

# 8 Questions to ask when you're

## SELECTING DIVERSE CHILDREN'S BOOKS



### 1. Is this an #ownvoices book?

The #ownvoices movement recognizes diverse books that are written by authors who share a diverse identity with the characters they write about. Reading the author's bio will often answer this question for you. While not every diverse book has to be written by an author from that same background, #ownvoices authors are more likely to be able to accurately portray their own culture or community and avoid stereotypes.

### 2. If it's not an #ownvoices book, does the author have a connection to the culture or community they're writing about? Have they done considerable research?

Are there any educational notes or bonus material that explains more about concepts in the book? If the book is set in another country, has the author spent time there?

### 3. Will the story be interesting to kids, or does it try too hard to explicitly teach a lesson?

The best stories teach children important truths without having to spell out "the moral of the story" for them. Choose diverse books for your home or classroom that are engaging stories that kids will want to read.

### 4. Does the book make broad generalizations and lump different cultures together?

For example, there is no one "Native American culture." Instead, a story should draw on the culture of a specific tribe. I often see books that generically refer to "Africa" over and over again, a huge continent with 54 different countries and even more cultures and languages.

### 5. Are diverse characters front and center, or are they just the "sidekicks"?

The kinds of books reinforce society's message that leaders are white, able-bodied, or straight. Look for diverse books where kids from marginalized backgrounds are the main characters.

### 6. Are the characters full formed, interesting people?

Stay away from books that **only** focus on the hardships of a diverse character's life. Are the diverse characters complex kids (like all kids are)? Do they have quirks, hobbies, or faults?

## **7. Does the book include authentic words and phrases that are used in the culture?**

If the book includes a glossary that explains key terms, this is a good sign!

## **8. Does the story acknowledge that there are different experiences within a cultural group?**

Before sharing a diverse book with a child, read through it to see it relies on stereotypes. The best diverse books also find ways to acknowledge that there are many different experiences, beliefs, etc within every culture.

# **3 Additional Questions to Evaluate the Overall Diversity of Your Child's Bookshelf**

## **1. Do we have a significant number of books that defy gender stereotypes?**

Do you have books that show strong girls and gentle boys as heroes? Do you read books that have girl main characters to your boys?

## **2. Do your diverse books include other types of diversity in addition to race and ethnicity?**

Look for stories that also feature children who are part of LGBT families, for example. Find diverse books that include characters who are neurodiverse or who have a disability. Look for books featuring characters from a variety of religions.

## **3. Are all of your books from other cultures folktales, or do you have books set in a modern context as well?**

It can be challenging to find global books that are set in modern times, but it's important to include these in your collection. Folktales are very valuable, but if these are the only books we read children about other countries, they'll develop inaccurate ideas about other cultures and how people live.