the Ghost Woman: Prietita Y La Llorona

Anzaldúa’s children’s book titled Prietita and the Ghost Woman, or Prietita Y La Llorona, is a retelling of one of Mexico’s most popular legends. The story follows a young girl,
Prietita, who hears of horrifying tales about the legend of La Llorona—the ghost woman who steals children at night. As the story evolves, Prietita learns that La Llorona is nothing like the stories she has heard, and is instead a kind woman who actually helps Prietita. Anzaldúa’s version of the story can easily be interpreted under a feminist lens, arguing that a benevolent reimagining of La Llorona paired with the strong female protagonist transforms the story into a feminist tale. Not only are the main characters strong, loving women, but they are women who develop a community to look out for one another. Furthermore, Anzaldúa partners with artist and illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez, who has illustrated almost twenty children’s books and is celebrated for her vivid imagery of young, strong women and vivid displays of Hispanic culture, such as small lizards scampering across the dusty floor, large cacti, and red chilli peppers hanging from the wall (Prietita and the Ghost Woman 5). Typical of Anzaldúa’s writing for adults, the children’s book also features English and Spanish—and when English is written, she intersperses Spanish words.

The story begins with Prietita in the garden of the healer, la curandera, because her mother is sick. She learns that she must find a special herb to heal her mother, which is located in the dark woods of Kings Ranch, which is also where she meets La Llorona, who helps her navigate the problems she encounters. Interestingly, Anzaldúa has created a counter narrative unlike the traditional tropes where men sweep in and save the helpless females. Instead, Prietita relies on the help of other strong females like her to make it through the King Ranch. In a sense, the King Ranch becomes a metaphor for patriarchal systems that are difficult for women to overcome, which is not surprising since Anzaldúa has worked tirelessly to represent the struggles and power of marginalized communities. Despite the challenges in the woods, the women survive and are victorious.
Finally, the character of Prieta can be argued to be a representation of Anzaldúa’s younger self. The character Prieta makes an appearance in both of Anzaldúa’s children’s books and is a strong female protagonist in both. Additionally, Prieta is discussed in her autobiographical essay, where she explains that “la prieta” means “dark” in Spanish—referring typically to the color of skin—and that “ita” is a diminutive suffix that refers to something small in size. In other words, “Prietita” can be translated as “little dark-skinned girl,” which is one of the reasons people believe the character to be a younger version of Anzaldúa. Certainly, Anzaldúa’s work in children’s books—just as the complicated texts she writes for adults—is concerned with the experiences of Mexican American women (Chicanas) and the goal of creating what she has described as “a new mestiza consciousness” (Borderlands/Fronteras 5).

As a social activist, Anzaldúa has ensured that her works are inclusive and representative of underrepresented Americans, including people who identify as non-heteronormative, as Anzaldúa believes they benefit from empowering the mestiza community.

Trespassing with Purpose

The authors discussed in this chapter—Grace Lin, Ashley Franklin, Gabi García, Malala Yousafzai, and Gloria Anzaldúa—are all successful, feminist women of color who use children’s books to dismantle the oppressive systems of patriarchy and white supremacy. Readers can also observe concepts expressed by theorists Audre Lorde, Kwame Appiah, and Deleuze and Guittari in their work. In addition to helping the reader trespass into identities unlike their own as Lorde encourages us to do, they also encourage readers to learn about others unlike them and to develop understanding of cultures different from their own. Additionally, all the children’s authors in this chapter highlight voices in the beautiful way that Morrison described: the explosion and undermining of children’s literature on the fabrication of racism.
and other oppressive power structures. All of them intentionally use children’s picturebooks to promote inclusion and self-love. More than just mirrors, these books showcase marginalized characters who overcome challenging obstacles via resiliency and embracing their differences. By looking through a non-white, non-male lens, these authors absolutely undermine the “fabrication of racism” and misogyny. Rather than only examining and critiquing those picturebooks that are complicit with the systems of oppression, it is equally important—as Morrison noted in Playing in the Dark—that we seek out diverse perspectives to highlight from outside of the fishbowl to challenge existing power structures and beliefs.
Chapter 4
Black Girl Magic: Going Back to the Root

While the previous chapter looked at children’s texts written by women of color with the goal of dismantling white supremacy, a specific form of racism against Black women demands its own conversation. Of course, using children’s picturebooks to support and inspire Black girls is certainly not a new idea, as Black women have served as leaders and civil rights pioneers from the beginning of America’s history. The texts by women in this chapter are working similarly to the texts described in Chapter 3—the authors are using literary imagination to leave the fishbowl of whiteness. However, the significant difference between this chapter and the last is that the women in this chapter are specifically creating a new fishbowl—a world uniquely centered around Blackness. The rest of this chapter will a.) explain why visibility for Black women is particularly important b.) describe a brief history of the children’s literature genre for Black children and c.) examine texts by especially influential Black female authors, including Jacqueline Woodson, Alice Walker, and Nikki Giovanni, who boldly aim to use the children’s book genre as a vehicle to dismantle white supremacy.

The Stakes of Invisibility: Looking at the Clark Experiment

Representations of Black people—and how people respond to those representations—are powerful clues to the function of racism in our society. This became particularly apparent in what is colloquially known as “the doll tests” by psychologists Mamie and Kenneth Clark.²

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² These psychologists merged their passion for fighting for Civil Rights with their skillset as social psychologists. Mamie’s Master’s thesis was titled “The Development of Consciousness in Negro Pre-School Children” and surveyed 150 Black pre-school boys and girls to look at child development and race. Specifically, the study showed distinct racial awareness of self in boys ages 3 – 4 years old. The described their findings as “disturbing” and wanted to continue their
which strongly impacted the research by Erin Winkler in the late 1990’s. The findings in Erin Winkler’s article ‘Children Are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race’ continue exploring questions asked by the Clarks. Winkler notes one study in 1997 that looked at more than 200 children and found infants as early as six months of age can categorize people by race and gender (Katz and Kofkin). Another study in 2008 argues that toddlers as young as two years of age can “use racial categories to reason about people’s behaviors” (Hirschfeld 3). And last, like the Clarks, Winkler cites a plethora of research that suggest children ages 3 – 5 begin to “use racial categories to identify themselves and others, to include or exclude children from activities, and to negotiate power in their own social play networks” (Winkler 16). Although Winkler argues that children are aware of race, she points out that most research has disproved the once popular belief that children with racial biases must be directly taught to have them. Hirschfeld’s work explains that children “are motivated to learn and conform to the broader cultural and social norms that will help them function in society. To gauge these ‘community norms,’ children have to gather information from a broad range of sources—not just their own families”

work via the Doll Test. The Clarks’ famous Doll Test would eventually influence the decision of the US Supreme Court’s ruling on school segregation based on race. The Clarks interviewed more than 253 black children and shown them four dolls—two had white skin and blonde hair and two had brown skin and black hair. Aside from racial differences, the dolls were identical. Every child was asked to identify the doll’s race and select which doll they favored. Again, the results were disturbing, as the Clarks determined the Black children overwhelming preferred playing with the white dolls, because they viewed those dolls positively. The Black dolls, however, were described negatively. The Clarks ultimately concluded that “black children formed a racial identity by the age of three and attached negative traits to their own identity, which were perpetuated by segregation and prejudice” (McNeil). The Clarks were brought in to testify in the 1954 Supreme Court’s ruling of Brown v Board of Education, who then argued that their social psychology research supported integration. Research today continues to agree with the Clarks’ conclusion that young children become aware of race by ages 3-5 and then develop racial biases.
The preference for whiteness seen in the Clarks’ experiment can be seen in numerous sources—children’s picturebooks, children’s movies and television, songs, all of which include subtle messages that whiteness is best. Winkler explains that “this message is so prevalent in our society it is like ‘smog in the air’. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in” (4). When reviewing the social research about race and how it shapes the self-esteem of children, it becomes clear that the “smog” is hurting vulnerable children in powerful ways. Numerous authors have been attempting to “clear the smog” and challenge the notion that whiteness is preferable.

Black Women Matter & the Importance of Visibility

For those who care about intersectionality, the presidential victory of Joseph R. Biden in 2020 over Donald Trump was significant. Not only did it represent a form of symbolic relief for those who felt traumatized by the Trump administration, but Inauguration Day also meant something else significant for America: the first Black woman, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, secured the second-highest office in American politics. As Terryn Hall described in her article “For Those Who See Themselves in Kamala Harris, the Inauguration Is Cause for a Careful Celebration,” the unique amalgamation of her identities as a “Black woman, South-Asian woman, first generation American, HBCU graduate, sorority member” was a meaningful victory for other individuals who identify as part of these groups. Or, as Hall contends, “Harris is a symbol of what is possible” (3). Without doubt, Harris’s victory as vice president echoes that of Barack Obama’s in that their election served as a powerful symbol for people identifying in marginalized groups. On the flip side, however, is another disturbing truth: the election of both Barack Obama and Kamala Harris further intensified racist hate groups in America. The
distressing insurrection at the United States Capitol by white supremacists in January of 2021 is a reminder of “how fragile things have always been” and how the “rhetoric of representational politics and post-racialism that clouded the Obama presidency are not as powerful as people would like to believe.” Despite Harris’s parade of accomplishments, there will still be people who view her as a “source of rage for people who hate the multiracial democracy that she symbolizes” (Hall 5). Understandably, that is even more reason for those who celebrate Kamala Harris’s victory to do so vociferously, and that celebration should also—perhaps especially—happen within the genre of children’s literature.

Shortly after Harris’s triumph, an explosion of children’s literature was created and dedicated to her victory. For example, the New York Times bestselling author Nikki Grimes and Coretta Scott King Honoree Laura Freeman partnered to write Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice. The book tells the story of Kamala Harris as a child, who had big dreams despite oppressive forces against girls of color. Like the story of the protagonist in last chapter’s Not Quite by Snow White, young Kamala dreamed of big roles, despite being Black and female. The book depicts another young girl in Kamala’s town named Eve who is speaking with her mother regarding an incident at school where a young boy told her, “Girls can’t be President, stupid” upon hearing of her aspirations. Eve’s mother assures her that the boy is wrong and then tells her that “a girl right here in Oakland hopes to be President one day” (Grimes 8). It is apparent that scholars believe it important to highlight Kamala Harris’s win in the children’s literature genre because children’s texts are tools for teaching children how the literary imagination can escape the white gaze.
A History of Erasure: Looking at the History of Children’s Literature by Black Authors

Like Black literature written for adults, Black literature for children has a problematic and disturbing past. In 1933, esteemed critic Sterling Johnson analyzed images of African Americans in American literature and concluded that, “The Negro has met with as great injustice in American literature as he has in American life” because the “majority of books about Negroes merely stereotype Negro character” (44). Brown goes on to identify seven popular stereotypes in the American canon, including “the contented slave,” “the wretched freeman,” “the comic Negro,” “the brute Negro,” “the tragic mulatto,” “the local-color Negro,” and “the exotic primitive” (42). Scholar Violet Harris’s text “African American Children’s Literature: The First One Hundred Years” looks at the seven stereotypes identified by Brown and then shows how these stereotypes are also found in children’s literature for Black children, including popular titles like Finley’s 1868 book Elsie Dinsmore, which depicts a young slave girl who is happy and loyal to the slave system, or the beloved The Story of Little Black Sambo by Helen Bannerman, with illustrations showing Black people “as simian-like or with protruding eyes and large, red lips, extremely dark skin, and in the case of males, long, gangly arms” (543). Sadly, Harris reminds us that “one cannot label a book such as Little Black Sambo atypical; rather, it is a typical depiction” (543). Harris goes on to argue that the stereotypical depictions of African Americans permeate throughout all aspects of American culture, even in the smallest of ways, like using the adaptations of “mammy” and “uncle” to sell pancakes. Researchers tend to agree that children’s literature for Black children did not actually begin until the 1890’s and only cite two books in the 19th century that qualify as books for Black children. Historians credit A. E. Johnson’s first novel Clarence and Corinne, also known as God’s Way, as the first work by a Black American in this genre. However, critics are quick to point out that “despite its
designation as the first African American children’s novel,” it is not “strictly for African Americans, nor is it strictly a novel of African Americans” (Harris 543) because it focuses on white characters. Rather than focusing on the experiences of Black people, Harris argues that its implicit purpose of the novel was not necessarily to entertain but “to promote piety, obedience, refinement, and morality among children” and encourage them to strive for “middle-class status” (Harris 546). Certainly, this was not a book that served as a mirror or lamp for Black children.

Since Johnson’s story did not focus on the experiences of Black people, many people argue that it is not a good candidate for the designation of the first Black Children’s book and instead argue that Paul Laurence Dunbar’s 1895 *Little Brown Baby* is a better option. *Little Brown Baby* is a collection of short poems written in dialect about “mundane topics” and “seems more an appreciation of African American folk culture.” For example, Dunbar’s poem “When a Feller’s Itchin’ to be Spanked” is simply about a young boy in school who is daydreaming about being elsewhere. Dunbar writes, “Ef you fin’ the days is gettin’ awful hot in school / An’ you know a swimmin’ place where it’s nice and cool, / Er you know a cat-fish hole brimmin’ full o’ fish, / Whose a-goin’ to set around school and wish?” (Brown 20). As noted earlier, there are only two books written in the nineteenth century for Black children, which makes it difficult to determine patterns or themes, except that of invisibility.

The tradition of writing for Black children has, of course, expanded immensely since the nineteenth century. Many of the books published were for activist purposes under the Crisis Publishing Company, an enterprise of the NAACP. W. E. B. DuBois is credited for much of the expansion in the early 1920’s—and even his literature for adults *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940) showed his interest in children. Moreover, however, DuBois’s contribution to the creation of *The Brownies Book* is often credited as one of his biggest
achievements, and it ran as the premier periodical for African American children until the 1960s, when Ebony, Jr.! was created. The goals of the *The Brownies Book* were not unlike the goals of contemporary children’s literature for Black children: 1) make colored children realize that being ‘colored’ is a normal, beautiful thing, 2) to inform them of the achievements of their race, 3) to teach them a code of honor, 4) to entertain them, 5) to provide them with a model for interacting with whites, and 6) to inspire them toward racial uplift and sacrifice (Harris 546).

Researchers and scholars have since used letters published in *The Brownies’ Book* from young readers to show that some Black children had “assimilated the magazine’s goal.” One young student wrote to the magazine in 1920, “I think colored people are the most wonderful people in the world and when I’m a man, I’m going to write about it, too, so that people will know the terrible struggles we’ve had. I don’t pay any attention any more to the discouraging things I see in the newspapers. Something just tells me we are no worse than anybody else” (Harris 546).

The visibility and positive representations of Black children in the *Brownies Book* was a significant steppingstone toward dismantling white supremacy and cultivating new literary traditions and consciousness for Black people.

The rest of this chapter will focus on brilliant Black women who are doing that very thing by helping children to see beyond the fishbowl and create their own: Jacqueline Woodson, Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, and Grace Beyers. Like the women of color authors in the last chapter, the women in this chapter use their literary imagination to showing children’s narratives through gazes different than the prominent white gaze. These women create narratives to push back against white supremacy and encourage Black girls everywhere that they can aspire to be Snow White in the school play, or even dare to be Vice President of the United States.
Jacqueline Woodson

Perhaps one of the most prestigious and esteemed children’s authors is Jacqueline Wilson, a Black woman who is decorated with dozens of important awards and honors, including the Coretta Scott King Honor, the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, the Langston Hughes Award, National Book Awards, the impressive Newbery Honor, and The Hans Christian Andersen Award, which is what she calls “the highest international recognition given to an author of children’s books” as it recognizes lifetime achievement. One reason Woodson is celebrated among adolescents is her lack of reluctance to take on serious, heavy issues that many teens experience, including racism, the bereavement of parents, growing up in poverty, and police brutality. Abandoning the white gaze, Woodson frames her stories around objects important to the Black experience, such as the death of Tupac and the streets of Harlem. Although Woodson is best known for her books written for adolescents and young adults, titles such as After Tupac and Feathers, she has also created a series of picturebooks for children—and she does not shy away from tough topics of realism in these books, either. This section will look at some of the picturebooks penned by Jacqueline Woodson, including The Other Side of the Fence, Show Ways, The Day You Begin, Visiting Day, and This is the Rope, all of which use realism to carry bibliotherapeutic themes surrounding inclusivity and building a sense of belonging.

The Other Side of the Fence

Although deceptively simple, Woodson’s The Other Side of the Fence tells a difficult story about challenging the racial boundaries of our communities. From the perspective of two young girls, one white and one black, the story describes a literal and metaphorical fence that separates the black side of town from the white side. A defining characteristic of Woodson’s
work often includes detailed physical landscapes, and this book is certainly no exception. Full of beautiful lifelike watercolor illustrations, Woodson tells the story via lyrics narrative about how two girls from different parts of town become friends through the simple action of challenging the barrier of the fence, an innocent action ultimately allowing them to challenge existing structures of white supremacy, one child at a time.

The narrator of the story is Clover, a young black girl warned by her mother on the story’s first page that she should not “climb over that fence when you play” (2). Upon challenging her mother’s instructions, she is simply told, “Because that’s the way things have always been” (8). Young Clover learns early in the narrative that trespassing over the fence into the white world is not only now allowed, but it was dangerous. Her mother tells her that climbing over the fence simply “wasn’t safe” (9). But as the story unfolds, Clover becomes increasingly curious about Annie, the young white girl playing on the other side, and begins questioning her mother’s instructions. Clover increasingly becomes curious about Annie after watching her from behind the fence, and eventually, the girls begin to speak. Clover tells Annie, “My mama says I shouldn’t go on the other side,” to which Annie responds, “My mama says the same thing. But she never said nothing about sitting on it” (20). Slowly, the girls challenge their segregation and find ways to overcome it.

Eventually, after slowly challenging the barrier of the fence between them, the girls quite literally “trespass” over the fence and play together. There are two illustrations showing reactions from others—one picture shows a group of Clover’s friends staring at her talking to Annie on the fence, and the next illustration shows Clover’s mother staring at them. But Clover states she “didn’t care” they were being watched and observes, “That summer me and Annie sat on that fence and watched the whole wide world around us” (22). The profoundness of Clover’s
mother witnessing this microlevel of desegregation is not lost on this children’s book. The illustrations often portray her looking curiously on as the kids play and the mother makes numerous comments about the girls playing—almost as if she is processing aloud her surprise at the ease of the girls’ friendship. By the story’s end, other children begin questioning the fence as a boundary and eventually join them on the fence. On the last page of the book, Woodson foreshadows that future generations will continue challenging superficially imposed racial boundaries. Annie proclaims, “Someday somebody’s going to come along and knock this old fence down” (24). Woodson’s *The Other Side* not only fits in well with Lorde’s discussion of trespassing—as we see in this story how the trespassing is also quite literally done—but it also goes along well with Kwame Appiah’s views. Appiah argues that people need not agree with others who are different from themselves, but that it is simply enough for us to take interest and learn about one another, so that we are able to come to some sort of understanding of one another (88). By literally trespassing over the fence, the children give themselves a chance to trespass metaphorically as well—and as they get used to one another, the reader sees the development of understanding and inclusion. The end of Woodson’s story implies that this type of trespassing can help remove artificial boundaries that are established by systems of oppression. Again, Woodson hints that trespassing and dialoguing with people unlike yourself may destroy socially constructed barriers on race and class.

*Show Way*

Unlike *The Other Side of the Fence*, which offers little historical context for the girls’ predicament and gently tackles segregation, *Show Way* is a graphic picturebook that tells the story of Soonie’s family—seven stories of generations actually based on Jacqueline Woodson’s family history. *Show Way* tells the autobiographical journey of Soonie’s grandmother, who
although sold as a slave to a big plantation at the age of seven, learns to make quilts known as “SHOW WAYS” that hold secret maps to show slaves the way to freedom. Soonie’s grandmother shares the tradition and teaches her granddaughter quilting skills, and eventually, Soonie can share this tradition with her own daughter, who is born free. Show Way’s ability to honor Woodson’s ancestry and traditions of the past while simultaneously hinting at a better future not surprisingly helped earn it the Newbery Medal Honor Book in 2006. This children’s book by Woodson encourages people to trespass into new ways—rather than trespassing into present identities unlike yourself, this story encourages children of all identities to trespass historically in the identities of Black American slaves from the past.

Much like the quilts themselves, the story is told in bold, beautiful, inviting colorful pieces. Soonie describes her grandmother’s quilting poetically, “And at night, she sewed stars/ and moons and roads--/tiny patch pieces of stars/ and moons and roads” (12). Although the text is accompanied by bright, imaginative illustrations, the gravity of the story’s historical significance is not lost. Other illustrations, such as the one of Soonie’s grandmother, Mathis May, look less imaginative and more lifelike. Hauntingly real, the illustration depicts Mathis May at the age of seven, the time of her being sold to the planation. The narrative describes Mathis May’s portrait, “Got herself a piece of muslin/ and some thread somewhere / and kept up her sewing” (12). In her hand, you can see some red thread trace downward the right side of her body, which could be mistaken for a trail of blood. Behind the little girl is a collage of disturbing, graphic photographs depicting slavery—for example, an illustration of a newspaper clipping advertising slaves for sale can be seen, as well as a violent depiction of a white slave master whipping a slave in the field.
Other photographs, however, blend bright colorful illustrations with disturbing realistic ones. For example, these two young girls dressed brightly in pink are juxtaposed strongly against the distressing background that depicts times of America’s past that are shadowed by racism, fear, and violence. For example, one illustration shows two young Black girls in fancy pink dresses staring in bewilderment at the black and white images in the background behind them. The images around the girls are disturbing, showcasing photos of white, angry mobs who are shouting and waving the confederate flag. There is a disturbing photo of buildings burning behind the girls and a well-dressed Black man being dragged away by white police officers.

Although Woodson’s *Show Way* confronts these pieces of America’s dark history, it does not attempt to hide these realities from young readers. Teachers of grades as early as 3rd can find lesson plan materials online to utilize Woodson’s book in their classes with the goal of teaching children about complicated subjects like slavery, police brutality, and rioting. Some educators have used *Show Way* to teach students about their own ancestry and heritage.

*Show Way*, much like *The Other Side of the Fence*, uses realism in children’s literature to critique problems of our culture’s dark past involving racism and white supremacy— but it also invites the readers to trespass into those histories. Young readers are simultaneously encouraged to trespass into dark, historical aspects of America’s past, while also encouraged to trespass imaginatively and question existing territories and boundaries. The conclusion of the narrative is quite fitting, as the illustration shows a mother who wants to “start all over” and holds her child, Toshi, happily in the air and begins to tell stories about the child’s ancestry and history. Even though oppressive ideologies like racism can be shared to new generations, the beautiful historical stories of their ancestry can also be recycled to depict African Americans to be clever and courageous survivors.
Jacqueline Woodson’s picturebook *The Day You Begin* is surprisingly different from *The Other Side of the Fence* and *Show Ways*. Rather than focusing specifically on the strained, oppressive histories between white and black people, Woodson steps back and discusses feelings of difference much more generally—and includes cultures outside of those in the United States. Furthermore, rather than reflecting on racial problems in the past, *The Day You Begin* relies less on realism and instead utilizes a more positive, bibliotherapeutic approach with a clear message: differences between people are good and thus we must embrace those differences within ourselves.

However, despite the optimistic message found within this picturebook, Woodson does not shy away from the feelings of isolation and loneliness that one experiences when feeling different from others. The book’s illustrations begin with a beautiful brown-skinned, curly-haired little girl peering inside a room from the comfort of a door. The book reads, “There will be times when you walk into a room and there is no one there quite like you.” Woodson continues, “Maybe it will be your skin, your clothes, or the curl of your hair” (4). Readers of all ages can identify with the feeling of not belonging to a certain place or group. Woodson outlines those differences in her description of the students. For example, take Rigoberto, who just moved to the class from Venezuela. Woodson describes Rigoberto’s accent, writing that “there will be times when no one understands the way words curl from your mouth,” as Woodson attributes to “the beautiful language of the country you left behind” (8). Although Woodson describes the accent as “beautiful,” the narrative acknowledges that others may not feel this way, largely due to ignorance and lack of exposure. Woodson writes, “And because they don’t understand, the classroom will fill with laughter” (9) and the teacher must be trusted to quiet them. Woodson’s
inclusion of children from other countries is an important form of trespassing—children can learn about other children literally beyond their own borders.

The story describes the narrator’s embarrassment when asked by the teacher where she went for the summer. Other students name exciting places—many of them journeying far away and costing much money. One student names France; another names Maine. Someone else even stated they traveled to a less exotic land, South Carolina. But compared to going nowhere, all those places sounded lovely to the little girl. The narrator recalls staying home all summer dealing with the heat, reading in her bedroom, and babysitting her little sister. Woodson successfully creates a character who explores intersectional aspects of her identity, as the main character struggles with both class and race. Her shame settles in when she realizes her experiences are unlike those of her peers and she looks down at her “empty hands” and wonders “What good is this when other students were flying and sailing and going somewhere?” (8). Another example comes in the cafeteria, when the girl’s lunch looks different or “too unfamiliar” to the girl’s peers. Even the narrator’s best friend, Nadja, wrinkles her nose at the lunch and asks her imposing questions about why her mother had packed this for her. The narrator does not speak up then, but she does wonder “how she doesn’t see the rice between the meat and kimchi” and how they see her lunch as “strange” when “rice is the most popular in the world” (8). Woodson does not shy from the pain and isolation often felt from being different than your peers, and in fact, goes on to give a parade of other examples of how the narrator and others feel a lack of belonging. But to be empowered, one must feel and acknowledge pain to heal and grow from it.

Woodson goes on to demonstrate that growth in her picturebook The Day You Begin. Although nervous, the narrator finally introduces herself to the other children and shares with
them an important part of her identity—her name, Angelina. In doing so, Rigoberto is surprised, because that is also the name of his sister. This seemingly small connection is tremendously significant, as Woodson describes it, “And all at once, in the room where no one else is quite like you, the world opens itself a little wider to make some space for you” (15). Woodson’s book then claims that this moment is special—it “is the day you begin” (14). Furthermore, this is the day where you start to explore the special parts of you—both those parts that are similar and dissimilar to others and “where every new friend has something a little like you—and something else so fabulously not quite like you at all (15). This is the end of the book, accompanied by an illustration of Angelina, who is no longer alone but happily in the company of Rigoberto on a swing. The last illustration depicts Angelina and Rigoberto with other friends lying in a pile of fall leaves painted with every color. While Woodson’s narrative does not shy away from the pain and reality of feeling excluded, it also reminds us that these differences are in fact profound, wonderful pieces to who we are as individuals.

Alice Walker

Another Black woman author unafraid to use realism in picturebooks for children to teach about white supremacy is Alice Walker. In addition to being a highly acclaimed novelist, Alice Walker is famous for her essays, poetry, and work as a social activist. Walker grew up in a poor household of eight children to sharecropper parents. She is most famous for the 1982 novel *The Color Purple*, which went on win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was adapted into a film by Steven Spielberg. Much of Walker’s work draws from her own experiences and observations of living as a Black person in America’s South. Walker was born in 1944 in Eatonton Georgia, where the footprints of slavery and oppression were still obvious and Black vernacular was commonplace. When Walker was only eight years old, her brother shot her in the eye while
playing with his BB gun. As her parents were too poor to own a car, it took them several days to take her to the doctor, and by the time they made it, she had lost the use of her right eye. Walker has spoken extensively about how her disability shaped her feelings of self-loathing and insecurity. She withdrew from others and focused on observing the behavior of others—and of course wrote about her observations. Walker turned to reading and writing as a form of escape that provided some solace from the world around her.

Although Walker is best known for her adult novels, she is also the author of some children’s picturebooks, which is not too surprising considering her interest in children. Many of her books depict the way that the harsh reality of the world shapes children. For example, in her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker writes thoughtfully of children and the pain they experience in the chapter titled ‘Adam,’ which begins by describing the apathy of adults, “They do not want to hear what their children suffer. They’ve made the telling of the suffering itself taboo” (165). This chapter includes one of the most popularly quoted lines by Alice Walker, where Adam recalls his father asking him, “What is the fundamental question one must ask of the world.” The answer to his father’s question remained the same: “Why is the child crying?” (165). This question is significant because it focuses on something that adults often neglect to think about: What is causing our children pain? By shifting the perspective to considering the emotions of children, Walker is reminding us that their perspectives and feelings of children are important and worthy of attention. Since Walker tackles the plights of children in her novels for adults, it is not surprising that she has turned her attention to directly writing for children. Four of those picturebooks, *Why War is Never a Good Idea*, *To Hell with Dying* and *Sweet People are Everywhere*, demonstrate Walker’s skillful attentiveness to the seriousness of children’s pain.
Why War is Never a Good Idea

For many, the idea of tackling the subject of war in a book created for young children would be a precarious task, but that is exactly what Alice Walker did in this book, which is aimed at a readership of children between the ages of four and eight. Walker relies on sophisticated literary devices to tell the story via a beautiful poem that personifies war as a destructive force that does damage to people, their communities, and their earth. Interestingly, Walker never explicitly defines or depicts images of war—instead, Walker’s work focuses on its aftermath.

The book begins with depictions of two frogs resting peacefully in nature and playfully asks the reader to imagine them “holding their annual / pre-rainy season/ convention” (3). Immediately after this pleasant image, the narrator tells us that the frogs do not “see War / Huge tires / Of a / Camouflaged / Vehicle / About to / Squash / Them Flat” (4). The poem goes on with more cautionary images—and like the innocent frog, the narrator bluntly states that War is a chaotic and violent force that does not care about innocence, as it “never knows / Who / It is going / To hit” (4). The story goes on to depict other peaceful scenes that are not anticipating being touched by war. There are beautiful illustrations of other peaceful scenes in the village, depicting other potentially unsuspecting victims of war. For example, in one illustration there is a donkey eating the straw fed to him by a small boy. The text tells us that they are not thinking of war, because they “are both thinking / Of dinner / The boy / is hoping for / Polenta & eggs / Maybe a carrot / Or apple / For / Dessert” (7). The donkey and the boy are as innocent and unsuspecting of war as the two frogs in the poem’s beginning.

Perhaps even more concerning, the book then depicts a young mother singing a lullaby to her newborn baby, and the poem tells us that they, too, are unsuspecting of war’s arrival. Should
the reader even begin to hope that perhaps war will spare those most deserving to be spared, the poem reminds the reader that war does not care about its casualties by warning, “Though War is Old / It has not / Become wise / It will not hesitate / To destroy / Things that / Do not / Belong to it” (9). Even though the poem is written in a book for young kids, Walker does not water down the unjust destructiveness of war.

In 2007, Walker was interviewed by New York Public Radio about Why War is Never a Good Idea and the importance of educating children about war and other complicated subjects. Walker comments, “Part of what is so awful about war is that it kills the creatures who have no idea that wars exist and are not interested in being obliterated” (Shafer). In a sense, Walker’s poem serves as a counterpoint to the other narratives children hear about wars—kids are often told narratives that center war around patriotism and necessity for freedom. Children are taught at a young age that military leaders of war are heroes, but they are often shielded from the aftereffects of war.

Walker reflects that she has been an activist all her life, even if she admits that claiming the title of “activist” sometimes embarrassed her. Walker includes the texts that she writes—for both adults and children—to be important aspects of her activism. Walker comments, “In Mississippi, where I lived from 1967 to 1974, people who challenged the system anticipated menace, battery, even murder, every day. In this context, I sometimes felt ashamed that my contributions at the time were not more radical. I taught in two local black colleges, I wrote about the Movement, and I created tiny history booklets which were used to teach the teachers of children enrolled in Head Start” (Shafer). For Walker, educating and empowering children via texts is a fundamental building block to social activism.
Similar to *Why War is Never a Good Idea*, *To Hell With Dying* is another children’s picturebook that takes on the difficult theme of death. Originally, the narrative was published as a short story in the 1967 anthology *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers* edited by Langston Hughes. *To Hell With Dying* was celebrated for an early look at under-represented Black Southern families. The book was later published as a children’s picturebook in 1988 and begins by introducing a sickly man named Mr. Sweet, who is described as a guitar player but also an alcoholic and diabetic. Mr. Sweet lives down the road from the narrator on a neglected cotton farm. The reader is told that Mr. Sweet had ambitious goals of becoming a doctor or lawyer but was unable to do that because he is a Black man. Regardless, Mr. Sweet is adored by the neighborhood children and the mutual regard reflects the closeness that is part of the character of the community. He refers to the narrator as his “princess” and “Sweet Georgia Brown,” which also is the name of a blues song he sometimes plays on the guitar for the families. As the narrator grows older, Mr. Sweet’s health wanes and he has numerous close encounters with death. Of course, the neighborhood children do not focus on Mr. Sweet’s sickness to the point that some of them start to believe Mr. Sweet will love forever. Despite the seriousness of Mr. Sweet’s health problems, the relationships he builds with the children in the neighborhood bring him companionship and hope. The story focuses on the joy of friendship and importance of platonic love. Eventually, at the age of 90, Mr. Sweet does pass away, and he leaves the narrator his beloved guitar. In this sense, Mr. Sweet truly does live on forever through the music of his guitar and the memories of the children.
**Sweet People Are Everywhere**

Alice Walker’s newest children’s book, titled *Sweet People Are Everywhere*, was published in 2021. The story represents kind people across the globe, repeating the idea that sweet people are all over the world in all countries. The illustrations depict people from different countries, while also depicting a piece of the country’s culture. For example, one picture depicts the importance of music in the Cuban culture, as it is considered by many to be some of the richest in the world. In another picture, a woman is clothed in a hijab, a common statement of modesty and conservatism by many women living in Iran. The book highlights good people from numerous places around the world, including the Sudan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Mexico, Brazil, Korea, Norway, the United States, Egypt, Iraq, and many others.

Although the text might seem simple and repetitive, Walker abruptly stops the narrative with an important reminder to appreciate diversity and goodness all over the world. She writes, “Being sweet, they must not be disappeared. We are lost if we can no longer experience how sweet human beings can be” (22). The story ends with a young girl telling another child, “Promise me never to forget this no matter how far you go or who sends you” (24). The message conveyed in Walker’s *Sweet People Are Everywhere* is a powerful one—and one not simply needed for children. In a world often divided by racism and discrimination, it is necessary to seek similarities of goodness among cultures and its people to find commonality and build understanding. Walker’s book encourages children to look beyond the differences they might have when compared to others and instead focus on the positive ties that bind us. These texts serve as wonderful tools to promote Appiah’s “cosmopolitan curiosity” for children and lead them to deeper understanding of one another.
Nikki Giovanni

In the spring of 2019, iconic author and poet Nikki Giovanni visited the University of Memphis University Center to discuss her poetry and other contemporary activist topics, including problems impacting African Americans under President Trump’s Administration. She was invited as a keynote lecturer during the 10th Annual Women’s Honor Conference, which is presented by the Professional Assertive United Sisters of Excellence (P.A.U.S.E). The goal of pause is to unite women of all races, creeds, and economic backgrounds via dialogue, workshops, and networking. Giovanni also spoke about her new book—a collection of poetry titled *Utopia*. The collection features a poem titled “Allowables,” which literally is about a narrator who kills an innocent spider and concludes, “I don’t think / I’m allowed / To kill something / Because I am / Frightened” (*Utopia* 91). The poem’s theme—as in much of Giovanni’s work—looks at the ways Black people experience racism. The poem is not simply about killing a spider—it is about the way humans react to fear and how being afraid of something does not mean it should die. Many readers interpret this poem to criticize the number of African Americans killed by police violence—not because the person committed a crime, but simply because the officers felt afraid of that person: As Kwame Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism* argues that humans with differences should seek out understanding of one another, much of Giovanni’s work contends the same. Most of Giovanni’s work is centered around the lives and experiences of African Americans, and thus her texts offer a unique means of trespassing into the lives of her characters. She often takes on complicated themes, and her work in the children’s literature genre is no exception.

Giovanni is celebrated by scholars for numerous things—being a teacher, thinker, activist, and poet. She has written complicated African American political theory, like her 1994
book *Racism 101*—a survival book written for Black students trying to navigate predominantly white campuses, to which she famously argued to the Black community, “We have a world to conquer. One person at a time. Starting with ourselves” (*Racism 101* 32). Her interest in Black liberation emerged in the late 1960’s alongside other powerful poets in the Black Arts Movement, such as Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka. In one of her earliest poems, she responded to Martin Luther King Jr’s assassination in Memphis, TN with the poem “Reflections on April 4, 1968,” where she wrote: “What can I, a poor Black woman, do to destroy America? This is a question, with appropriate variations, being asked in every Black heart” (*The Poetry Collection of Nikki Giovanni* 72). Her devotion and love for the Black community shines through all her work, as she frequently writes about “Black love, Black struggle, and Black joy.” In her poem “Lemonade Grows From Soil, Too,” Giovanni argues, “There is no way not to like Black Americans” and argues that “We try to practice love / We use the chicken feet to make a stew; we take the scraps of cloth to make the quilt. We find the song in the darkest days/ to say ‘put on your red dress, baby, ‘cause we’re going out/ tonight, understanding we may be lynched on the way home” (*Collected Poetry* 9). Her love for Black people is celebrated in her work, alongside her criticism of way America continues to make them suffer unjustly.

Of all the authors discussed in this chapter, Giovanni by far has written the most children’s books. With more than a dozen children’s books under her belt, her work expands into a different audience—one significantly important to America’s future. In these books, Giovanni brings her love for poetry and the Black community to younger, impressionable audiences. Although Giovanni is hesitant to comment too much about her work and point out that she is a writer, not a critic, she did lend some insight into why she writes for children in an interview with Scholastic. When asked why she writes for young people, Giovanni laughs,
“Because I was once young. I have great respect for young people. And I wanted to share what I remembered that might be interesting or helpful” (Scholastic Kids!). Later in the interview, she discussed how children influence her writing and specifically noted her relationship with her own son, Thomas, recalling he has encouraged her to “look again at the needs or interests of children” (Scholastic). The rest of this section will look at two of the books Giovanni has written for children, including *Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat*, and *I Am Loved.*

*Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat*

Giovanni’s book *Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat* is different from other children’s books in numerous ways, and that difference has gotten it a lot of attention, including landing on the *New York Times* bestseller list and winning the NAACP Image Award for Literature. Part of the book’s appeal is that it does three things that other books for children have not done, and this section will look at those characteristics in greater detail. To begin, the book is not just an anthology of poetry, but very specifically, it is a collection of hip-hop. Second, the book is written in collaboration with dozens of canonical and contemporary African American authors. And third, the book comes with a CD in the book’s jacket, so that children can experience the spoken word. These three things together make *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* a particularly interesting text worthy of attention and analysis.

There are numerous sources that describe why Giovanni decided to take on this significant project. In a video interview with Scholastic Kids! Radio in 2008, Giovanni argues that “nobody in our generation has been doing much with hip hop” and that the book “takes poetry on another level of urban youngster” (Giovanni 11). Even though Giovanni notes in the interview that she herself is not a particular fan of hip hop and is more of a “disco person,” she
recalls the sounds of the 1979 release “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugarhill Gang. Giovanni can be seen in the interview in a loose gray long sleeve shirt and a backwards black ballcap singing some of the lyrics from “Rapper’s Delight” and reflects, “I liked what the kids were doing” and “thought it was time that the so-called cultural warriors got involved” (*Hip Hop Speaks to Children* 13). She notes that she wanted to find the key to hip hop, and she eventually concludes that it boils down to vernacular. “Hip hop is a vernacular,” Giovanni argues. She goes on to acknowledge that some of the hip hop vernacular is “disturbing” because of some of its “salacious images,” like “all of those young women in the swimming pool, dripping water. That’s embarrassing.” However, Giovanni and the other contributors to *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* ultimately decided that the taboo reputation of hip hop should not deter them from exploring it in a book for children. She concluded, “So we wanted to identify—and I thought we should—what was embarrassing and what was good” (*Hip Hop Speaks to Children* 7). Proudly, Giovanni describes how the book not only highlights contemporary hip hop, but how the group took canonical poems-- like Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask” and Gwendolyn Brooks’ “We Real Cool”—and rapped them with unique interpretations on the CD for children to hear. By embracing the “good” in hip hop, the creator of *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* can feature important aspects of Black history and its vernacular.

Preserving Black histories and passing them on to children is obviously important to Giovanni. In the introduction of the book, Giovanni compares hip hop to slave songs, gospel music, and blues. “Hip hop, like poetry, encompasses everything about the human experience,” she argues, and “it’s easy to forget that hip hop was born using creativity to improve circumstances” (*Hip Hop Speaks to Children* 12). Giovanni describes how people who were enslaved used drumbeats to communicate when they were prevented to read and write and how
gospel preachers used the call and response technique to communicate important concepts of its congregation. Similarly, she reminds, that inner-city kids with limited resources and other challenges created hip hop to express themselves and communicate important aspects of their lives.

For example, although the collection is fused with names of respected Black artists dating back more than a hundred years, some of the artists are more controversial, such as Kanye West, due to the prevalence of explicit lyrics and topics in his work and his controversial image in the media. Regardless, West is included in the anthology—alongside legends Martin Luther King Jr. and Langston Hughes. Not surprisingly, however, the excerpt selected to be featured by West was far from controversial. The song “Hey Mama” is a sentimental tribute to a mom empowering her child and says, “Forrest Gump MAMA said, life is / like a box of chocolates / My MAMA told me to go to school, / get your doctorate” (Hip Hop Speaks to Children 11). Although the speaker ignores his mom’s advice and “did the opposite,” the poem is full of love and appreciation for her support and compares her to other powerful Black women: “Can’t you see, you’re like / a book of poetry / Maya Angelou, / Nikki Giovanni, / turn one page and / there’s my MOMMY” (Hip Hop Speaks to Children 11). The allusion to two esteemed Black women is an obvious sign of respect from the speaker about how his mom’s importance is viewed. West’s original song tackles challenges for Black mothers that might be less appropriate for a children’s book, but nonetheless highlights important challenges for Black women, including poverty and being a single mom. West notes how his mom “had to work late nights just to keep the lights on” “knelt on the kitchen floor” when a “nigga cheating and “telling you lies” (Hip Hop Speaks to Children 11). Despite the hardships the mother experiences, she is viewed by her child as a strong survivor. Giovanni’s selection of Kanye West’s “Hey Mama” is
a great example of her seeking the “good” from Black artists that others might look over due to being considered too salacious.

Part of *Hip Hop Speaks to Children*’s appeal is that it includes 51 selections from 42 poets and performers. Some of the selections are created by more contemporary artists, like Mos Def’s “Umi Says”, Queen Latifah’s “Ladies First,” Tupac Shakur’s “The Rose that Grew from Concrete”, and Lauryn Hill’s “Everything is Everything.” Other selections from more contemporary authors include Nikki Giovanni’s “The Girls in the Circle,” Jacqueline Woodson’s “Hip Hop Rules the World,” and Maya Angelou’s “Harlem Hopscotch.” But among these contemporary artists are also pieces by historical canonical authors, including James Weldon Johnson’s “The Creation,” Sterling Brown’s “Long Track Blues,” Claude McKay’s “If We Must Die,” Gwendolyn Brooke’s “Aloneness,” and W.E.B. Du Bois’s “The Song of the Smoke.” This dynamic chorus of Black voices makes *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* a special and meaningful artifact in the collection of Black literature, especially since the text is paired with a CD for the reader to enjoy the work aurally, which allows the reader to experience these canonical poems in significant new ways.

*I Am Loved*

Much like Nikki Giovanni’s other works, her picturebook *I Am Loved* focuses on the lives of Black people and their relationships, but more specifically illustrates that Black children are loved and worthy of love and celebration. Although the poems are rich with imagery and ripe with meaning, the anthology is targeted for readers starting in preschool through third grade. The book begins with a sweet and graceful address to children that reminds them they are loved and worthy of art to be created for them and about them simply because they exist. She tenderly writes, “As time goes on / I am you / and you are me / and that’s how life / goes on” (*I Am Loved*
Although some might think Giovanni’s message is simple, in a world of white supremacy, teaching brown-skinned children to love themselves is somewhat revolutionary. Additionally, Giovanni’s poems are accompanied by colorful, vibrant illustrative representations of Black people, created by Newbery honoree Ashley Bryan. The watercolor help illuminate themes or lines from the poems to help aid in the children’s comprehension and understanding.

Some of the poems in the collection are tender reminders to children that they are loved. For example, the poem “Leaves” tenderly explores the beauty of human connection. The poem expresses hope that “on a rainy day,” should the speaker be looking for a friend, “I hope you’ll be the one” to be there “Holding out your arms/ To gently catch/ My fall” (*I Am Loved* 43).

Another poem, playfully titled “Do the Rosa Parks” encourages children to believe in themselves and stand up for what is right and what they deserve. There’s also the “I Am a Mirror” poem, which serves as a tribute to Black pliancy, strength, and ancestry: “I reflect the strengths / Of my people / And for that alone / I am loved” (*I Am Loved* 26). Next to the poem, there is an actual mirror inserted into the book, so that the reader can see quite literally that they are included in the community of this anthology and that they, too, are loved.

**Reflections**

Giovanni’s anthology *I Am Loved* functions as an ode to children. It is full of poetic affirmations of Black identity and self-love, just like the other texts in this chapter. Challenging negative attitudes about Black women is a daunting task, because, as explored earlier in this chapter by the work of the Clarks’ famous doll tests, racial awareness and subsequent bias presents early in childhood, even in the first three years of life. Because stereotypical and damaging beliefs about race and gender are generated early, it is important to start dialogue about these issues early. The texts by these brilliant and resilient women—Jacqueline Woodson,
Alice Walker, and Nikki Giovanni—serve as important tools to help children undermine the racist beliefs in white supremacy, embrace their own identities, and learn to love and define themselves.
In 2019, Mothy Greenfield Sanders created a movie about Toni Morrison to explore the acclaimed author’s life experiences and examine some of the dominant themes recurring in her work. The full title of the documentary is *Toni Morrison: Pieces that I Am: My World is a Black World*. Because the film’s title is long, most people exclude the part that proclaims, “*My World is a Black World,*” even though that descriptor is key to Morrison’s vision and work. The line “*My World is a Black World*” conveys Morrison’s experience of leaving the dominant “fishbowl” and embracing the creation of worlds that do not center on white people. As noted in the introduction, Morrison writes at length about the “white gaze” in her 1992 book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, using a metaphor of a fishbowl to note the omnipresence of whiteness in the world. Although some items are clearly seen in the bowl, like the fish and the gravel, the bowl itself is clear and not always easily spotted. Similarly, although the bowl is not always obviously seen, the “white gaze” is also always there—often working as a border to limit the imaginations of anyone who might confront territories beyond it.

In the documentary *Toni Morrison: Pieces that I am: My World is a Black World*, Morrison defines the “white gaze” at length and describes how she was finally able to see beyond the fishbowl herself. Morrison gives the viewers several examples of how she began to understand that language is a vehicle of power—and how she began to use it to trespass beyond the “white gaze.” She describes a situation from her childhood, where she enjoyed writing words on the sidewalk with her friends using little pebbles. Although the children did not know its meaning, they began writing a word they had seen recently written on a fence down the street.
They had already written the letters “F” and “U”—and had started making the letter “C”—when her mom flew furiously out of the house, yelling at the kids and telling them not to write that specific word. Even though the children did not understand why her mother was mad, they knew they were in trouble and thus started crying hard. Morrison reflects that she ultimately “knew that words have power. Words can do that to my mother—words I don’t even know. Now that is power” (Pieces That I Am). Another example of Morrison being in awe of language’s power happened after she published Paradise. She describes how she received a letter from the Texas Bureau of Corrections announcing that her book had been banned in fear it could incite a riot. Rather than being offended, Morrison was thrilled, and she framed the document in her bathroom. She comments with a chuckle, “And I thought, how powerful is that? I could tear up the whole place” (Pieces That I Am). Throughout her career, Morrison has used the power of language to create her own fishbowl—one that was not centered on the “white gaze” and one that specifically revolved around Black people.

The documentary goes on to shed light on how Morrison’s desire to trespass beyond the “fishbowl” was revolutionary and garnered her criticism from others. For example, Fara Griffin recalls an early review of Sula which said that Morrison has “got a great talent” but that they hoped “one day she won’t limit it to only writing about black people.” Griffin questions with frustration, “Really? It’s limiting to write about Black people?” and retorts that nobody says that when “an Irish writer writes about Irish people. It’s only limiting when you write about Black people” (Pieces That I Am). Similarly, a 1973 review in the New York Times of Sula claimed that “in spite of its richness and its thorough originality, one continually feels its narrowness” (Henley 87). Of course, the “narrowness” referred to is that Morrison frames her narratives around Black people and ignores taboos about trespassing beyond the white gaze. Sanders’
documentary also notes some of the criticism Morrison received, including the comments that Morrison “is far too talented to remain only a marvelous reporter of the black side of provincial American life” and that “she is going to have to address a riskier contemporary reality” (Pieces That I Am). should she want to keep her audience. Of course, Morrison was unmoved by their remarks to write about the “real confrontation for black people, which is white people. As though our lives have no meaning, and no depth, without the white gaze” (Pieces That I Am). It is not a mistake or error that Morrison has eliminated the focus of white people from her work—in fact, she quite specifically made sure that the white gaze was not prominent in any of her books.

Morrison explains how the narrator in many books about the black experience, particularly those written in the 40s and 50s, were talking to white people because “they were explaining things that they didn’t have to explain if they were talking to me” (Pieces That I Am). Morrison elaborates that the assumption was always that the reader was white troubled her, “They were never talking to me. Even Frederick Douglass, he’s not talking to me. I can feel him holding back” (Pieces That I Am). Morrison notes how Douglass even acknowledged holding back in his work by disclaiming that he would not cover “these things too terrible to relate” and how he avoided hard topics, like rape. She even goes on to point out how another literary giant, Ralph Ellison, was trapped in the fishbowl and focused on the white gaze: “Invisible to whom?” she asks. The prevalence of writing from within the fishbowl was one even Black literary giants did not escape. Griffin explains that Morrison is not questioning whether Invisible Man was “a great novel” or “exquisitely written,” but rather she is questioning “that perspective that you are only defined by what your oppressor thinks of you” (Pieces That I
Morrison was seeing something that nobody was seeing—the parameters of the fishbowl that held white supremacy.

David Carrasco explains that not only do Morrison’s “readers feel that she’s talking to them, and they can talk back, but they’re finding in Morrison a language about themselves, about the condition they live in, and that discovery gives them a sense of transcendence” (195). Giving Black people a sense of transcendence is exactly what Morrison wanted to do—she clearly states that she welcomes readers of all races and genders to read her books, but that her “sovereignty and my authority as a racialized person had to be struck immediately with the very first book” (Pieces That I Am). Using books as a vehicle to see from a Black “fishbowl” and challenge ideas about Blackness was a significant form of political activism. Griffin reflects that it showed her “the magic of my own world that I didn’t see” and that “after reading her, it was hard to see my own world in the same way” (Pieces That I Am). Another popular critic, Hilton Als of The New Yorker, comments, “Books have an incredible impact on our culture, even though most of our culture doesn’t know it” and explains that Morrison was “doing something that a lot of black writers who had come up in the 70’s weren’t doing, which was to write about the stories without having to talk about excising whiteness. And she didn’t do it in a way that was saying that the white world was wrong. The white world was just peripheral if it existed at all” (Pieces That I Am). Although much of Morrison’s writing is classified as fictional, her work changed how people felt after looking at the world through a lens that centers on Black people.

Numerous other Black theorists and writers have also discussed the danger of the white gaze. Morrison alludes to the world-renowned James Baldwin and paraphrases his writing about a white man who sits on your shoulder and checks out everything you do. Morrison argues that people of color must learn to knock him off your shoulder, and that if you can that, “you’re
free. Now I own the world. I mean I can write about anything” (*Pieces That I Am*). Sonia Sanchez also speaks about how Toni Morrison’s fictional work empowers Black people and claims that reading it is a necessity, “In order to survive, you should re-read Toni every ten years” because African Americans “have to re-imagine ourselves on this American landscape” and “won’t survive if you don’t do that” (Sanchez 12). Morrison’s work impacts her readers in profound ways by encouraging them to finally see the fishbowl.

The children’s literature genre is certainly not excluded from the dominance of the white gaze, since “critical blindness”—as discussed in the introduction of the project—can be found in books for even the youngest of children. The rest of this chapter will look at how Morrison attempts to correct some of that “blindness” through children’s literature. When Morrison pairs her desire to help encourage marginalized people to leave the fishbowls with writing children’s picturebooks, she is ultimately doing a revolutionary act within a world of white supremacy: she’s encouraging young children to build their own worlds centered in Blackness. The chapter will take a closer look at Morrison’s children’s books—*The Big Box, When God Made You*, and *Please Louise*—to see how she centers Blackness as the dominant gaze and empowers the self-image of Black children. This chapter will also look at her allusions to the *Dick and Jane* series in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, showing how psychological racism in the fishbowl contributes to the rise of self-loathing among Black children.

**Trauma, Realism, and the role of Authorship in Morrison’s Work**

As Foucault contends in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* while discussing the unities of discourse, “The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut,” because they are “caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network” (23). Therefore, it is critical to ask about what other voices emerge beyond the economic value
and limits of the book itself. Foucault explains, “The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative” (23). By utilizing the “archaeological” analytical method provided by Michel Foucault, one can dig up these “discursive formations” by dissecting the roles that authorship and intersectional identities play in the construction of childhood. For example, how has the prevalence of the white gaze in society shaped Toni Morrison’s views about Blackness—and how have those views influenced the themes she confronts in her writing? How have Morrison’s childhood experiences as a Black girl shaped her constructions of girlhood for the female characters of her books? What causes Morrison to take on heavy, taboo motifs in books for young adults and children—themes that look at sexual violence against girls, self-loathing, and the role of trauma in childhood?

To “dig up” those factors that influence Morrison’s authorship and characters, it is imperative to look at outside systems, including the intersections of race and gender, as they relate to the Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* presents an intriguing commentary on authorship and identity:

What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing—with a rather shaky hand—a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. (17)
Foucault aptly points out that the historian or author is also a document, a crucial piece for analysis, because he or she brings so many texts to the table. This is important when thinking about Toni Morrison’s work because her life as a Black woman in America has greatly influenced her writing, characters, and her desire to move past the white gaze. Zipes argues that children's literature is “not for the benefit or delight of children. Rather, the narrative manipulations may somehow be connected to the way children are always used, if not exploited, by adults in the socialization process” (19). As Foucault points out, we often see this “narrative manipulation” play out in the methodological approaches of history, but one could also contend that it also plays out in children's literature. This is important when the children’s literature genre and the publishing companies for that literature are monopolized by white people who inherently utilize the white gaze.

Considering privilege, intersectionality, and authorship in character constructions complicate the text in powerful ways. As Edward Said writes about Foucault in *The Problem of Textuality*, digging into an author's “ouevre” and the significations of his or her text, “attempts to make visible what is invisible in a text” (74). When thinking about literary criticism and the deconstruction of girlhood in texts, what truths do we find about our culture? Said further aptly observes that “criticism cannot assume that its province is merely the text, nor even the great literary text. It must see itself, as well as other discourse, inhabiting a much-contested cultural space in which what has counted in the continuity and transmission of knowledge has been the signifier as an event that has left lasting traces upon the human subject” (713). What cultural beliefs about race, gender, and class can we dig up and make visible when reading texts by Toni Morrison? What visible truth can we extract from Morrison's works—truths that institutions find
so threatening to our culture that they constantly seek to ban them? How have the texts imprinted on society?

Stephanie Li attempts to answer some of these questions in her book in *Toni Morrison: A Biography*. Li remarks, “Despite having published nine remarkable novels, Morrison continues her commitment to charting the contours of African American life through fiction” (xii). Morrison’s prose seeks to answer questions about why systems exist and how things happen the way they do. Li expands, “Morrison writes in order to understand certain dynamics or the nature of specific relationships—how does a child come to hate herself? What will a mother do to protect her child? How does a man achieve self-understanding?” (xiii). Although Morrison’s characters may not embody her exact experiences as an individual, they most certainly carry her questions about race and gender. For example, since Morrison’s parents, George and Georgia, had contrasting views on racism in the South, Morrison grew up with a complicated truth that reflected both ideas: “These paradoxical truths attitudes strongly influenced Morrison, who grew up without a singular conception of the South as either wholly violent or as romantically idyllic. As she would later demonstrate in her fiction, exaggerated binary oppositions never capture the complexity of life” (Li 2). Morrison takes on complex topics—like oppressive patterns for marginalized people—in her work, even in texts written for young adults.

Using the trauma of characters in children’s literature as a “didactic tool” for readers is a concept outlined in Eric Tribunella's *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature*. Tribunella writes about “melancholic maturation” in children’s texts: “the process of loving and losing objects, which effects the incorporation of qualities belonging to those objects and thus the transformation of the one who loses them into a
melancholic adult” (xxv). Tribunella contends that it is commonplace for children’s authors to use trauma in their narratives to teach children about loss and maturing. For example, Tribunella argues that *Johnny Tremain* “triggers the reader’s own melancholic development, which might account in part for the emotional resonance and canonical status of the novel” (83). He also uses SE Hinton’s *The Outsiders* to explain, “Losses that do not wound the child, that do not produce an alteration in the child, cannot be described as traumatic. Many of the protagonists in the texts examined here are transformed by the experience of traumatic loss, which leaves the child’s psyche scarred” (xiv). If Tribunella is correct that we use children’s texts as didactic tools because we “want children to grow up into mature adults who are prepared for the brutalities of life,” how does that apply to ethnographic authors? After all, ethnographic authors must consider things that other white children’s authors never have to consider, like constructing their narratives outside of a prevalent gaze. Also, ethnographic authors are often charged with exploring different “brutalities” in life—brutalities that are products of dominant systems which oppress people based on skin color, gender, or ability. Authors like Toni Morrison might indeed use trauma as a didactic tool in their writing, but the trauma they are confronting is much different than that which Tribunella describes—it is not the trauma of losing a dog like in the plot by Fred Gibson’s *Old Yeller*.

Morrison’s work—as well as all the other children’s texts discussed in this project—are also confronting the trauma of racism and white supremacy. In a sense, being locked within the white gaze has been the worst psychological and emotional trauma for the characters in these narratives—and it is also can be the worst psychological and emotional trauma for their readers. These ethnographic authors are often dealing with the generational trauma of racism—being kidnapped into the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the disturbing legacy of slavery—in their
narratives that is not even considered in Tribunella’s scholarship. Morrison writes about trauma in her narratives for children, but her purposes in doing so as a Black woman writer are quite different than what Tribunella describes of non-marginalized authors.

The Trauma of Pecola Breedlove

“How do you do that? I mean, how do you get someone to love you?”

This powerful question is asked by Toni Morrison’s child character Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye*, a controversial book written for young adults in 1970. After Pecola is told that “someone has to love you” to make a baby, she is left marveling at how she has no idea how to do that, or even what loving someone and being loved looks like. Pecola Breedlove is arguably the most haunting character in American Literature—a young black girl who carries her father’s baby, who prays for blue eyes in hopes of finally being pretty, who has few resources within her home or impoverished community, and who genuinely asks how to make someone love you, because love is an experience with which she has no knowledge. Pecola Breedlove personifies and humanizes “otherness” for us—it is no longer a theoretical framework to navigate privilege and belonging. Most teachers—or social workers and psychologists—know a Pecola Breedlove who broke their heart.

Morrison’s narrative digs at the heart of what—beyond the abuse suffered in her home and her poor self-esteem—drives Pecola’s internalization of self-hatred. Alluding to slavery, Morrison describes not only Pecola’s inclination for self-loathing, but the entire Breedlove family’s: “It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had accepted it without question. The master had said, ‘You are ugly people’” (*The Bluest Eye* 39). As Morrison reminds us in *The Bluest Eye*, racism plays a strong
role in societal standards of beauty, and, as argued by feminist scholars, it disproportionately affects women. Through a series of thoughtful allusions—from Shirley Temple to white baby dolls—Morrison’s character is reminded that she is ugly because she is not white.

Morrison explains that the reason she created Pecola Breedlove was to write a book she wanted to read: “I hadn’t seen a book in which black girls were center stage” (*Pieces That I Am*). She wrote a novel to change that and asked questions specific to the traumas of Black girlhood. Morrison asks, “Where does a child learn self-loathing? Where does it come from? Who enables it? How is it infectious? And what might be the consequences?” (*Pieces That I Am*). Morrison explains she intentionally put the entire plot on the first page, so the readers know exactly what happened at the very beginning. Of course, Morrison was not interested in just explaining the traumas experienced by Pecola Breedlove, she wanted to dig deeper in those traumas and address how those awful events happened to a young Black girl.

Inevitably, some of those events were shaped by her own experiences as a Black girl. In the documentary *Living in a Black World*, Morrison explains how part of Pecola’s characterization developed from a childhood friend. She recalls walking down the street with a young girlfriend and debating the existence of God. Morrison’s young friend explained that she didn’t believe in God and that she had proof, because she had been praying for blue eyes for two years and never got them. Morrison reflects on that experience, “How painful. Can you imagine that kind of pain?” She goes on to remind how this kind of pain is different because it’s “not lynchings and murders and drownings. This is interior pain. So deep for an 11-year-old to believe that if she only had some characteristic of the white world, she would be okay” (*Pieces That I Am*). Morrison’s novel dives deeper into that pain and looks at how living in the white gaze traumatized Pecola in a unique way. Morrison shows that the white gaze was all-
encompassing for Pecola and that artifacts all around her were working to uphold white supremacy: “She got it from her family, she got it from school, the movies—she got it everywhere,” says Morrison, who argues that Pecola “surrendered completely to the master narrative” (*Pieces That I Am*). The interviewer of the documentary asks Morrison to define what the “master narrative” meant:

> It’s white male life. The master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else. The master fiction—history—has a certain point of view, so when these little girls see that the most prized gift that they can get at Christmastime is this little white doll—that a master narrative speaking. It’s telling you that ‘this is beautiful’ and ‘this is wonderful, but you are not it.

The trauma of the master’s narrative on Pecola transforms the character’s entire life in what many critics see as one of Morrison’s “rawest” novels.

Morrison describes many of the artifacts surrounding Pecola Breedlove that echo the master narrative. For example, the novel begins by alluding to the Dick and Jane series, a series of children’s books used to teach children how to read across the United States. The books made their “debut in 1930 in Scott-Foresman’s Elson-Gray Basic Readers, accompanied by a guide urging teachers using them in their classrooms” (Shermer 9). Of course, the characters Dick and Jane were white and had access to resources and a loving family, meaning their constructed realities were a far cry from that reality constructed by Morrison for Pecola Breedlove—and moreover, from the reality of marginalized children across the United States. The Dick and Jane children’s series did not provide a glimpse of insight into American families—it provided insight into privileged, white families, and Black girls like Pecola Breedlove could not see themselves in that world.
Of course, Morrison’s picturebooks for young children are not as saddled with trauma as Pecola’s story. The rest of this chapter will look at those picturebooks—*The Big Box, Little Cloud and Lady Wind, and Please Louise*. Although Morrison’s texts do not take on topics like incest and poverty, Morrison is still determined to challenge the white gaze. For children of color suffering from the trauma of living underneath the white gaze, Morrison’s ability to transport them to another fishbowl—a Black world that is centered Blackness—is revolutionary.

*The Big Box*

This idea of returning to ancestry and roots is commonly seen throughout Toni Morrison’s work, including her controversial texts *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, which take up taboo and mature topics like collective memory, sexual and psychological trauma, and the oppressive nature of racism. In addition to these texts being controversially exposed to young adult readers, Morrison developed a new children’s series, written in collaboration with her son Slade Morrison, a painter and artist. In a 1981 interview, Morrison describes her empathy for children as a marginalized group: “Certainly since Sula I have thought that the children are in real danger. Nobody likes them, all children, but particularly black children. . . . Everywhere, everywhere, children are the scorned people of the earth. There may be a lot of scorned people, but particularly children” (Ropero 44). In this sense, Morrison has become an author advocate for children, warning about classism, racism, materialism, and isolation. Her children’s books particularly promote themes that revolve around confronting some of the dangerous aspects of racism, such as the significance of self-love, the bravery of being yourself, and the wonders of the child’s imagination.

*The Big Box*, a poetic story with imaginative illustrations, follows three children of various ethnic and racial backgrounds as they are judged, shrunken, and scolded by the adults in
their lives. Ropero explains, “Rather than producing texts for and about African-American
children alone, what concerns Morrison is inculcating her readers with values that are in keeping
with a liberal ideal of education. The author has criticized a model of education solely based on
the uncritical imposition and acceptance of a strict set of rules and goals. Something is lacking,
Morrison claims, when children simply comply with norms and expectations: ‘they don't have
their own lives and their own experiences’” (2003). Later in the interview, Morrison expresses
frustration at Princeton with students who seem to want to succeed just for the sake of success.
She comments, “You keep wondering and you want to scratch them a little bit to see what’s
really underneath that enormous burden and commitment” (Ropero 2003).

Morrison prizes critical thinking and problem solving in learning, both of which come
through in the themes of her children’s books. Morrison argues that we must “trust the children
to figure it out... give them the opportunity to figure it out and applaud them not because they are
beautiful or because they ate their food but when they figure something out on their own”
(Ropero 47). This ideal is personified by the three children in The Big Box, all of whom are
reprimanded by adults for doing normal child-like activities and respond with, “I know you are
smart / and I know that you think / You are doing what is best for me / But if freedom is handled
just your way, then it’s not freedom or free” (The Big Box 18). At the end of the story, although
the children do not reconcile with the adults, they escape the “the big box” and run away free to
whatever life they can imagine. This theme proves especially fruitful to marginalized children,
who are constantly being defined by the world, and the “the big box” can be read to signify the
various systems, “truths”, and rules that adults have established in the world Not surprisingly,
when Morrison began to create this narrative—one that pushes children to create their own
truths, even if those disagree with the adults in their lives—she was warned that adults might not
be open to embracing this theme, since it is adults, after all, who purchase books. Not only do creative works like *The Big Box* challenge children’s acceptance of adult truth, but they challenge the publishing market that controls children’s literature.

*Lettie Cloud and Lady Wind*

Another book co-authored by Slade Morrison is *Little Cloud and Lady Wind*, accompanied by whimsical illustrations by Sean Qualls. The book’s narrative is inspired by Aesop’s fable “The Bundle of Sticks,” which is a story about strength in unity and working together. Essentially, “The Bundle of Sticks” tells the story of an old, dying man whose sons always fought with each other. Hoping to teach his children to work better together before his demise, he commands each son to use physical strength in an attempt to break a bundle of sticks. Of course, none of the sons can break the faggot on their own, but when the dying father tells them to work together and each break one stick from the bundle, they are successful. The father explains to the children that divided they can be easily subdued, but that their union made them invincible. Like Aesop’s tale, Morrison’s story details that everyone has a special role in the world and that their contributions are important, even if it seems difficult to fit in with the crowd. The story follows The Little Cloud, a small, personified cloud who—fearing that assimilating would cause her “to blend into a group and lose her freedom”—finds “a quiet place in the sky” by herself (*Little Cloud and Lady Wind* 4). Although she loves her home in the sky, Little Cloud feels lonely and dreams of connecting with the world below on Earth. She dreams of touching the earth—she longs to “skip in the snow,” “lie down with the valley flowers,” and play in the “silver-topped waves” (*Little Cloud and Lady Wind* 8). Later that night, Lady Wind appears to Little Cloud, saying that she heard Little Cloud’s dream and wants to help her. Lady Wind cradles Little Cloud in her arms and takes her on a beautiful journey closer to earth. Their
journey was not easy at times: Little Cloud cried out, “I am afraid” amid a storm, as the ocean “leaped” below and there was a “loud crack of thunder” (Little Cloud and Lady Wind 16). Despite their challenges and feeling afraid, Lady Wind helped Little Cloud throughout their journey and assured her everything would be okay. Most critics are quick to point out how Morrison’ story gives Aesop’s tale a feminist interpretation, because the storyline highlights the strength of women working together, as both Little Cloud and Lady Wind are personified as female. Additionally, Lady Wind functions as a mentor and mother figure for Little Cloud.

When the two make it closer to earth, Little Cloud marvels at the beauty of Earth, but she also marvels at how she specifically is connected to its beauty. For example, Lady Wind tells Little Cloud to look down at the “tiny pearls falling from clothes” and explains that it is dew. Little Cloud admires the dew and sees it as a “necklace of many colors stretching from her place in the sky to the valley.” Little Cloud also observes little baby clouds “just like her” floating near a rainbow as mist. Lady Wind has led Little Cloud to a profound observation, and she proclaims, “Now I see. I can be me and part of something too” because she sees herself now as part of the dew that touches the earth and mist “playing over the ocean” near rainbows” (Little Cloud and Lady Wind 26). Little Cloud thanks Lady Wind because she has finally learned that she can be herself, as well as all the things she has dreamt of. The last illustration of the book features Little Cloud with beautiful Black features—she has a voluminous curly afro and large plump lips—but more importantly, a smile on her face as she feels more comfortable in understanding her place in the world—one that is not defined by anyone but herself, and yet also simultaneously defined by her place in the world.

In her typical way, Toni Morrison escapes the white gaze in her children’s books, even when writing about personified characters in the sky. She centers her story outside of the white
gaze and replaces it instead with a whimsical world that values sisterhood and resilience. Fara Griffin jokingly comments in the documentary *Living in a Black World*, “If there’s life on Mars, they are reading Toni Morrison to find out more about what it means to be human.” Whether in the sky or in outer space, literary scholars trust Morrison’s work to capture what it means to be human. Morrison uses her imagination to reinvent the world, while encouraging Black Americans and their children to do the same.

*Please, Louise*

Of all the books discussed throughout this project, it is fitting to end on a discussion of Morrison and Slayde’s children’s picturebook titled *Please, Louise*. This text aligns well with one of the loudest arguments of the project: children’s texts promote a space to build literary imagination that can change the lives of children, particularly marginalized children. Morrison’s book leaves the white gaze and follows a young girl named Louise to the library. The narrator of the story is an unnamed adult gently imploring little Louise throughout the story to keep her mind open and continue challenging her existing perspective.

As the story begins, Louise can be seen bundled up in a bright yellow raincoat with matching tall boots exiting the front door of a home. The readers are not told immediately where Louise is going, but they do hear the narrator immediately caution Louise with the wise advice, “Things are not always what they seem” (*Please, Louise* 2). As Louise continues walking beneath the dark sky, the unnamed speaker begs her many times to not fear the various things she encounters. For example, Louise gets nervous as she walks by and observes various things—a tree with bare branches, an unknown man playing music on the side of the road, a small dog’s bark, and a tall dark home—and the speaker continues to remind her not to be afraid, because things are not always as they seem. The speaker challenges the young girl’s immediate
interpretations of the world around her that are rooted in fear: “Is that house really haunted?” Or does it just need care? Why not imagine the joy that used to be there?” (Please, Louse 10). As in much of her work, Morrison stresses that the imagination is an important tool, especially for marginalized people who want to change their circumstances. To move outside of the fishbowl and take on a new perspective, one must be brave like Louise—and have an imagination that can confront initial and outside perspectives. As Louise reaches her destination, the reader discovers she has been venturing to the library, and upon arrival, the reader realizes that the unnamed adult wants Louise to develop her imagination via books. The speaker refers to the library as a “shelter” for Louise—both literally and metaphorically. The illustration of Louise entering the library is powerful, as we see her taking her first steps inside with the door open and the storm behind her. By entering the library, Louise not only is about to seek refuge from the rain and all the things that scare her about the world, but the narrator claims that the library can help grow her imagination and develop new perspectives. The unnamed speaker tells Louise, “These books are loyal friends, helping you explore, dream, discover, think, learn, and know much, much more” (Please, Louse 14). A few pages later, the narrator directly speaks to Louise about how imagination can be a tool for reimagining realities: “Imagination is an open door. Step in here and let it soar” (Please, Louse 16). The story has several pages of illustrations of Louise discovering books in the library, and she can be seen opening them up and trespassing into other realities.

At the story’s end, Louise can be seen leaving the library with a red wagon full of books. Acquiring and discovering these texts have empowered her—when she leaves the library, the sky is no longer dark. The illustrations are vibrant and display a sunny background; Louise looks happy and no longer fears all the things she saw before because reading the books have given her...
the imagination and courage to create a new perspective. The narrator asks the reader, “Fear and sadness—where did they go? Louise doesn’t care. Louise doesn’t know” (Please, Louise 18). At the end of the story, the narrator tells us that “books can teach and please Louise,” and the reader is left watching Louise at home cuddled up with her nose in a book.

Like the other books explored in this project that are written by ethnographic readers, Morrison’s work uses picture texts for children—but especially Black and marginalized children—as power vehicles that can empower them and encourage them to trespass beyond the fishbowl that was created for them by oppressive structures. Like Louise, the selection of the ethnographic children’s texts identified in this project provide refuge for kids—including refuge from systems like racism and misogyny. These texts encourage children to use their imagination to create their own fishbowls—spaces that are safe from the white gaze and include characters that look like them and relate to them. The texts included in this project were chosen by consciously thinking about intersectionality with the purpose of evading texts that favor the dominant gaze.

As Morrison wrote in Playing in the Dark, it is not only important to identify texts that are “complicit in the fabrication of racism,” but it is equally important to “see when literature exploded and undermined it” (16). Most of the texts identified in this project are uniquely able to accomplish that. The picturebooks outlined across these chapters help scholars understand how selected texts in the children’s literature genre can help accomplish the undermining of white supremacy and misogyny. Morrison creates narratives for children that are outside of the dominant white gaze, while also begging them—as the speaker begs Louise in Please, Louise—to engage with other similar ethnographic texts. Just as Louise finds refuge in the children’s library, Morrison’s picture and theoretical texts argue that books can help humans trespass into
new worlds, empower them by seeing representations like themselves so that they can confront prevalent gazes that promote exclusion, and of course, support these children in developing their own imagination. All these tools are necessary for marginalized children to confront harmful, dominant perspectives, so that they ultimately can identify the parameters of the fishbowl, leave it, and then create their own worlds to exist within. As Morrison explained in the documentary *Pieces That I Am*, “history has always proved that books are the first plain on which certain kinds of battles are fought.” My project claims that books in the children’s literature genre are essential parts of the battle.
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