

**TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM THROUGH  
LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE**

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Children learn about the world around them by listening, making observations and interacting with others. Picture books can provide both teachers and students a tool with which readers can examine and evaluate the ways in which they see the world and relate to others. The utilization of children's picture books with themes of social justice in the primary classroom can be an excellent tool to help teachers create space for their students to grapple with social justice issues in an age-appropriate manner. The goal of this study was to analyze award-winning children's picture books that have been identified as having themes of social justice in order to ascertain the messages present in each book and consider whether these messages can inspire social activism within the classroom and school community.

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## PREFACE

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## **POSITIONALITY STATEMENT**

As a mother I have always looked to children's literature as a way to teach my children about institutional oppression and unearned privilege. It was important for me to find age-appropriate ways to help my children understand the differences and commonalities between race, socio-economic status, religion and cultural practices. Although difficult to find, picture books always served as an excellent tool. Raising strong, educated black women who were confident to speak up and step out to do their part in making the world a better place was non-negotiable. It is only fitting that I became an educator, as this is my life's calling. I now use children's literature, specifically picture books to teach my students how to be critical consumers of text. I want my students to understand that texts are not neutral and they are written from the author's perspective based on their ideologies. Thus, I have included suggested critical literacy questions (Appendix B) that can be used with the books being analyzed in this research project.

According to Milner (2007), in addition to researching something or someone else, a researcher must also engage in researching himself or herself in order to understand how their personal ideologies may impact the lens through which they analyze the data sources. With this in mind, in addition to examining the children's pictures books, I kept the questions below at the forefront of my mind to work through what Milner (2007) refers to as "the dangers seen, unseen and unforeseen"

In what ways does my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world, what I stress in my research and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences? What racialized and cultural experiences have shaped my research decisions, practices, approaches, epistemologies, and agenda? In like manner, Sikes (2004) states:

“. . . it is important for all researchers to spend some time thinking about how they are paradigmatically and philosophically positioned and for them to be aware of how their positioning and fundamental assumptions that they hold might influence their research . . . This is about being a reflexive and reflective and, therefore a rigorous researcher who is able to present their findings and interpretations in the confidence that they have thought about, acknowledged and been honest and explicit about their stance and the influence it has had upon their work. This is important given that a major criticism of much educational research is that it is biased and partisan” (Sikes, 2004, p. 15).

Thus, the purpose of this statement is to make transparent my identity and personal interest in the power of children’s literature, specifically, picture books with themes of social justice.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

My first grade students were gathered on the floor in the area of the classroom where we sit during a read-aloud. The third graders invited us to join their peace walk that morning which was a culminating activity for the great migration unit they had just completed. In preparation for the peace walk I read the book *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* by Andrea Davis Pinkney. I chose this book because I felt it provided a great example of how a group of people can take action to raise awareness on a specific issue of importance to them in hopes of effecting a change. While I was reading the story, a Black student raised his hand and said, "I would not have been able to eat at that restaurant because I am Black." The following is the dialogue that resulted from that comment. The names have been changed to protect the identities of the students:

Kevin: "My dad is Black but my mom is White. What about me?"

Ms. Herring: "Because of the color of your skin you would not have been served at the restaurant either."

George: "Well, I am White so I would have been able to get a doughnut and a cup of coffee even though I don't really like coffee."

Group of Students: "I am White, too. I would have been allowed to eat there."

Ashley: "But that is not fair everybody should be able to get a doughnut."

Vanessa: "I could go with my Black friends and get a doughnut to share with everyone."

- Keith: “One doughnut would not be enough for everyone and I don’t think they are allowing the White people sitting with the Black people to have a doughnut either.”
- Mrs. Herring: “ You are correct. There are some people who are angry with the White students for ‘standing up by sitting down with their friends’ to change an unfair law.”
- Keith: “Are there still laws like that now?”
- Chuck: “No, but there are people who are still like that.”
- Kaveri: “If I was born during that time would I have been able to go swimming with my dad -- because he is White and I am more dark like my mom who is Indian?”
- Mrs. Herring: “Your mom and dad would probably not have gotten married to one another during that time so you would not have been born.”
- Kaveri: “I am glad things are different so I could be born and you could be our teacher.”
- Mrs. Herring: “That is why it is important for us to read books like this to help us better understand our world and each other as well as work with each other to make life better for everyone.”

Children learn about the world around them by listening, making observations and interacting with others. Providing students with an opportunity to discuss social justice issues is important because it can offer them a way to confront and evaluate how they view the world and interact with others (Lugo, 2013). The above narrative of the discussion my first graders engaged in during our reading of *Sit In* is my rationale for conducting a content analysis of children’s picture books that have been identified as promoting the cause of social justice, and equity among the sexes and all races. The goal of this study is to analyze children’s picture books that have been identified as having themes of social justice in order to identify the messages present in each book and how, if at all, these messages can inspire social activism within the classroom and school community. According to Foreman (2005), social justice is “a

belief system based on equity, human rights and fairness for all” (p. 532). Teaching for social justice in the primary grades is a way to help students begin to challenge the inequalities and biases that exist in our society.

The New London Group (1996) argues, “Just as global geopolitics have shifted, so has the role of schools fundamentally shifted. Cultural and linguistic diversity are now central and critical issues” (p. 9). The essence of the New London Group’s argument is that literacy instruction has to change in order to prepare students for a global world. Dever, Sorenson and Brodrick (2005) state, “children’s books serve as a bridge or a way to vicariously experience social justice situations, and they provide a vehicle to foster empathy” (p.19). Therefore, it is important to create a space for children to have opportunities to discuss social justice issues because this can afford them multiple ways to consider and evaluate how they view the world and interact with others.

Quality literature provides a springboard from which classroom discussions can launch about the way that power, race and culture produce equity and inequity around the world. It begins with a deliberate, developmentally appropriate approach that acknowledges the unique perspectives and cognitive development of each student. My study will provide educators with a resource that can help them create a space for dialogue around equity and inclusion in their classroom through the use of picture books. It is my hope that this study will be beneficial to practitioners who are eager to become more culturally responsive in their teaching.

## **1.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009), social justice is defined as



... standpoints and scholarly traditions that actively address the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, recognizing that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratifications along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Working for social justice in education means guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (p. 350).

In other words, Sensoy and DiAngelo believe social justice is a way of seeing and acting aimed at resisting discrimination and injustice while improving freedom and possibility for all but especially those who are underrepresented. In order to achieve my goal for this inquiry, I will situate my study at the intersection of transformative learning and critical literacy as they relate to teaching for social justice. The terms civic education, citizenship education, character education, teaching for democracy, social justice education and teaching for social justice are frequently linked together (Adams, 2007, Dau, 2001, Noddings, 2005). It is against this backdrop of concepts that my study is situated.

### **1.1.1 Transformative learning**

For the purpose of my inquiry, I will be using the term “teaching for social justice” as it is placed under the banner of transformational learning (Ayres, 2004). The literature on transformative learning informs us that the purpose of learning is to cause change in the learner (Dewey, 1933, Mezirow, 2000). John Dewey describes transformative learning as an individual seeing some aspect of the world in a new way and valuing that new perspective. Mezirow defines transformative learning as a process whereby:

“we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open [changeable] and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p.24).

Mezirow explains further that our frames of reference or meaning structures consist of two dimensions: “habits of mind” and “points of view” (Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000, p. 345). Hence, for transformation to take place, it is important for individuals to become aware of their habits and perspectives. Additionally, they must also be willing to participate in examining, reflecting and challenging their beliefs and the reasons for them to develop different perspectives. In 1916 John Dewey wrote,

“I appeal to teachers . . . to remember that they above all others are consecrated servants of the democratic ideas in which alone this country is truly a distinctive action—ideas of friendly and helpful intercourse between all and the equipment of every individual to serve the community by his own best powers in his own best way” (Dewey, 1976, p. 210).

In other words, being a teacher is being an activist for social justice and advocating for the full inclusion of all. Social justice educators think, speak, and act critically and consciously. They provide opportunities for students to strengthen their self-efficacy as well as opportunities to appreciate, value and respect others through development of critical consciousness, reflection and action. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire states:

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 1970, p. 34).

Basically, education should be used as a tool to free and liberate. Freire believed that teachers and students are partners in education partners, who listen to one another and work together to eliminate oppression. Additionally, he believed education had the power to transform and

inspire students to respond thoughtfully to the social controls that sustain and undergird injustices in our society. He argued that students must learn how to read their own socio-historical-political context by reading the world. Moreover, Freire (1970) states, “It is possible to access meaning through reading words. One must first read the world within which these words exist” (p.304). This is why it is important for educators to get to know the world of their students when teaching for social justice. Furthermore, using children’s picture books that include social justice themes at the primary level (kindergarten through third grade) can help educators challenge their students to think critically about the social, political and historic reality within which they exists (Freire, 1970). Children’s pictures books with themes of social justice can be a tool to help students learn to read their world and scrutinize inequities in order to intervene and act for social change in a developmentally appropriate manner.

### **1.1.2 Critical literacy**

Critical literacy is grounded in Freirian pedagogy. Freire (1970) maintains that proponents of critical literacy situate readers as active participants in the reading process and encourages them to move beyond passively accepting the text’s message. Instead, readers are encouraged to question, to examine, or to dispute the power relations that are present between readers and authors. The emphasis is placed upon issues of power and reflection, as well as the promotion of transformation and action. Recent research on critical literacy builds on Freire’s work and places the emphasis on a type of “reading the world” through understanding the social and historical factors shaping social justices and injustices. Children’s literature invites critical readings among researchers and young readers alike. Additionally, children’s literature with themes of social justice can be used to help students take a critical approach to literacy. This can

be achieved by asking the reader to scrutinize the overt themes as well as the themes that are less visible that afford privilege to some and relegate others to a lower status of importance. In order to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they must not only be able to decode and comprehend text, they must also be able to interpret critically the ideologies present in text and how these ideologies position certain people and, undeniably, the reader (Leland et al., 2005).

Children's picture books that accurately, sensitively and respectfully portray diversity of cultures, perspectives and viewpoints demonstrate to the reader that other realities apart from one's own not only exist but also have the right to do so. Nodelman (1988) cautions:

“If we are not conscious that other cultures offer different and, for those who live within them, equally satisfactory definitions of meaning and value, and that consequently, these cultures postulate quite different but equally satisfactory realities, then we are doomed to a dangerous solitude, a blindness that amounts to an unconscious form of arrogance” (p. 232).

For this reason, it is imperative that educators create space in the curriculum that allows students to discuss and critically examine how they view the world and interact with others. “Care of self, others and the planet should be embraced as the main goal of education. Such an aim does not work against intellectual development or academic achievement. Rather, it supplies a firm foundation for both” (Noddings, 2005, p. 368). This is mirrored in the ideas of critical literacy where the social world of students is the framework for literacy instruction and learning (Vasquez, 2004). Thus, it is important to discuss the relationship between social justice and critical literacy.

Phelps (2010), points out that using critical literacy in classrooms strengthens students' ability to think critically as they learn how to ask certain types of questions when engaging with any texts. The kinds of questions that they begin to ask based on these texts can impact how they view the world and others as well as how they interpret equity and inequity as it relates to social

justice. The use of critical literacy instruction in the classroom can provide teachers with a tool with which they can help their students understand that texts are not unbiased representations of reality, but in fact are socially created artifacts that influence people's ideas and represent specific points of views while omitting others (Luke & Freebody, 1999). Often, however, adults feel that primary aged children are not emotionally ready to have critical discourse around social justice issues. This is primarily due to their own fragility and feelings of awkwardness and uncertainty regarding how to talk with young children about equity and inequity as it relates to race, gender and socioeconomic status (Vasquez, 2007). In her research, Vasquez (2007) found that children are in fact capable and willing to engage in topics perceived as "difficult" by adults especially if they regard the conversations as significant or having an impact on their lives. Vasquez (2007) believes that in order for young children to develop different perspectives, it is necessary for them to have access to dominant and powerful discursive practices that create spaces for them to participate differently in the world (p.6). Comber (2001) describes critical literacies as "people using language to exercise power to enhance everyday life in schools and communities, and to question practices of privilege and injustice" (p.1). Comber's point is that critical literacies involve people using the power of language to question and analyze the world in order to make positive changes. Vasquez (2003b) agrees when she writes,

"From the start I have believed that, a critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived. It arises from the social and political conditions that unfold in communities in which we live. As such, it cannot be traditionally taught. In other words, as teachers we need to incorporate a critical perspective into our everyday lives with our students in order to find ways to help children understand the social and political issues around them" (Vasquez, 2003b).

Vasquez believes that exploring text with young children in order to develop their ability to critically analyze the social constructs of the world and their relationships with others remains an

area that has largely been untapped in the early elementary grades. Using children's picture books with themes of social justice can be a vehicle to help teachers create the space for critical literacy instruction in the primary classroom.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Children's books that include social justice themes not only provide a space from which students can grapple with equity and inequity as they relate to race, gender and socioeconomic status, they also can give teachers an opportunity to deepen their understanding around these issues (Dever, Sorenson & Brodrick, 2005). In order to establish a foundation for my study, I will explore the body of professional literature on culturally responsive teaching and multicultural literature as they relate to teaching for social justice.

### **2.1 CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING**

Much like critical literacy, culturally responsive teaching encourages students to scrutinize critically the society in which they live and to work for social change (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.314). As classrooms become more diverse, the demand for teachers to construct pedagogical practices that are relevant to students' social and cultural realities increases. In an attempt to address low academic performance among low income students and students of color, researchers and scholars developed a theory of culturally responsive pedagogy, also known as culturally relevant or culturally sensitive pedagogy (Au, 2000; Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994a, 2010). "Culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 2001) and "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2010) requires teachers to acquire the skills and

understanding for teaching children that come from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds. Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as:

“. . . using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (p.29).

According to Gay (2010), it is vital that educators understand how education can be used as a vehicle to ignite social transformation. Additionally, administrators, teachers, parents and students have to work together to ensure that the beliefs and practices that support equity of voices are present in all classrooms. Conversely, there also has to be a willingness to lean into the discomfort of the conversations that must take place to eradicate those beliefs and practices that perpetuate oppression of certain individuals or groups. Gay (2010) states:

“Success does not emerge out of failure, weakness does not generate strength, and courage does not stem from cowardice. Instead, success begets success. Mastery of tasks at one level encourages individuals to accomplish tasks of even greater complexity . . . . To pursue [learning] with conviction, and eventual competence, requires students to have some degree of academic mastery, and personal confidence and courage. In other words, learning derives from a basis of strength and capability, not weakness and failure” (p.26).

Teachers must incorporate the pluralistic backgrounds of students into the classroom environment. Although many educators have the best intentions of offering their students literature that is representative of other cultures, it is possible that text shared with students in the classroom may ignore all differences except physical ones. All students should have the opportunity to experience accurate portrayals of themselves and of others in literature. This is especially important for those students that are underrepresented in many aspects of our society. Unfortunately, the efforts to bridge the cultural gap between home culture and school culture often falls short. The idea of culturally responsive education can be so daunting to effectively



implement that efforts to adopt this type of teaching are quickly abandoned. In order to engage in this type of teaching well, Gay (2010) states,

[It] requires tapping into a wide range of cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions and perspectives. Emotions, beliefs, values, ethos, opinions and feelings are scrutinized along with factual information and physical behaviors to make curriculum and instruction more reflective of and responsive to ethnic diversity” (p.34).

Gay’s point is that teachers need to have *explicit* knowledge about cultures other than their own and learn how to translate that knowledge into instructional strategies. According to Gay, critical literacy is a way of understanding and engaging in culturally responsive teaching. Like critical literacy, culturally responsive teaching can be empowering. It can support students with clarifying their ethnic values while correcting factual errors about cultural heritages. Children’s picture books with themes of social justice can serve as a tool to the culturally responsive teacher by providing a means to help students develop skills for how they think, question, analyze, reflect and feel about the world (Gay, 2010). Furthermore, incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies into the classroom may also help students realize that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences. This in turn, could result in taking social action to promote freedom, equality and justice for all. The affirmative effects of this knowledge and acquiring these skills for Black, Asian, Latino/a and Native American students has been documented by Ladson-Billings (1994); Foster (1995); Krater, Zeni & Cason (1994); Tharp & Gallimore (1988); Escalanté & Dirmann (1990); and Sheets (1995). To this end, the complexities of this type of teaching praxis requires identifying the “change agents” and providing them the support and strong examples of how to implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices into the classroom. This will not happen by chance. It is a developmental process that involves acquiring specific skills that are acquired gradually and over time.

Likewise, culturally responsive teaching involves representing and validating the cultures of all students (Gay, 2010, Ladson-Billings, 1994). “Good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about changes needed in educational programs and procedures to prevent academic inequalities among diverse students” (Gay, 2010, p.14). Crichlow, Goodwin, Shakes and Swartz (1990) offer an example for why pedagogical practices grounded in multiculturalism are beneficial for teaching and learning. In their view, it:

“utilizes an inclusive and representational framework of knowledge in which students and teachers have the capacity to produce ventilated narrative . . . By collectively representing diverse cultures and groups as producers of knowledge, it facilitates a liberative student/teacher relationship that ‘opens up’ the written text and oral discourse to analysis and reconstruction” (p.103).

These words of Crichlow, Goodwin, Shakes and Swartz indicate that a pedagogical practice grounded in multiculturalism helps students understand that no single version of “truth” is absolute and eternal. As a nation of diverse beliefs, languages and cultures it is important to the social and academic well being of all children that they are afforded the opportunity to succeed by receiving support from every tool available to them. Thus, children’s picture books that include themes of social justice can serve as a tool to help students and teachers better understand and relate to the multiple forms of diversity present in their schools and communities. The use of children’s picture books to teach for social justice can promote pedagogical practices that have the power to transform how students and teachers see the world and interact with others. Creating an environment appreciative and accepting (not tolerating) of diverse people and perspectives is vital to building an environment not only respected but also embraced by both teachers and students. When children are given the opportunity to explore and engage in critical dialogue regarding multicultural topics, the basis upon which they will shape their knowledge of the world will be stronger. It also affords them the opportunity to acquire multiple

perspectives about people, cultures and languages that are different from their own. Children's picture books that contain themes of social justice can provide bridges for readers to cross the national, cultural, racial, sexual, linguistic and religious differences that often divide us (Hadaway, 2007).

## 2.2 MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

The term "multicultural literature" became known during the era of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s as part of the multicultural education movement. During that time many nonwhite writers and illustrators were unable to get their work published (Cai, 2002; Cai & Bishop, 1994; Taxel, 1997). Founded in 1966, the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) promoted authors and illustrators of color and published articles that pointed out the racial stereotypes and the lack of authenticity in books published for children of color. Meanwhile, the Coretta Scott King Award was established in 1969 to recognize the accomplishments of African American authors and illustrators. These factors, the influence of the CIBC and the establishment of the Coretta Scott King Award coupled with the social changes occurring in American society, all contributed to a steady increase in multicultural books during the late 1960s and the 1970s. Equally important to the growing awareness that multiple perspectives needed to be represented in children's books, was the *Saturday Review of Books*, which featured Nancy Larrick's (1965) historic article, "The All White World of Children's Books". Larrick (1965) drew attention to the fact that millions of black children were learning to read from books that entirely omitted or scarcely mentioned them. According to Bishop (1990a), this disparity of mirrors (reflections of one's self) in children's books can not only negatively

impact marginalized groups of children, but can also have a negative impact on those children who often see themselves in picture books. Bishop (1990a) states, “if children only see reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world –a dangerous ethnocentrism” (p.x). Over the decades, the term multicultural literature has changed, making it a difficult concept to define because it means different things to different people (Cai, 2003b; Cai & Bishop, 1994; Harris, 2003). Cai (2002) describes multicultural literature as “an instrument to reach the goals of multicultural education” (p.19). These goals include “helping students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in a democratic and free society” (Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor, 2002, p. 82). Bishop (1994) describes multicultural literature as an integral part of multicultural education which can serve a political purpose, be used for enjoyment, and provide opportunities for children to “see themselves and others reflected in the texts with which they come into contact” (Smith, 1997, p.65).

For this inquiry, the above definition offered by Cai (2002) will be used when referring to multicultural literature. While there has been an increase in the representation of people of color in children’s picture books there remains an overrepresentation of white people indicating there is still much work to be done in order to reflect the diversity of perspectives and experiences across race and culture. Multicultural literature has the potential to help students and teachers gain broader understandings about the world. However, teachers often struggle with choosing high quality multicultural literature or neglect to see the important role multicultural literature plays in the lives of children (Colby & Lyon, 2004). For example, using multicultural children’s books with themes of social justice in the primary classroom can provide a safe space for young children to engage in dialogue around social justice issues. This genre can also allow students

and teachers to address sensitive issues in the context of a story and its characters rather than an uncomfortable personal experience. Additionally, multicultural literature with social justice themes can also provide students with a framework for developing and using “feeling” vocabulary as it relates to themes of social justice. The concrete examples present in the books have the potential to expose students and teachers to marginalized voices and historic struggle for equity. Rochman (1993) describes the overall purpose of multicultural literature as,

“A good book can help to break down [barriers]. Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person - flawed, complex, striving - then you've reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us know each other” (p. 19).

Similarly, Nieto (1992) discusses how students are able to practice critical thinking habits, develop a capacity for creativity and risk-taking and understand as well as appreciate people different from themselves. Multicultural education will not come about through prepackaged curricular offerings but through critical thinking and a focus on “knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change” (Nieto, 1992, p. 307). Celebrating isolated heroes and holidays is less effectual than using a transformative method which involves redesigning the curriculum and integrating multicultural literature and diverse cultural perspectives throughout the year.

For this inquiry, I will specifically focus on the Jane Addams Young Children Award Book lists for the years of 2010 – 2015. The Jane Addams Children’s Book Awards are given annually to the children’s books published the preceding year that effectively promote the cause of peace, social justice, world community and the equality of the sexes and all races. Jane

Addams (1860 – 1935) was an exceptional progressive who took untiring and thoughtful action against social injustice. She advocated for reforms in sanitation, housing, work conditions and child labor. In 1915, Addams founded the Women’s International League for Peace Foundation (WILPF) and in 1931 she became the first American female recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Eighteen years after Addams’ death, the WILPF created the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award (Griffith, 2013). Since these books have received awards for effectively promoting the cause of peace, social justice, world community and the equality of the sexes and all races, my goal is to identify the specific social justice messages conveyed in the text and illustrations and identify the percentage that the protagonist is a person of color (Black, Native American, Latino/a or Asian) or a female. Thus the following questions will drive my inquiry:

1. What are the specific social justice themes conveyed through visual illustrations and written text in each of the selected books?
2. Out of the selected books, how often is a person of color (Black, Asian, Native American, Latino/a) or a female portrayed as the protagonist?

To answer these questions, I will use a qualitative approach to conduct a content analysis of the picture books. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as:

“A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (p. 3).

The drive of this inquiry is to make the world of picture books with themes of social justice visible to educators, administrators, parents and students. Accordingly, each book will be analyzed through the lens of critical literacy. According to Luke & Freebody (1997), critical literacy can be described as the taking up of alternative reading positions and questioning how

texts work ideologically. Christensen (2003) asserts that becoming critically literate within school contexts also involves engaging students in academically challenging work that is grounded in their lives, connected to larger contexts, and giving them hope as they work toward constructing the world in which they want to live.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

Children's literature plays an important role in the lives of primary school children. According to Bishop (1990b), "literature functions as a major socializing agent. It tells students who and what their society and culture values, what kind of behaviors are acceptable and appropriate and what it means to be a decent human being" (p. 561). For this reason, it is important that teachers understand that texts are not unbiased and represent specific worldviews while silencing other perspectives. Furthermore, it is also important for teachers to understand the explicit and implicit messages in text in order to determine the impact these messages can have on the students in their classroom (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Through the examination of children's picture books that include social justice themes, students can begin to develop a deeper understanding regarding equity and inequity around the world. Hefflin and Barksdale & Ladd (2001) discuss the significance of children connecting to characters and situations found in books reflective of their own culture:

"Literature is a powerful medium. Through it, children construct messages about their cultures and roles in society. Literature offers them personal stories, a view of their cultural surroundings, and insight on themselves. When children read books that are interesting and meaningful to them, they can find support for the process of defining themselves as individuals and understanding their developing roles within their families and communities" (p.810).



### 3.1 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Each book was analyzed for the themes present in the written text and illustrations. Bruan and Clarke (2006) define a theme as “. . . something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p.82). In other words, themes are overarching ideas in a text that are typically communicated indirectly through multiple features of the story including characters, character actions, dialogue, setting and plot (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Because themes are abstract and implicit, readers must engage deeply with the text and illustrations to determine the theme.

Bogdan & Biklen (1998) define reliability as “consistency in results of observations made by different researchers or by the same researcher over time” (p.35). Similarly, Krippendorf (2004) states:

“Research techniques should result in findings that are replicable. That is researchers working at different points in time and perhaps under different circumstances should get the same results when applying the same techniques to the same data. Replicability is the most important form of reliability” (p.18).

Thus, there were two additional readers of the selected books to check for reliability in relationship to the themes present in each book. The readers were both female and work with young children. One reader was a twenty-eight year old Caucasian female who works with children in grades kindergarten through eighth grade as a school-based therapist. The second reader was a twenty-nine year old Black elementary teacher working in a charter school with students in third grade. The readers were selected because they both work with young children and expressed an interest in incorporating picture books with social justice themes into their practice. Each reader used the methods of thematic analysis and inductive coding of the books to determine the themes that emerged. Thematic analysis refers to the development or ‘emergence’

of themes from the data. Braun & Clarke define it as “qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing an reporting patterns within data (p.79).

Like thematic analysis, inductive coding is an emergent data driven method of coding (Saldana, 2016, p. 75). The reader used the same data collection sheet which includes a section for each book title and year, the gender of the main character, the ethnicity of the main character, the social justice theme and other themes or powerful quotes (see Appendix A). The data was reviewed for patterns across readers. If there were differences in the collected data, the books from which there were differences, were reread by all readers and the results discussed to see if any patterns emerged after the second reading.

### **3.2 THE QUALITATIVE PLUMB LINE**

While qualitative research involves moving to and fro between data collection, data analysis and data interpretation, Chenail (1997) stresses the magnitude of the “qualitative research plumb line” (p.3). Chenail (1997) describes the qualitative research plumb line as consisting of four parts: (1) area of curiosity, (2) research question(s), (3) data to be collected and (4) data analysis procedure. Chenail (1997) asserts that a clear understanding of these four parts at the onset of the study will help the researcher remain focused and thorough. Accordingly, the following is an illustration of the plumb line for the current study:

- Area of Curiosity:
  - Using critical literacy and children’s picture books to teach primary students about social justice issues
- Research Question(s):

- What are the specific social justice themes conveyed through visual illustrations and written text in each of the selected books?
- Out of the selected books, how often is a person of color (Black, Asian, Native American, Latino/a or a female portrayed as the protagonist?
  
- Data Collected:
  - Jane Addams Young Children Award list for the years of 2010-2015
  - Social justice themes present in each book
  - Race/Sex of Protagonist
  
- Data Analysis
  - Thematic Content Analysis
  - Inductive Coding

## 4.0 FINDINGS

The books in this study were analyzed with an eye towards determining the social justice themes conveyed through the written texts and illustrations as well as which books contain a female or person of color as the protagonist. Specifically this study focused on the following research questions:

- What are the specific social justice themes conveyed through visual illustrations and written text in each of the selected books?
- Out of the selected books, how often is a person of color (Black, Asian, Native American, Latino/a) or a female portrayed as the protagonist?

In order to check for reliability regarding the themes present in the books, the primary researcher, along with two additional readers, analyzed each text. Each reader used the methods of thematic analysis and inductive coding to determine emerging themes. The readers used the same data collection sheet which included a section for each book title and year, the gender of the main character, the ethnicity of the main character, the social justice themes and other themes or powerful quotes (see Appendix A). The data was reviewed for patterns across readers and any differences in the collected data resulted in the rereading of those books by all readers and a discussion of the results to determine if any new patterns emerged after the second reading. A detailed analysis of each book can be found in the collective data collection sheets (Appendix B)

In order to answer the research question pertaining to the specific social justice themes conveyed through visual illustrations and written text, I will provide a summary for each book to

provide context. Each summary will be followed by the identification of the social justice themes as collectively identified by the three independent readers, and a short commentary. The books are listed in chronological order beginning with the most recent.

## **4.1 BOOK SUMMARIES AND THEMES**

### **4.1.1 *Separate is Never Equal***

#### **4.1.1.1 Book summary**

“Cuando la causa es justa, los demás te siguen.” “When you fight for justice, others will follow.” This powerful quote from *Separate is Never Equal* helps bring to light an important case about school segregation. When Sylvia’s parents are told they cannot enroll her in the nearby school intended for “Whites only” but instead must enroll in the Mexican school which is significantly further away they took action by organizing the Hispanic community and filing a lawsuit in federal district court.

#### **4.1.1.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *access to education, desegregation of schools and racism in the United States*. This true story is told from the perspective of young Sylvia Mendez, almost 10 years before *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. The triumph of this case becomes key to decisions that impacts the Supreme Court years later in *Brown vs. Board of Education* outlawing racial segregation throughout the country.

## **4.1.2 *The Whispering Town***

### **4.1.2.1 Book summary**

Based on a true story, *The Whispering Town* takes place in a small Danish fishing village during the Holocaust. Anatt and her parents are hiding a Jewish woman and her son Carl, in their cellar until it is safe for them to be ferried to safety in Sweden. Soldiers guarding the street are growing suspicious and Anatt's concern for the safety of Carl and his mother inspires her to develop a unique and clever plan to get them to the harbor. While Annat's plan is clever, it is dependent on her bravery and the willingness of the villagers to put themselves in danger.

### **4.1.2.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *living under dictatorship and nonviolent activism*. The emphasis of this story is on the rescue efforts of the Danish resistance. This constructs a nice balance of peril and compassion for the initial introduction of this historical period to primary students. *The Whispering Town* can be used as a primer to both the injustice of oppression and the strength of perseverance.

## **4.1.3 *Brave Girl***

### **4.1.3.1 Book summary**

This is the biographic story of Clara Lemlich, a teenage girl who helped to lead the largest walkout of women workers in United States history. Clara, a Jewish immigrant comes to the United States in 1905 with her family. When her father is unable to find work, Clara gets a job in the New York garment industry where for little pay she has to work long hours in an

unsafe and unhealthy environment. Determined to change the working conditions, Clara becomes an advocate for the garment workers and stands up to those in power demanding to be treated fairly.

#### **4.1.3.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *the importance of fair labor practices, women's rights, and overcoming sexism*. It shows young people in an activist role. *Brave Girl* can be used as an example of what it means to be a “Change Maker” as Clara’s hard work and determination resulted in her becoming a leader in the Labor Movement and helping thousands of people obtain better working conditions or the right to organize unions “... proving that in America wrongs can be righted, warriors can wear skirts and blouses, and the bravest hearts may beat in girls only five feet tall.”

#### **4.1.4 Razia’s Ray of Hope**

##### **4.1.4.1 Book summary**

Razia desperately wants to get an education. Every night she dreams of going to school just like her two brothers. But, in the small village in Afghanistan where she is from, girls are not permitted to attend school. One day, Razia learns that a school for girls is being built right down the road from her home. She is hopeful that her dreams may finally come true if only she can convince her father and oldest brother that getting an education will not only benefit her, but will also be good for her family and their community.

#### **4.1.4.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *access to education, children's rights and global issues*. Based on the true stories of students who attend Zabuli Education Center for Girls near Kabul, Afghanistan, this book provides students with an example of self-advocacy and determination.

#### **4.1.5 *Each Kindness***

##### **4.1.5.1 Book summary**

Maya, the new girl, comes to school and tries to make friends. Chloe and her friends are unkind to Maya and won't play with her. Maya continues to try and win over their friendship but the girls continue to leave her out and Maya is left to play alone. One day Maya does not come to school and this is the day that the teacher gives a lesson on how even small acts of kindness can change the world. Chloe must deal with her guilt about the lost opportunity to make a friend and show kindness.

##### **4.1.5.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *classism, empathy and bullying*. *Each Kindness* is set in a multiracial classroom (Figure 1) and addresses various positions of power. The author very cleverly has the main character's awareness of these issues raised through the seriousness of her actions and the lost opportunity to right her wrong. Rather than focus on race, *Each Kindness* focuses on the idea that once you hurt someone you may not have an opportunity to make amends.





**Figure 1- Multiracial Classroom**

#### **4.1.6 Dolores Huerta**

##### **4.1.6.1 Book summary**

Dolores Huerta could not understand why her students were hungry, sick and had no shoes. When she discovered that their families were poorly paid and working under hazardous conditions, this spirited Latina woman used nonviolent tactics to improve the lives of migrant workers and their families. Using “her words” and encouraging the farm workers “to use their voices” she fought to ensure fair wages and a safe working environment for migrant workers.

##### **4.1.6.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *inequitable labor laws, classism, women’s rights and non-violent activism*. *Dolores Huerta A Hero to Migrant Workers* is a picture book biography of a Latina activist who advocated for the civil rights of migrant workers and their children. The powerful illustration using watercolor and pastel paintings (Figure 2) express the warmth, anger, and determination of an activist who is still at work to this day. Dolores Huerta, a female civil rights leader is eighty-six years old and has been involved in civil rights work since she was sixteen years old.



Figure 2 - Watercolor and Pastel Painting

#### 4.1.7 *The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families*

##### 4.1.7.1 Book summary

This is the story of Dr. Sato, who through science changed the lives of the people not only in the village of Hargigo, but also around the world. In the 1990s, Dr. Gordon Sato had the idea of planting mangrove trees on the shore of the salty Red Sea to help the people and animals from starving. Dr. Sato taught the villagers how to plant and use fertilizer and seawater to grow Mangrove trees since their roots and leaves help them live in salty water. Through interchanging verse and text passages, *The Mangrove Tree* introduces readers to Dr. Sato's mangrove tree-planting project. This story also focuses on environmental ingenuity and how one man through his hard work and creativity made a difference in the lives of many.

##### 4.1.7.2 Social justice themes

The social justice themes present in this book were *community building, global struggles, understanding human needs with empathy and using science for social change*. The illustrations crafted in the colors of the sky, sea and earth blend well with the written text to express the message of the Manzanar Project that it is possible to fight injustice with hope.

#### **4.1.8 *Emma's Poem The Voice of the Statue of Liberty***

##### **4.1.8.1 Book summary**

This story is about Emma Lazarus the woman who wrote the poem on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. The book tells of how Emma grew up in a wealthy Jewish American family in New York City never wanting for anything. One day, Emma visits Ward's Island, an entry port for many immigrants. Seeing the poor, hungry, tired and sometimes sick immigrants many who were Jewish like Emma effected her profoundly. When asked to write a sonnet to raise money for a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty, Emma composed "The New Colossus." Emma's sonnet gave the Statue of Liberty a strong and empathetic voice viewed by many as a symbol of welcome.

##### **4.1.8.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *immigration, poverty and classism*. *Emma's Poem, The Voice of the Statue of Liberty* can be used to open discourse in the elementary classroom around social movement and social change as well as developing empathy for others.

#### **4.1.9 *Nasreen's Secret School***

##### **4.1.9.1 Book summary**

*Nasreen's Secret School* is based on the true story of a young girl living in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan between 1996- 2001. The story begins describing how Nasreen's entire world changes when her father is taken by the Taliban and does not return. Her mother decides to go

searching for him even though women and girls are forbidden to be out alone in the streets leaving Nasreen behind with her grandmother. Nasreen no longer sings, smiles, draws or speaks. Desperate to help Nasreen, her grandmother risks everything and each day takes Nasreen to the forbidden school for girls hidden behind the green gate in their neighborhood. Told from the perspective of Nasreen's grandmother this is a story of bravery, hope, the power of education and resistance.

#### **4.1.9.2 Social justice themes**

The social justices themes present in this book were *oppression of women, war and access to education*. Nontraditional paintings in colors that metaphorically mirror the path of Nasreen's healing demonstrate the power of education, resistance and the human toll encouraged by war and the oppression of women.

#### **4.1.10 *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai***

##### **4.1.10.1 Book summary**

This is a biography of Kenyan activist and Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai who returned home after attending college and was shocked to see how Kenya was stripped of its environmental beauty by the development of commercial plantations (deforesting). In response to what she perceived as an assault on her homeland, Wangari Maathai got right to work training her people how to plant new trees. This movement known as the Green Belt Movement not only made Kenya green again but it gave Kenyans hope by emphasizing empowerment and education through hard work and determination.

#### **4.1.10.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *ecological solutions, women as activist, global leadership and non-violent activism*. The illustration in this book glimmer with an orange and green landscape speckled with red, purple, blue and yellow details to bring alive the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (2004), Wangari Maathai. She is an example of a leader who saw community building as a way to build a movement that continues to inspire people to take responsibility of their lives, their land and their future.

#### **4.1.11 *The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom***

##### **4.1.11.1 Book summary**

Onah (Oney) Maria Judge wanted the right to have “no mistress but herself.” After the Revolutionary War ended, Oney had a difficult time understanding why liberty meant freedom for everyone except people enslaved. When General George Washington is elected the first President of the United States, Mrs. Washington chooses Oney to travel to the nation’s capital (which at that time was located in New York) to be her personal maid. When Mrs. Washington tells Oney that she plans to give her to her newly married granddaughter upon her death, Oney begins to plot her escape. Oney’s determination to have no mistress but herself gives her the courage to run even though she has no idea how she will survive without the Washington’s upon whom she depends on for food, clothing and shelter.

##### **4.1.11.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *access to education and the enslavement of Black people in the United States*. The expressive illustrations coupled with the

well-written biography, portray the courage of Oney Maria Judge. It lends itself to critical literacy discussions with students around human dignity and rights.

#### **4.1.12 *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow***

##### **4.1.12.1 Book summary**

“Spring comes after winter, and flowers bloom again. Peace comes after war.” These are the words of young Mari’s father intended to give her hope as she plants sunflower seeds with her mother in the, sandy soil, barbed wire-bound yard of the WWII internment camp in Topaz, Utah. Forced to leave her home and all that is familiar to her, Mari, finds herself in a new life that is miserable. This bilingual story told in Japanese and English traces Mari’s gradual growth in strength and confidence as she adapts to the painful circumstances by finding comfort in expressing herself through art.

##### **4.1.12.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *oppression, Japanese incarceration, xenophobia, racism and problems associated with war*. Inspired by the author Amy Lee-Tai’s family’s experience and told in both Japanese and English this story highlights the arts, family and friendship as a spring of hope and strength in the midst of injustice. The mixed-media illustrations in browns, yellows and gold reinforce the story’s principal message that while not easy, with time, patience and care, hope can be inspired in even the worst of circumstances.

### 4.1.13 *Delivering Justice: W.W. Law and the Fight For Civil Rights*

#### 4.1.13.1 Book summary

This book tells the story of Westley Wallace Law (W.W.) and the effects of segregation in Savannah, Georgia. Encouraged as a young boy by his grandmother to "Grow up and be somebody," W.W. a mail carrier by profession and a fearless activist by conviction, led his community in the Great Savannah Boycott and the eventual desegregation of the city of Savannah (three years prior to the federal Civil Rights Act making all segregation illegal). The author and illustrator do a great job telling his very powerful and inspiring story (Figure 3).



Figure 3 - Boycott of Levy Department Store by returning store credit cards

#### 4.1.13.2 Social justice themes

The social justice themes present in this book were *voting rights, civil rights movement, non-violent activism, poverty and desegregation*. The dramatic, non-traditional oil-and-collage illustrations extend and interpret the impressive progress of a man who said he could never marry or have children because his work for African American civil rights was too threatening.

#### **4.1.14 *A Haitian Story of Hope: Sélvi***

##### **4.1.14.1 Book summary**

This striking story based on the lives of actual children living on the streets in Haiti introduces readers to the triumphs of children who face some of life's most difficult challenges. Selavi, the main character, is a homeless boy who is befriended by other children living on the streets in Haiti. The children help each other survive by watching out for each other and sharing food and other resources. Together they express the needs of Timoun Lari, the children who live in the streets and work collaboratively to build a shelter, and create Radyo Timoun, Children's Radio, a station run by and for children.

##### **4.1.14.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *homelessness, empathy, war, revolution and world hunger*. This attention-grabbing story and the arresting photographs of real children living on the streets work together to provide a window into present-day Haitian life for many.

#### **4.1.15 *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez***

##### **4.1.15.1 Book summary**

Written from a third person point of view, this is the story of Cesar Chavez's life from age eight to thirty-eight. Forced to migrate to California with his family at age ten after being displaced from their ranch in Arizona, Cesar must quit school to work on the farms and help support his family. The working conditions on these farms were inhumane and paid very little.



When Cesar could no longer tolerate the conditions, he organized the first National Farm Workers Association and in a non-violent protest he fought for justice.

#### **4.1.15.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *classism, unfair labor practices, change and justice through non-violent protest, immigration and unionization*. The culturally sensitive paintings along with the engaging narrative inform readers of the hardships faced by Cesar Chavez and how he overcame them to obtain the first contract in the nation for farm workers in 1965.

#### **4.1.16 *Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam***

##### **4.1.16.1 Book summary**

This picture book uses poetry to tell the story of an American soldier in Vietnam. The author, Walter Dean, takes readers on a journey into the heart and mind of a young, frightened soldier who shares the realities of war and the fear of being bombed, shot at, and even the possibility of having to kill the “enemy.” The author does a nice job of portraying how the soldier and his enemy are similar in that they have loved ones, have fears, and most likely do not really want to be participants in this war.

“There is the enemy! He is looking at me! We are surprised to see each other. Shocked. . . We stare across the distance. I know he wants me to lift my rifle, to be the enemy. I want him to lift his rifle. I want him to turn away. In a heartbeat, we have learned too much about each other.

#### **4.1.16.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice theme present in this book was *war*. The idea of war is a difficult concept for young children to grapple with and is often either glorified or censored. This book can you be used to engage young children in discourse around war and the different moods and feelings one might experience as a soldier fighting in a war.

#### **4.1.17 *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

##### **4.1.17.1 Book summary**

*Martin's Big Words* is a simple and elegant story of how one of the greatest civil rights leaders was inspired and influenced by the words of his mother, his father and southern whites to change America and the World forever. Integrating Dr. King's own quotations into her biographical portrait, Doreen Rappaport gracefully tells the story of Dr. King's life and lets young readers know that his big words (FREEDOM, PEACE, LOVE, TOGETHER, I HAVE A DREAM) are alive for us today.

##### **4.1.17.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice themes present in this book were *civil rights, racism, and non-violent activism*. The large collage illustrations motivated by stained glass window colors shimmer on each page throughout the book. An added bonus for teachers and students is the timeline and resource list appended at the end of the story.

## 4.1.18 *The Composition*

### 4.1.18.1 Book summary

Pedro, the main character in *The Composition*, is a nine-year-old boy who lives with his mother and father and loves playing soccer. One day, while playing soccer, Pedro witnesses his friend Daniel's father, the owner of the local grocery store, being taken away by soldiers. When he asks his parents why this has happened, he discovers that Daniel's father, as well as his own parents, are against the government dictatorship. When a man in uniform named Captain Romo comes to Pedro's classroom and asks all the students to write a composition as part of a contest called "What my Family Does at Night," Pedro is forced to understand what's happening around him and answer for himself the important question "can a child be against the dictatorship."

"Are you against the dictatorship?" Juan looked up to see where the captain was and leaned towards Pedro. "Of course, stupid." Pedro moved away and winked, smiling. Then, pretending to write, he said, "But you're a child."

### 4.1.18.2 Social justice themes

The social justice themes present in this book were *living under dictatorship and young people as activist*. The Chilean author Skarmeta prompts readers to think about an important question: When can a child begin to understand the secrecy needed to survive in a dictatorship? This can be extrapolated to another idea that prompts the question: When can a child begin to engage in discourse around social justice issues. *The composition* is a text that can be used to engage students in conversations around issues related to freedom, moral choices, personal responsibility,

#### **4.1.19 Molly Bannaky**

##### **4.1.19.1 Book summary**

Molly Walsh was a servant girl in England. When she spills her Lord's milk she is accused of stealing and is sentenced in a court of law. The typical punishment is death at the gallows but because she could read the Bible, she is exiled from her country and sentenced as an indentured servant to the colonies. Molly worked as an indentured servant for seven years and once she received her freedom, she bought a slave, Banneker, to help her work her land. Molly and Banneker fall in love and marry. They had four daughters and in time Molly had a grandson. Molly wrote the name of her grandson, Benjamin Banneker in her bible and taught him to read and write. Through the telling of Molly's story, students learn about the life of an interracial couple.

##### **4.1.19.2 Social justice themes**

The social justice issues present in this book were *sexism, racism, access to education, indentured servitude and slavery*. The richly detailed watercolor illustrations combine with the historical text to tell a story of a white dairymaid from England who is almost executed for accidentally spilling her Lord's milk. Readers discover in the unexpected ending that Molly Bannaky is the grandmother of Benjamin Banneker, a renowned African American mathematician and astronomer.

## 4.2 RACE AND GENDER OF PROTAGONIST

In order to answer the research question pertaining to the race and gender of the protagonist, the readers categorized each book to determine if the protagonist was a female or a person of color (Table 1). Fifteen out of the nineteen picture books analyzed had a person of color as the protagonist and twelve of the nineteen books had a female as the protagonist.

**Table 1.** Protagonist of color or female

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Person of Color as Protagonist</b>	<b>Female Protagonist</b>
Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and her family's fight for desegregation	Hispanic	<b>F</b>
Whispering Town		<b>F</b>
Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Maker's Strike of 1909		<b>F</b>
Razia's Ray of Hope: One Girl's Dream of an Education	Asian	<b>F</b>
Each Kindness	Black	<b>F</b>
Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Workers	Hispanic	<b>F</b>
The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families	Asian	
Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty		<b>F</b>
Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan	Middle Eastern (Arab)	<b>F</b>
Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai	African	<b>F</b>
The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom	Black	<b>F</b>
A Place Where Sunflowers Grow	Asian	<b>F</b>
Delivering Justice: W.W. Law and the Fight for Civil Rights	Black	
Selavi, That is Life: A Haitian Story of Hope	Black	
Harvesting Hope: The story of Cesar Chavez	Hispanic	
Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam	Black	
Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	Black	
Composition	Hispanic	
Molly Bannaky		<b>F</b>

### 4.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This inquiry was designed to answer two research questions:

- What are the specific social justice themes conveyed through visual illustrations and written text in selected books?
- Out of the selected books, how often is a person of color (Black, Asian, Native American Latino/a) or a female portrayed as the protagonist?

Table 2 depicts the categories of social justice themes that emerged from the analyzed books. Additionally, the table includes the rate of occurrence for each theme in the nineteen books that were analyzed. And, while an underrepresentation of female characters have been documented in children’s picture books in the past, (Hamilton et al., 2006; Taylor, 2003; Weitzman et al., 1972), in this current study there is a higher representation of female characters as the protagonist (Table 1).

**Table 2.** Categories of themes and rates of occurrences

Theme	Rates of Occurrence
Global Environment	5%
Bullying	5%
Desegregation	5%
Child Labor	5%
Indentured Servitude	5%
Homelessness	5%
Slavery	10%
Voting Rights	10%
World Hunger	10%
Dictatorship	10%
Classism	10%
Feminism	15%
Political Resistance	15%
Women’s Rights	15%
Classism	20%
Sexism	20%
Access to Education	21%
Racism	63%
Human Dignity	68%
Non-violent Activism	73%
Civil Rights	78%

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The social justice themes contained in the books analyzed in this study have the potential of being the tool that teachers of elementary aged students can use to assist their students in becoming critical caring citizens. By examining the books from a critical literacy perspective, topics such as the civil rights movement, women's rights, poverty, migrant workers' issues, voting rights, sexism, bullying and child labor can be introduced in an age appropriate manner to create space for discussions about social justice and equity in the primary grades.

For example, the power of education and resistance are themes that stand out in *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan*. Challenged in Duval County Florida public schools by a group of parents who believe this book promotes a religion other than Christianity and is too violent for young children, students can be invited to examine the text and related issues from multiple perspectives (Greene, 1978). Prompting young students to ask questions such as: What does the author want us to know? What different interpretations are possible? What view of the world is the text presenting (Ciardiello, 2004)? How is power used and what effect does power have on others? Young readers can explore the themes of resistance, sexism, social injustice and access to education.

It is notable that twenty percent of the books examined lend themselves to exploring themes like the ones mentioned above in *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan*. In fact, the nineteen books examined offer more than one access point for critical

literacy discussions and frequently interconnected more than one subject related to social justice. For instance, *Razia's Ray of Hope: One Girl's Dream of an Education* contains many of the same social justice themes in *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan*. Both books are set in Afghanistan and the protagonist in both books is a young girl who has to overcome an obstacle in order to gain access to an education. However, the obstacle that each girl must overcome to attend school is very different. *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* also contains some of the same themes as the books mentioned above. However, it also contains the social justice theme of bullying. Students will be able to identify with the main character through this context and may find parallels to their own life or someone close to them.

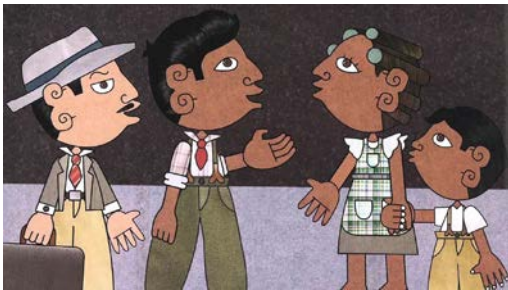


Figure 4 - Mixtec Codices



Figure 5 - Folk-Like Flat Appearance

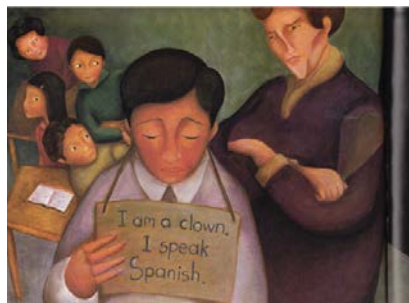
Supporting students' interrogation of literature does not only involve examining the print text, it is also important that students scrutinize the illustrations. Duncan Tonatiuh's (the author of *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*) artwork is inspired by Pre-Columbian art specifically by Mixtec codices from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and that is why it is very geometric (Figure 4).

On the other hand, Jeanette Winter (author of *Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan*) has a characteristic painting style that is simple and more folk-like. Her art contains little shading or depth giving her illustration a flat appearance (Figure 5) rather than a



realistic one. Students can discuss in what way the illustrations influence their perspective and how the authors and illustrators work together by answering the following questions: What is going on in this picture? What is the illustrator's purpose? How does the illustration make you feel? What emotions do you think the illustrator wants people to feel? As our world continues to become more visually complex, it is vital that students think critically not only about what they read, but also about what they see.

As classrooms become more diverse, the need for educators to recognize social barriers created by race, gender equity, poverty and the like increases. These social barriers can stunt the development of student democratic citizenship. Thus it is significant that themes pertaining to human dignity, civil rights and racism comprise the largest percentage in the books analyzed. It is important for students to understand that while the United States is often seen as a melting pot of different cultures, races and religions, the experiences of marginalized groups of people remind us how negative stereotypes can be used to justify discrimination and oppression resulting in social barriers. For instance, *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* provides students with a glimpse of the enculturation difficulties that many immigrants experienced. Chavez's family moved a lot in order to find jobs resulting in him attending 27 different schools before he reached eighth grade. Chavez's inconsistent attendance of school became a barrier to his acquiring the English language. This in turn resulted in him being isolated and tormented (Figure 6).



**Figure 6 - Tormenting Cesar**

Similarly, it is important for students to engage in critical discourse to develop an understanding of how the language of power benefits dominant voices. According to Freire (1970) when students learn to interrogate the language of texts that are manipulated by the social, cultural, political and historical forces that function as interconnected practices through dominant discourse, they can strip away the oppressive forces that surround their lives. For example, *Molly Bannaky* can be used to help students examine the themes of slavery, sexism, indentured servitude, racism and human dignity. Asking questions such as whose voices are heard, whose voices are missing, why the author chose to favor or reject some characters and how might the story change if told from another character's perspective can provide students the opportunity to discover their own voice. A list of recommended critical literacy questions for each book is located in Appendix C and a list of generic critical literacy questions is located in Appendix D.

Equally important, out of the nineteen picture books analyzed, there were no books that captured the voice of Native Americans. Giving voice to the indigenous people of this country through the use of picture books with social justice themes that feature Native Americans as the protagonist is necessary to help students challenge the stereotypes that exist in media, literature and the minds of many. It is also important to note that the books analyzed for this study were a small sampling spanning from the years 2000 – 2015. It is quite possible that there are other winners of the Jane Addams' Children's Book Award, from different years, that capture the voice of Native Americans.

Given these points, it is valid for teachers to pull different themes at different times from the books that they read-aloud in their classrooms depending on the needs of their students. Themes like perspectives can change. As we change, what resonates with us changes also. It is

hoped that this inquiry will inspire teachers in the primary grades to utilize picture books with social justice themes that include protagonist of color and female protagonist.

## **5.1 IMPLICATIONS**

There is no doubt that social justice is an important educational issue for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, there is often a belief that primary aged students are not developmentally ready to grapple with themes of social justice as they relate to power, race, gender and culture. Yet, children at very young ages adopt messages about power and privilege with regard to race, gender, ethnicity, class, language and sexual orientation. These messages are then perpetuated through their play and talk both at home and in school (Ryan & Grieshaber 2004). While parents play a huge role in shaping their child's beliefs on these matters; strong, subtle and repeated messages in school also influence what children believe is valued. The consequences of these messages are huge for students and for a society striving for equality and justice for all. As classrooms become increasingly more diverse culturally, ethnically and linguistically, it will be imperative that teachers have the skills and tools to teach for social justice in order to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of students from marginalized groups and non-traditional homes (children of color, children from gay and lesbian families, children from immigrant families). Thoughtfully chosen, high quality literature can play a powerful role in this regard.

The findings of this study can be used to support teachers desiring to incorporate texts with social justice themes into their classroom. This study illuminates the range of important social justice themes that can be teased from one set of books, the recently published Jane Addams awardees. Additionally, this study offers a model of analysis that educators can use

with their students so that they can develop their own critical literacy skills and then apply them to a diverse array of texts. Exploring texts that construct our worlds in new ways has the potential to help teachers and students develop the skills necessary to interrogate texts, scrutinize multiple perspectives, question issues of power and inequity, recognize societal obstacles and construct their own ideologies and world-views.

## **5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH**

While my study will add to the body of literature that can help practitioners who desire to equip their students with resources and skills to support their social, emotional and academic growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the potential of incorporating text with social justice themes in kindergarten through third grade classrooms still remains largely untapped. Future research could include conducting an investigation using the method of participatory action research as a collaborative process with kindergarten, first and second graders utilizing the books analyzed in this present inquiry or other Jane Addams Children's Book Award winners. Utilizing the texts as read-alouds, teachers can work together across grade levels to heighten awareness of and sensitivity to social justice issues related to race, socio-economic status, bullying, gender issues and human dignity in order to create more inclusive classroom communities.

Additionally, future work can also include deep analysis of books with social justice themes including ones whose voices were not represented in the books in this present study. Teaching with literature is political and the books that we offer children can have an impact on them and their worlds. Thus, deeply analyzing the themes to determine the voices of different ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic groups could contribute to the body of literature to

help educators wishing to incorporate picture books that reflect multiple ideologies that match diverse student populations.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, social justice is an important educational issue for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, there are parents and educators who believe that primary students are not emotionally ready to grapple with the themes present in the books presented in this inquiry. Yet, children at very young ages adopt messages about power and privilege with regard to race, gender, ethnicity, class, and language. These messages are then perpetuated through their play and talk both at home and in school (Ryan & Grieshaber 2004). While parents play a huge role in shaping their child's beliefs on these matters; strong, subtle and repeated messages in school also influence what children believe is valued. The consequences of these messages are huge for students and for a society striving for equality and justice for all. Exposing children to quality literature and curricula that reflects a range of diversity and allowing them to critically discuss what they see or do not see can increase their awareness and understanding of our pluralistic society (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013; Landt, 2013).

According to Dewey,

“A society with too few independent thinkers is vulnerable to control by disturbed and opportunistic leaders. A society which wants to create and maintain a free and democratic social system must create responsible independence of thought among its young.”

Teaching students to be critical consumers of texts can help them develop an understanding of the sociocultural influences in their lives and realize their role in society and the role of others

around them. The books in this inquiry offer intense and compelling stories that invite students and teachers to think critically and humanely about injustice and conflict. Although the text on their own cannot change reality, they can spur feelings and construct openings for the reader to visualize their lives and the lives of others differently.

## 6.0 EPILOGUE

This dissertation opened with a vignette from my own primary classroom, one in which my students and I were discussing Andrea Davis Pinkney’s book, *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*, which recounts a crucial moment in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. In February 1960, four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (A&T) walked into a Greensboro, North Carolina Woolworth and sat down at its “whites only” lunch counter. Everyday for the next six months, black students returned to the lunch counter and over time their numbers largely increased. The “sit-in” (Figure 7 picture book version) was central to the struggle for black civil rights and soon ignited similar nonviolent protests across the South. This is just one example of how student activist have organized efforts to tackle inequalities and systemic factors that worked against them.

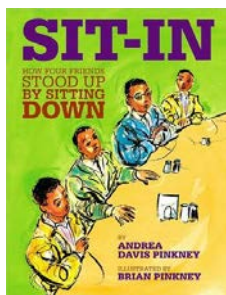


Figure 7 - Picture Book for Primary

There have been incidents where even younger students of color have organized efforts to make a statement against inequalities. In October 1963 one of the largest and most overlooked civil rights actions in the 1960s took place when 250,000 students staged a one-day boycott. The

next year (1964) 450,000 Black and Puerto Rican students protested de facto segregation in New York City's public schools almost 10 years after *Brown v Board of Education* struck down segregated schools.

More than 50 years later movements like Black Lives Matters have ignited students of all ages to activate their combined strength for equity as it relates to race, culture, socio-economic status and gender in the classroom and in their communities. The urgency to create equity in school communities has never been greater, especially in light of the current political climate when code words are used to disguise racism and inequities in public and private schools. In order for students to be critical, analytic thinkers, teachers have to encourage, support and extend their awareness of social and political issues in the classroom (Allen, 1997). For this to happen, teachers have to first examine their own politics of location with respect to their power, social class, access and privilege and how these could be in conflict with the frameworks of their students (Delpit, 1988). Using picture books with themes of social justice can teach even the youngest members of our society to be advocates for justice.



## APPENDIX A

### BLANK DATA COLLECTION SHEET

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Gender of Main Character</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Main Character</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Powerful Quotes</b>

## APPENDIX B

### COLLECTIVE DATA COLLECTION SHEETS

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Gender of Main Character</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Main Character</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Powerful Quotes</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2015</b></p> <p>1. <b>Separate is Never Equal:</b> Sylvia Mendez and her family's fight for desegregation</p> <p>Author: Duncan Tonatiuh</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>Mexican</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Equal Rights</li> <li>➤ Civil Rights</li> <li>➤ Desegregation</li> </ul>	Illustrations are unique (not authentic but not disrespectful)	"Cuando la causa es justa, los demas te siguen." "When you fight for justice, others will follow."
<p>2. <b>Whispering Town</b></p> <p>Author: Jennifer Elvgren</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>Danish/White</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Nonviolent activism</li> <li>➤ Living under dictatorship</li> </ul>	Female heroin	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2014</b></p> <p>3. <b>Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Maker's Strike of 1909</b></p> <p>Author: Michelle Markel</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>Jewish</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ immigration</li> <li>➤ child labor</li> <li>➤ feminism</li> <li>➤ sexism</li> </ul>	<p>Largest walkout of women workers in U.S. History</p> <p>Courage</p> <p>Perseverance</p>	<p>"If she can do it, we can do it too."</p> <p>"Stand fast, girls!"</p> <p>"Unity is strength"</p> <p>"The bravest hearts may beat in girls only five feet tall."</p>
<p>4. <b>Razia's Ray of Hope: One Girl's Dream of an Education</b></p> <p>Author: Elizabeth Suneby</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ women's rights</li> <li>➤ sexism</li> </ul>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2013</b></p> <p>5. <b>Each Kindness</b></p> <p>Author: Jacqueline Woodson</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>African American</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Classism</li> </ul>	Empathy	"Each little thing we do goes out, like a ripple, into the world."

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Gender of Main Character</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Main Character</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Powerful Quotes</b>
6. Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Workers)  Author: Sarah Warren	<b>F</b>	<b>Latina</b>	➤ Classism		
<b>2012</b> 7. The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families  Author: Susan L. Roth	<b>M</b>	<b>Japanese American</b>	➤ Global Environment ➤ Access to education	Sustainable Farming	
<b>2011</b> 8. Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty  Author: Linda Glaser	<b>F</b>	<b>White American Jewish</b>	➤ Immigration ➤ Poverty ➤ Classism	Humanitarian	"Give me your tired, Your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest- tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Gender of Main Character</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Main Character</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Powerful Quotes</b>
<p><b>2010</b> 9. Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan</p> <p>Author: Jeanette Winter</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>Middle Eastern (Arab)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Education for women</li> <li>➤ Equal rights in education</li> <li>➤ Gender equality</li> </ul>	The power of literacy	"Nasreen no longer felt alone. The knowledge she holds inside will always be with her, like a good friend." "But the soldiers can never close the windows that have opened for my granddaughter."
<p><b>2009</b> 10. Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai</p> <p>Author: Claire A. Nivola</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>African (Kenya)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Slavery</li> <li>➤ Freedom</li> <li>➤ Education</li> </ul>	Self-advocacy Environmentalism	
<p><b>2008</b> 11. The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom</p> <p>Publisher: Calkins Creek</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>African American</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Slavery</li> <li>➤ Freedom</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2007</b> 12. A Place Where Sunflowers Grow</p> <p>Author: Amy Lee-Tai</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>Japanese American</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Racial prejudice</li> <li>➤ Internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II</li> </ul>		

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Gender of Main Character</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Main Character</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Powerful Quotes</b>
<p><b>2006</b> 13. Delivering Justice: W.W. Law and the Fight for Civil Rights</p> <p>Author: Jim Haskins</p>	<b>M</b>	<b>Black/African American</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Non-Violent Activism</li> <li>➤ Civil Rights</li> <li>➤ Voting rights</li> </ul>		"Grow up and be somebody"
<p><b>2005</b> 14. Selavi, That is Life: A Haitian Story of Hope</p> <p>Author: Youme Landowne</p>	<b>M</b>	<b>Haitian</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Non-Violent Activism</li> <li>➤ Homelessness</li> <li>➤ Poverty</li> <li>➤ Hunger</li> </ul>	Impacts of war on children	
<p><b>2004</b> 15. Harvesting Hope: The story of Cesar Chavez</p> <p>Author: Kathleen Krull</p>	<b>M</b>	<b>Latino American</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Civil rights for Mexican American farm workers</li> <li>➤ Dignity of human people</li> <li>➤ Political and economic rights</li> </ul>	American labor leader Civil rights activist First contract for farm workers in American history	... he told everyone truth was a better weapon than violence. "Nonviolence," he said, "takes more guts." It meant using imagination to find ways to overcome powerlessness.

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Gender of Main Character</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity of Main Character</b>	<b>Social Justice Theme</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Powerful Quotes</b>
<p><b>2003</b> 16. Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam</p> <p>Author: Walter Dean Myers</p>	<b>M</b>	<b>Black</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Human dignity</li> </ul>	Vietnam War	
<p><b>2002</b> 17. Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.</p> <p>Author: Doreen Rappaport</p>	<b>M</b>	<b>Black</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Non violent activism</li> <li>➤ Civil Rights</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2001</b> 18. The Composition</p> <p>Author: Antonio Skarmeta</p>	<b>M</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Communism</li> <li>➤ Political resistance</li> </ul>		<p>"Are you against the dictatorship?" Juan looked up to see where the Captain was and leaned toward Pedro, "of course, stupid."</p>
<p><b>2000</b> 19. Molly Bannaky</p> <p>Author: Alice McGill</p>	<b>F</b>	<b>White (American)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Gender roles</li> <li>➤ Indentured servitude</li> <li>➤ Power of literacy</li> </ul>	Benjamin Bannaker revealed as Molly Bannaky's grandson	

## APPENDIX C

### RECOMMENDED CRITICAL LITERACY QUESTIONS FOR EACH BOOK

#### *Separate is Never Equal*

Write the words “equality,” “segregation,” and “justice” on three separate large pieces of butcher paper. Read the first word (equality). Ask students, “What do you think about when you hear this word?” “What pictures come to mind?” “What does the author want the reader to feel?” Have students pair-share, then, ask for volunteers to share their thoughts and record responses under the appropriate word. Repeat for each word. “How can we use the information in the book to promote equity in our classroom?”

#### *The Whispering Town*

“How does the illustrator use eyebrows and bags (Figures 8 and 9) to show the emotions of the characters?” “What does the illustrator want the reader to think?” “Who perspective is missing from the text or illustrations?”

**Figure 8 - The Nazi soldiers' eyebrows right above their eyes in straight lines make them look aggressive and threatening (B)**



**Figure 9 - The Dane's high eyebrows give the appearance of worry (A)**

### ***Brave Girl***

What does the author want you to believe about Clara Lemlich? Give examples from the story of how the author tries to get you to believe this? Record responses. Show students [Sara Bareilles's music video](#) for her song “Brave” and engage students in a lyric/video/text analysis. Consider how the lyrics speak to what it means to be brave especially Bareilles’ call to “show how big your brave is.” What does Sara Bareille want viewers to think about bravery? How is her idea about bravery different from the author of *Brave Girl*? Have students write or illustrate a time in their lives when bravery was needed in school or in their community.

### ***Razia's Ray of Hope***

An author’s purpose for writing a book is either to **P**ersuade, **I**nform or **E**ntertain. Ask students to share what they believe Elizabeth Suneby’s purpose was for writing *Razia's Ray of Hope*. Tell students they have to offer examples from the book to support their answer. How does the author want us to feel about Razia? How might the story be different if it were told from the perspective of Razia’s brother?

### ***Each Kindness***

Before you begin the read aloud, ask students if they can tell what the story will be about based on the title and picture on the cover. During the reading, ask students what they would do if Maya wanted to play with them and Chloe was their friend and discouraging them from playing with Maya. After the reading, ask students how they felt while listening to the story, from whose perspective is the story being told, what would Maya say if the story was being told from her perspective, what message do they think the author is trying to convey?



### ***Dolores Heurta***

Before reading the story ask students to examine the cover and then turn and talk to a neighbor to share their prediction of what the story will be about. After reading a few pages ask student based on what has been read thus far, why they think the illustrator chose the cover image. Read a few more pages and then ask students who is telling the story. At the end of the story ask students what messages do they think the author wants to convey, whose voices are missing and how might the story be different if told from a different perspective. Photo copy the pictures from the book. Have students work in pairs to create thought bubbles of what the characters on the page might say if they were telling the story from their perspective.

### ***The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families***

Before reading the story find the country of Eritrea on a globe and share with the students that the village of Hargigo is one of the hottest places in the world. Ask students why it might be challenging to live in a place that is very hot and has little water. Read the second page of the book without showing the pictures

“The land in Hargigo is dry and dusty. There is very little rain It was hard for leafy plants to grow, and the sheep and goats that eat leaves did not have enough food. Then a scientist had an idea to plant mangrove trees by the shore of the salty Red Sea so the animals could eat the fat green leaves of the trees.”

Ask the students to try and visualize how the illustrator might have illustrated the picture to match the words. Ask students to draw their interpretation of what you just read. After reading this book ask students; “Why do you think the author wrote this book?” “Is there anything that is needed in our school community or the communities where we live?” “How can we as a class help to fill that need?”

*Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty*

Ask students what does the author want readers to feel about the Statue of Liberty? Ask students whose voice is missing from the story? Ask students how someone who does not speak or read English or know our customs might feel about the poem? Ask students how being new to a neighborhood or school can feel similar to being an immigrant. Have students work in groups of two to create an illustration that could be given to a new student that would welcome them to their school community even if they did not speak or read English.

*Nasreen's Secret School*

Explain to students how the author and illustrator have to work together to create meaning in a picture book. Have students work in pairs and give each pair a page from the book (Figures 10 & 11) instructing them to use their page to answer the following question: How does the written text and illustration work together? What if any information is only given in the text, what if any information is only given in the illustration? If you could ask the author or illustrator one question what would it be?



**Figure 10 - Written text and illustrations work together**



**Figure 11 - Written text and illustrations work together**

### ***Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai***

After reading the book, discuss the following quotes from the book with students.

- What do you think the author mean when she writes, “When the soil is exposed, Wangari tells us, “it is crying out for help, it is naked and needs to be clothed in its dress. That is the nature of the land. It needs color, it needs its cloth of green.”
- What does the author want the reader to think when she writes “When we see that we are part of the problem,” she said, “we can become part of the solution.”
- Think of a problem in our school or your neighborhood. What can you do to help solve the problem?

### ***The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington’s Slave Finds Freedom***

Engage students in a conversation about what the author and illustrator think they already know about slavery? Then, ask students what they found difficult about the text? Have students illustrate the emotions they experienced at the beginning, middle and end of the story. Whose perspective is this story told from? How does that impact the story?

### ***A Place Where Sunflowers Grow***

Have students share their thoughts about the cover and title by asking them what they think the book is about based on the title and illustration. Ask students based on the cover where do they think the story takes place. Take students on a picture walk before reading the story and ask what they notice about the text. Ask students why they think the author chose to write the story in both English and Japanese. Have students tell the story based on the pictures and then read the text. Ask students do the pictures support the text. Have students support their answer. After reading the story discuss how the author uses descriptive language that may not be easy to understand. Work with students to interpret the meaning of the following:

- “seeing the little seedlings was like seeing old friends again” (p.3)
- “passing through the mess hall doorway was like turning up the volume on a radio.”(p.12)

- “she glared at the sand like the hot May sun” (p.5)

***Delivering Justice: W.W. Law and the Fight For Civil Rights***

Explain to students how specific facets of a text’s pictures contribute to creating the mood of the story, emphasizing aspects of a character or emphasizing aspects of the setting. Ask students how do the illustrations that Benny Andrews created help them better understand the story? Why do you think the author thought this was an important story to tell?

***A Haitian Story of Hope: Sélvi***

Have students engage in text-to-text, text to self and text to world discussions by asking the following questions:

Text-to-self

- What is similar to my life?
- What is different from my life?
- What were my feelings while listening to the story?

Text-to-text

- Does this story remind me of any other stories we have read?

Text-to-world

- How does this story relate to the world around me?
- How is this story similar or different to things happening in the world?

***Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez***

Ask students’ to explain the author’s message and to use specific information from the book to support their responses. Ask students how does the author present the use of power in this text and what effect does power have on others?

***Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam***

To help students begin to understand how point of view shapes the content and style of a story ask them how do they think the American soldier feels about being in Vietnam fighting the war. How does his enemy feel? How might the story be different if it were told from the perspective of the enemy?

*Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Help students make connections to the story by asking the following questions:

- How does this story connect to you?
- Have you ever felt the same ways Dr. King felt during the story?
- Have you ever seen something you thought was unfair?
- Are there other ways this story connects or compares to your world today?
- How does this story connect or compare to another book you've read?
- Can you think of another character in a book, movie, or TV show with a leader like Dr. King?
- Does the artwork remind you of anything else you've seen before?

*The Composition*

Help students think deeply about this text to understand the author's message and explore why they wrote about this topic by asking the following questions:

- Why do you think the author wrote this book?
- From whose perspective is the text written?
- Are any voices missing?
- What does the author want us to know?

*Molly Bannaky*

Before reading Molly Bannaky do a **see, think & wonder** exercise with the students. Show them the cover and ask them what do they **see**, then ask them what do they **think** about what they see and finally ask them what do they **wonder** based on what they see. After reading *Molly Bannaky*, ask students why do they think the author chose to make Molly Bannaky so prominent in this text? Ask students what they think Benjamin Banneker would say if he had a voice in this text? Finally, ask students what do they think the author wants them to believe after reading this book?

## APPENDIX D

### RECOMMENDED GENERIC CRITICAL LITERACY QUESTIONS

- Who is talking?
- Who is not talking?
- If someone else were to tell this story, what would they say? How do you know?
- How would you tell this story?
- What does the author think we already know or understand? How do you know?
- What does the illustrator think we already know or understand? How do you know?
- What have we learned about ourselves? About the world?
- Whose voice(s) is/are heard in the text?
- Whose voice(s) is/are not heard? Why not?
- What did you find challenging about this text? Why?
- What might other people find challenging? Why?
- Do I agree with this text?
- How is this text changing the way I think?
- What actions do I need to take?

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