

Cultural Diversity in Learning and Learners

Common Understandings

Multicultural education recognizes that all children enrich the culture of the classroom through the diversity of their many origins, beliefs, values, and first languages. As such, the primary program affirms the cultural pluralism which is the essence of American society.

Children have stories, songs, dances, art traditions, celebrations, beliefs, and values that are unique to their culture and experience. The teacher makes use of opportunities to integrate this rich cultural diversity into the curriculum and weave it into the fabric of everyday school life to achieve the goals of empathy, respect, and understanding that characterize cultural pluralism. Children and teachers explore ways to find common understandings and similarities among cultures and ways to celebrate differences between cultures. In this way, all children are invited into the culture and the curriculum of the school. An education which sustains and teaches to these ideals and values is a multicultural education.

A sound multicultural education model manifests an acceptance of and respect for all cultures in our pluralistic society. It fosters positive self-regard in one's own culture and positive attitudes toward the culture of others. While exploring similarities and differences among cultures, it develops an understanding and appreciation of one's own cultural heritage as well as that of other cultures. It fosters the ability to function harmoniously and productively in a multicultural society.

The principles of multicultural education promote close working relationships among the school, home, and community in order to provide consistent expectations and mutual support. The use of positive role models from the community is an integral and valuable component for promoting multicultural education in the schools. It is important to note the diversity of cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and races of children in schools. The growing diversity of our nation's educational

Multiculturalism is a layered concept that includes not only the experiences of particular individuals and groups but also their shared interests and relationships, which in turn are embedded into the interconnectedness of all peoples of the world.

Pugh & Garcia, 1992



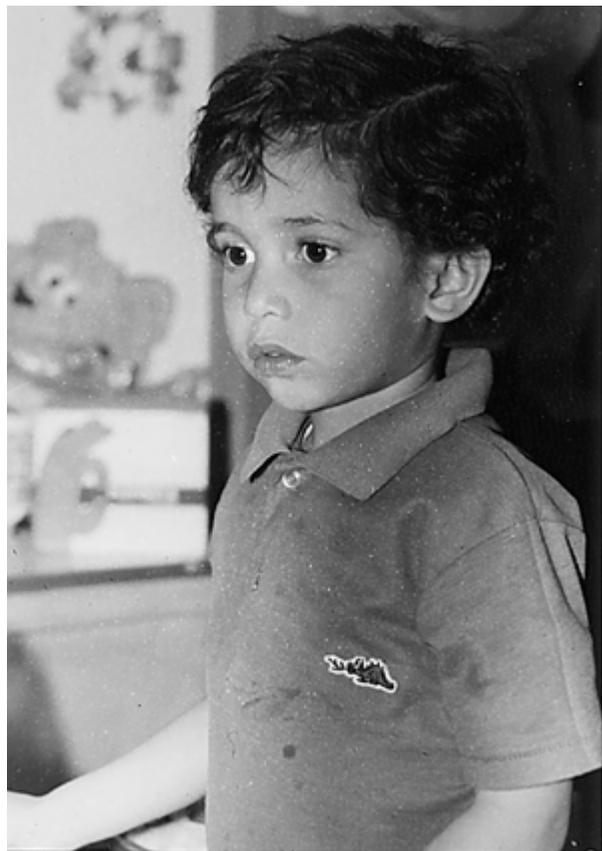
community provides educators with opportunities and challenges to provide an enabling environment and appropriate educational experiences.

The process of planning and implementing an appropriate educational program must include considerations of the child's identity, learning style, and needs as well as family priorities and concerns. Teachers and support staff will find it challenging to implement assessment procedures and instructional practices that accommodate the diversity of children in their program.

It is the responsibility of the teacher and the educational team supporting the classroom to offer a learning environment that respects and is sensitive to the experiences, values, and attributes of a child representing any cultural, racial, or ethnic group. It is the role of the team to recognize the child's strengths and be aware of any unique needs that may develop.

In some situations, a child may need accommodations in the learning environment and additional support to be successful in school. A student assistance team may be a valuable resource to access information, assess strengths and needs, and to design accommodations to assist the child and provide support to the teacher.

The building team may need suggestions and resources that are specific to the child and the unique needs of his or her racial or ethnic group. Resources and contacts available to the school district or family are listed at the end of this section.



Planning for a Multicultural Curriculum

Daily curriculum emerges from three sources:

- Children's behavior
- Teachers' awareness of children's developmental needs and learning styles
- Societal events (Derman-Sparks, 1992)

Activities within the curriculum emerge from exploring physical and cultural similarities and differences in the context of the child's family life. These explorations might begin with children's questions and comments as they express curiosity.

The goals of a multicultural curriculum for young children should foster in each child:

- Construction of a confident and knowledgeable self-identity
- Empathetic interaction with diversity
- Critical thinking about bias
- Ability to stand up for one's self and for others in the face of bias.

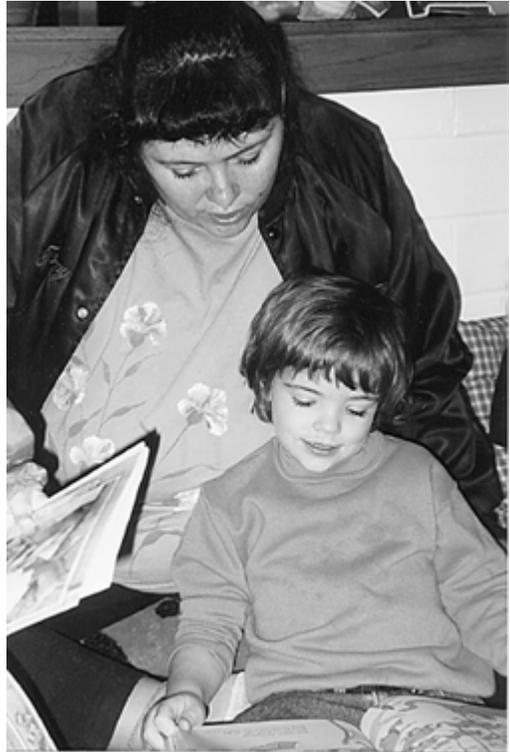


For the curriculum to be developmentally appropriate, it must be individually and culturally appropriate to each child. Therefore, the children, their families, society, and teachers provide important sources for an anti-bias, multicultural curriculum (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). Further, learning about diversity must be integrated into all aspects of the program.

One way to identify possibilities within a particular curriculum topic is to brainstorm multicultural issues that emerge from a traditional topic such as “families” or an ongoing theme such as “our environment.” The developmental expectations at the end of this section are a tool for evaluating the age appropriateness of the content. The teacher must also consider whether the content is meaningful to the particular group of children.

When planning for a multicultural curriculum:

- Form a study group; do background reading and discussion
- Involve parents and administrators in planning and developing activities
- Become involved with and supportive of families
- Make extensive use of all cultures throughout the curriculum, including methods of instruction, materials, and instructors. Curriculum materials should reflect the cultures of the learners and should be developed in concert with local communities. Materials and content which reflect all cultures need to be embedded in the curriculum and integrated across content areas. Sharing information about traditional values, using local crafts people in the classroom, and inviting the elders to share their stories and personal experiences are appropriate ways of establishing communication and honoring the local communities.
- Provide a range of instructional strategies which build on the strengths of the child
- Place a major focus on success for all children; self-esteem is developed when children experience success
- Provide learning experiences for teachers about the cultures of children in their classrooms
- Emphasize the development of good communication skills in an enriched environment through play, story telling, discussion, and role playing
- Begin by talking about differences children notice
- Reflect the cultures of children through the use of photographs, art work, language, and models of the cultures represented
- Evaluate materials for cultural biases in instruction and assessment
- Take advantage of the richness of having many cultures represented in the classroom.



In addition to meeting the educational needs of individual children with unique attributes and backgrounds, educators are also responsible for providing every child with an anti-bias, multicultural education. Children develop biases through messages they hear and see in society. An anti-bias curriculum offers goals to enable every child to construct a confident identity; to develop comfortable, empathetic and just interaction with diversity; and to develop skills for standing up for one's self in the face of injustice (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Goals and Developmental Expectations of Anti-bias, Multicultural Curriculum for Young Children

GOAL 1: To foster each child’s construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-identity.

Includes both personal and group identity, for many children a bicultural identity: fosters confidence, not superiority.

2 & 3-year-olds	4-year olds	5-year olds	6-year olds	7 & 8-year olds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are intrigued with their physical characteristics, including gender; anatomy; skin, eye color, hair color and texture; and physical ableness. ▪ See themselves as single, unique individuals; for example, 3’s typically consider their name as a part of themselves and are puzzled when another child has the same name as theirs. They also consider skin color, gender, anatomy, and other characteristics as part of their individuality. ▪ Begin naming their gender identity but are not yet clear which biological or social attributes determine it. ▪ Do not yet have gender or racial constancy; they think their gender identification can change by dress or play preferences and they can change their skin color and eye color. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue strong interest in their physical characteristics and what names describe them and begin constructing gender, race, and ethnic identity constancy. ▪ Begin to see themselves (including their ethnic group name) as part of their family, while still focused on themselves as individuals and not yet as members of larger groups. ▪ Are rapidly absorbing the rules of behavior and the language of their home culture, not from formal lessons but from their daily life experiences. In general, their “egocentrism” includes thinking their family’s way of life is how everyone else lives. ▪ Are vulnerable to the influence of societal norms and socially prevailing biases. Questions related to identity may reflect not only confusion about identity constancy but also awareness of negative societal messages about themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have established a rudimentary sense of gender and race identity that includes constancy. ▪ Have a heightened interest in the meaning of each component of identity in relation to other children’s ideas. ▪ Experience heightened possibilities of receiving teasing or rejection from other children based on an aspect of identity. ▪ Experience heightened possibilities of absorbing socially prevailing norms or negative stereotypes about themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have constructed a core sense of identity that includes their gender, race and ethnicity, physical ableness, and beginning awareness of class. ▪ Become increasingly interested in “hanging out” and identifying with classmates who are alike, e.g., girls with girls, boys with boys. ▪ Begin to identify themselves and their families as members of larger racial or ethnic groups. ▪ Can suffer serious damage both to self-esteem and to a positive sense of racial or ethnic group identity if they experience the impact of societal biases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are constructing or have constructed the cognitive ability of “class inclusion” that makes possible children’s understanding of how they can have many different aspects of identity and still be one person, and of how people who are not exactly the same as them can belong to the same ethnic group as they do. ▪ Begin to weave the various aspects of identity into a whole (I am a boy, Mexican- American, speak English and Spanish, like rap, am Catholic and middle-class). ▪ Demonstrate heightened interest in learning about their ethnic group in their community, city, and country, especially through oral stories, written autobiographies and biographies, although learning still must be concrete. ▪ Grapple with where they fit as individuals into their group identities—their gender, their ethnicity

This section is adapted from Derman-Sparks, L. (1992). “Reaching Potentials Through Antibias, Multicultural Curriculum.” In Bredekamp, S. and Rosegrant, T. (Eds.). *Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children*. Volume I. pp. 118-121. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. It is reprinted with permission from the publisher.

GOAL 2: To foster each child’s comfortable, empathetic interaction with diversity among people.

Includes developing the disposition as well as the knowledge to understand and appreciate similarities and differences among people, to respectfully and effectively ask and learn about differences, and to comfortably negotiate and adapt to differences.

2 & 3-year olds	4-year olds		5-year olds	6-year olds	7 & 8-year olds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notice and ask about other children’s and adult’s physical characteristics, although they are still more interested in their own. ▪ Notice other children’s specific cultural acts, e.g., Elena speaks differently from me; Mei eats with chopsticks; Jamal’s grandpa, not his mother, brings him to school. ▪ May exhibit discomfort and fears about skin color differences and physical disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are increasingly interested in how they are alike and different from other children; construct “theories” that reflect “preoperational thinking” about what causes physical and apparent cultural differences among children and adults they know, societal stereotypes, and discomforts. ▪ Although still focused on themselves and others as individuals, begin to classify people into groups by physical characteristics (same gender, same color, same eye shape) using the general classification schemes they apply to inanimate objects (for example, lack of class inclusion). ▪ Are often confused about the meaning of adult categories for what “goes together.” For example, how can a light skinned child have a dark skinned parent? Why are children called Black when their skin isn’t black? Mexican people speak Spanish; if I don’t speak Spanish, I’m not Mexican. 	<p>Girls are supposed to have girl names so how can “Sam” be a girl? How can you be an “Indian” if you aren’t wearing feathers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Begin to become aware of and interested in cultural differences as they relate to the daily lives of children and adults they know (for example, who makes up their family, who lives in their house, what languages they speak, what jobs family members do). ▪ Show influence of societal norms in their interactions with others (“Girls can’t do this; boys can.”) and learned discomforts with specific differences in their interactions with others (“You can’t play; your skin is too dark.”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate continued interest in gender, racial, ethnic, and ability differences and similarities, as well as an awareness of additional characteristics such as socioeconomic class, age, and aging. ▪ Demonstrate heightened awareness of themselves and others as members of a family and curiosity about how families of other children and teachers live. ▪ Continue to construct theories to classify or explain differences among classmates. ▪ Continue to absorb and use stereotypes to define others, and to tease or reject other children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have absorbed much of their family’s classification systems for people, but still get confused about why specific people are put into one or another category by adults. ▪ Use prevailing biases, based on aspects of identity, against other children. ▪ Are beginning to understand that others also have an ethnic identity and various life-styles as they understand their own emerging group identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrate heightened curiosity about other people’s life-styles, religion, and traditions, including people with whom they do not have direct contact. ▪ Can begin to appreciate the deeper structural aspects of a culture, e.g., beliefs about human’s relationships to the land and the impact of different historical environments on people’s lives. ▪ Understand, through new cognitive tools, that there are different ways to meet common human needs. ▪ Can begin to appreciate the past if history is presented concretely through stories about real people. ▪ May experience heightened in-group solidarity and conflict between children based on gender, race, ethnic identity, and socioeconomic class, and exclusion of children with disabilities because of interest in their own groups and because of the impact of societal biases on them.

GOAL 3: To foster each child’s critical thinking about bias.

Thinking seriously about bias means developing the cognitive skills to identify unfair and untrue images (stereotypes), comments (teasing, name calling,) and behaviors (discrimination) directed at one’s own and another’s identity—whether gender, race, ethnicity, disability, class, age, weight, or other characteristics—and the emotional empathy to know that bias hurts.

2 & 3-year-olds	4-year olds	5-year olds	6-year olds	7 & 8-year olds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are learning to be comfortable with various differences through repeated supportive experience. These experiences lay a foundation for later understanding of “fair”/“unfair” images and behaviors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can begin to use concrete experiences and verbal feedback from adults to explore the reality of their “theories” or misconceptions about human differences. ▪ Can begin to develop the foundation for critical thinking by comparing a fair and an unfair image. ▪ Can begin to learn to distinguish between a person’s action that is not positive and a person's identity. ▪ Can accept the limits of not teasing a person because of who they are and develop emotional understanding (empathy) that teasing or rejection because of identity hurts, just as hitting does. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can begin to think critically about stereotypes, comparing reality to stereotyped images and determining what is fair or unfair. ▪ Can begin engaging in critical thinking about unfair or hurtful behaviors (name calling, teasing) in specific, real situations. ▪ Can begin problem-solving, caring about ways to respond to differences. ▪ Can begin engaging in critical thinking about specific societal norms, but only on an individual basis. For example, “Some people say that a person who uses a wheelchair can’t be a teacher, but I know Martha is a teacher.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can also begin to engage in comparisons about correct and incorrect beliefs about various groups (not just individuals) by gathering and using concrete data relevant to them (for example, “Some people say men can’t be nurses or take care of children, but we have gathered evidence that says otherwise.” “Girls can’t do science, but we have learned...” “People with visual impairments can't work, but we have learned...”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have the cognitive tools to think about their own ideas and begin to understand about the influence of socially prevailing stereotypes on them, although they have absorbed and internalized many stereotypes and prejudices. ▪ Can use emerging reading and writing skills to gather data that challenges stereotypes and erroneous ideas about people based on gender, race, ethnicity, disabilities, class, or other characteristics.

Goal 4: To foster each child’s ability to stand up for herself or himself and for others in the face of bias.

Confronting bias means helping each child learn and practice a variety of ways to speak up when: (1) another child acts in a biased manner toward her or him, (2) a child acts in a biased manner toward another child, and (3) an adult acts in a biased manner. Goal 4 builds upon Goal 3: critical thinking and empathy are necessary components of acting for one’s self or for others in the face of bias.

2 & 3-year olds	4-year olds	5-year olds	6, 7, & 8-year olds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are learning acceptable ways to express their feelings when they want something or when others hurt them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage in simple problem-solving and conflict-resolution techniques for dealing with incidents of teasing or rejection directed at their own and others’ identities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problem-solve and use ways to handle specific unfair comments and behaviors that arise in their school or home lives. ▪ Gain emotional food for thought from stories about adults who have worked for social justice, especially adults they know. ▪ With adult help, create and engage in simple group actions based on a concrete, meaningful experience in their daily lives, for example, working to get a handicapped parking space at their center or school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop fair classroom behavior rules for identity issues with greater understanding, more autonomy, and more depth. ▪ Identify respectful ways to ask about cultural behaviors and ideas different from their own. ▪ Learn about people who work for social justice in their communities. ▪ Problem-solve conflict situations involving bias. ▪ Problem-solve specific group actions related to a concrete discriminatory situation in their school or immediate community.

Multicultural Classroom Environment Checklist

This checklist is designed to help teachers determine if the classroom environment and activities reflect multicultural perspectives. By using the checklist, the teacher will focus on individual aspects of the classroom environment and curriculum, highlighting areas of curriculum that need improvement. Teachers are encouraged to rate the classroom environment as it is and work on changes which make the classroom the way they would like it to be.

1. Does the classroom have a wide variety of age-appropriate and culturally diverse books and language arts materials?

Yes _____ No _____

2. Are there stories about people from each of these cultural groups in the classroom library?

_____	Native American	_____	Middle Eastern Ethnic Groups
_____	Spanish-speaking	_____	Asian Ethnic Groups
_____	Asian-American	_____	African Ethnic Groups
_____	African-American		
_____	Caucasian Ethnic Groups		

3. Do the characters in the classroom books have personalities like real people?

Yes _____ No _____

4. Are there stories about the contemporary life of a given ethnic group as well as tales and legends?

Yes _____ No _____

5. Are there pictures of people displayed in the classroom representative of a multicultural community?

Yes _____ No _____

6. Do materials and games present people in non-stereotypic ways? For example, are there examples of women in science and math careers; men in nurturing roles; Native Americans in the 90's? List examples from your classroom.

Yes _____ No _____

7. Do the people in the block accessories go beyond stereotypic roles? List some examples.

Yes _____ *No* _____

8. Is there a wide variety of clothing, including traditional and modern garments from a variety of culture groups, in the dramatic play area?

Yes _____ *No* _____

9. Are the dolls in the dramatic play area of both genders?

Yes _____ *No* _____

10. Do the dolls represent a variety of races in realistic ways?

Yes _____ *No* _____

11. Do the music experiences in the curriculum reinforce children's affirmation of cultural diversity?

Yes _____ *No* _____

12. Are finger plays, games, and songs from various cultural groups used in the classroom?

Yes _____ *No* _____

13. Do the cooking experiences in the classroom encourage children to experiment with foods other than those with which they are familiar?

Yes _____ *No* _____

14. Are the cooking experiences designed to give young children a general notion of the connections between cultural heritage and the process of preparing, cooking, and eating food? If so, how?

Yes _____ *No* _____

(Adapted from Kendall, 1983)

School-wide Diversity Checklist: Do you ...?

- Provide activities that require children to combine their energies to reach a common goal, such as group mosaics or construction projects?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Use group projects to reinforce the idea that working together is fun and productive?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Encourage children to practice taking another person's point of view?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Provide children with first-hand experiences which reflect a variety of races, cultures, and ethnic groups, for example, going to a museum in an urban center or dramatizing stories from various cultural origins?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Invite community members to share special skills related to their culture?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Have a wide variety of materials in the classroom which represent many backgrounds and cultures? (See Multicultural Classroom Environment list.)
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Use songs and games from various cultures:
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Send general messages that there are many ways to do similar tasks and sometimes these ways are influenced by where we come from?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Talk to parents about multicultural education?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Incorporate multiple perspectives when discussing events or investigating new topics?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Engage in activities which demonstrate both cultural diversity and human similarities? For example, we all use language even though there are many languages. (Learn some phrases in several languages.)
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Take walks in the community and talk about the many roles and services people provide?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Talk about how we need all of the people to make the community work?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Demonstrate interdependence through engaging children in activities which require individual contributions to a whole?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Encourage the equitable distribution of leadership opportunities and positions within the school?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Work to have all cultures represented in the school system?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Support networks for antiracism within the school?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Serve on personnel committees that hire staff?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Advocate for quality child care for all children?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Work with organizations to increase local, state, and federal resources for immunization programs, child care programs, and other social services?
Yes ___ *No* ___
- Seek resources from which to obtain multicultural materials as well as information about specific cultures or about groups doing antiracism work?
Yes ___ *No* ___

Checklist for Racism in Children’s Literature

YES NO

- Are illustrations true to the people depicted, or are they caricatures or stereotypes?
- Do illustration of regional minorities present accurate representations of living conditions and dress styles?
- Are people of color shown in a variety of lifestyles?
- Does the material emphasize that every culture has its achievers, thinkers, writers, artists, scientists, builders, and political leaders?
- Do the materials describe the achievements of all people in a similar fashion?
- Does the story focus on problems and issues that provide insight into the experience of racial and ethnic groups?
- Does the story focus on interactions among racial or minority groups and the dominant culture?
- Does it portray the minority culture as “problem oriented?”
- Is prejudice treated as a given without explanation?
- Are persons of color shown engaged in problem-solving activities in all professional areas in business, community and world affairs?
- Are persons of color central characters in the story?
- Are dialects considered integral to the story as part of our rich cultural heritage?
- Does the narrative convey a theme that is realistic, believable and not patronizing?
- Is bilingualism considered an asset to the characters?
- Are both female and male members of minority groups depicted in situations which exhibit them as worthy models to emulate?
- Does the material help children to recognize both the basic similarities among all people as well as the uniqueness of the individual?
- Do minority faces show individuality and not all look alike?
- Do whites in the story have power and make decisions while non-whites function in subservient roles?
- Are achievements of minority women and girls shown?

Adapted from: Arnow, J. (1995). *Teaching peace: How to raise children to live in harmony*. Berkley Publishing Group.

Checklist for Sexism in Children's Literature

YES NO

- Are girls rewarded for skills and competence rather than beauty?
- Is a realistic proportion of mothers shown at work outside the home?
- Are some of the jobs other than administrative or technical jobs?
- Are fathers shown raising or spending time with children?
- Do all members of the family participate equitably in household chores?
- Do girls and boys participate equitably in physical activities?
- Do girls and boys participate equitably in intellectual activities?
- Do male and female characters respect each other as equals?
- Are both girls and boys shown to be self-reliant, clever and brave—capable of facing their own problems and finding their own solutions?
- Are there any derogatory sex stereotyped characterizations, such as “Boys make the best architects,” or “Girls are silly?”
- Are both girls and boys shown as having a wide range of sensibilities, feelings, and responses?
- Are male nouns and pronouns (for example mankind, he) used to refer to all people?
- Are girls' accomplishments, not their clothing or features, emphasized?
- Are non-human characters and their relationships personified in sex stereotypes (for example, depicting dogs as masculine, cats as feminine)?
- Are the women and girls portrayed as docile and passive and in need of help?
- Does the material reflect the conditions and contributions of women in today's society?
- Are women in cultures other than the dominant one depicted accurately?
- Are traits such as strength, compassion, initiative, warmth, courage treated as human rather than gender-specific?
- Does the material encourage both girls and boys to see themselves as human beings with an equal right to all benefits and choices?

Adapted from: Arnow, J. (1995). *Teaching peace: How to raise children to live in harmony*. Berkley Publishing Group.

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