
There are a few good materials on each ethnic group. The criteria and examples given here will help teachers and curriculum workers make better informed selections.

Evaluating and Selecting Ethnic Studies Materials¹

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FINDING sound ethnic studies materials has always been difficult. When the first serious attempts were made to introduce Black Studies into the curriculum in the early 1960's, there was a tremendous paucity of resources. Currently, there is a flood of teaching materials on Afro-Americans. There are also many books on American Indians. However, there are still few resources on Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and Puerto Rican Americans.

While the quantity varies, most materials on each ethnic group are insensitive, inaccurate, and written from a White Anglo-Saxon point of view. Nevertheless, there are a few good materials on each group. Identifying these requires a great deal of time and careful evaluation and selection. The following criteria and examples of books are offered to help teachers and curriculum specialists to evaluate and select ethnic studies resources for classroom use.

Books and other materials should accu-

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rately portray the perspectives, attitudes, and feelings of minority groups. There are certain values, aspirations, and points of view prevalent in American ethnic communities. Books should honestly and sensitively reflect these perspectives and feelings, both through characters and in the interpretations of events and situations. *Touch the Earth*, compiled by T. C. McLuhan, is a collection of statements and excerpts from the writing of American Indians. This book successfully conveys some of the values endemic in Indian cultures. *America Is in the Heart* by Carlos Bulosan, *House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday, and *Uptown* by John Steptoe also faithfully portray ethnic feelings and aspirations.

Fictional works should have strong ethnic characters. Many books have ethnic minority characters who are subservient, weak, and ignorant. Kristin Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* and Thomas Fall,

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Learning materials should describe settings and experiences with which all students can identify, and yet accurately reflect ethnic cultures and life styles.

Canalboat to Freedom, have powerful and admirable characters. The strong characters and memorable incidents in *The Soul Brothers* and *Sister Lou* will help students to develop empathy for urban Blacks. Fierce but brilliant Fess; talented and lonesome Blind Tom; shy and sensitive Calvin; and Lou, who searches relentlessly for her Black identity, will deeply impress the reader. Children love and respect Lundius, the courageous, wise, and kind Black hero of *Canalboat to Freedom*.

Identifying With Life Styles

Books should describe settings and experiences with which all students can identify, and yet accurately reflect ethnic cultures and life styles. *Barrio Boy* by Ernesto Galarza, *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas, *Annie and the Old One* by Miska Miles, and *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George faithfully portray ethnic cultures in a way

that non-minority students can learn a great deal about them.

A young Indian boy shares his way of life with the reader in Ann Nolan Clark's *In My Mother's House*. Non-Indian readers can absorb much information about Indian life from this story. Indian children will strongly identify with the protagonist and his values.

The protagonists in some books about ethnic groups have few ethnic characteristics. Such books color Anglo-Saxons Red, Brown, or Black. *A Child in Prison Camp* by Shizuye Takashima and *Lone Heart Mountain* by Estelle Ishigo have authentic ethnic characters and faithfully portray Japanese culture. In *A Child in Prison Camp*, author-artist Takashima relates her childhood experiences in a Canadian concentration camp during World War II. This is a beautiful and poignant book. *Lone Heart Mountain* is the story of a Japanese American family in an internment camp. The characters, events, and illustrations in this touching book reflect

important aspects of Japanese American life.

The illustrations in books should be accurate, ethnically sensitive, and technically well done. Many books have beautiful photographs or drawings which are inaccurate. Maisie and Richard Conrat, *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans*, is a poignant and deeply moving collection of accurate photographs about the internment. The photographs in Rudy Acuña's *Cultures in Conflict: Problems of the Mexican Americans* sensitively and accurately portray contemporary Mexican Americans in a wide variety of settings. The woodcuts by Ann Grifalconi in *The Jazz Man* by Mary Hays Weik are movingly sad but highly effective. It is said that one picture is worth a thousand words. There is a great deal of truth in this adage. Teachers should carefully study the illustrations in books and other materials and check them for authenticity, accuracy, and sensitivity. Students can learn either stereotypes or facts from illustrations. Pictures often speak more cogently than words.

Judging Use of Words and Phrases

Ethnic materials should be free of racist concepts, clichés, phrases, and words. Many books contain words and statements that have negative connotations even though they might have many other strengths. Benjamin Brewster's *The First Book of Eskimos* is very stereotypic. The author portrays Eskimos as a carefree, happy people who have no serious human problems. Ruth Murry Underhill's *Red Man's America* is a fairly good general survey of Indian cultural groups which is seriously flawed by the author's many insensitive references to Indian cultures. Words like *colored* (used to refer to Blacks), *savage*, *hostile*, *primitive*, and *uncivilized* can alert the teacher to a possibly insensitive book or resource, although their use in a book does not necessarily mean that it is insensitive. An author might use these words for the sake of historical accuracy, to depict the language of bigots, or for other justifiable reasons. The teacher must judge the use of words and phrases within the total context of the book or resource. Nevertheless, the

teacher should watch out for these kinds of words when evaluating instructional materials.

Factual materials should be historically accurate. Books that present inaccurate information about minorities confuse students and reinforce stereotypes. They can also be the source of misconceptions about ethnic groups. Rudy Acuña, *A Mexican American Chronicle*, William Brandon, *The American Heritage Book of Indians*, Kal Wagenheim, *Puerto Rico: A Profile*, and Betty L. Sung, *The Story of the Chinese in America* are factually accurate and sensitive books. Oliver LaFarge, *A Pictorial History of the American Indian*, is replete with inaccurate and misleading statements. The author presents the Bering Strait theory of Indian migration as a conclusive fact and portrays Native Americans as warlike and hostile savages.

Resources which purport to be multiethnic should be comprehensive both in terms of the groups included and the events discussed. Some materials which are otherwise excellent omit an entire ethnic group. Puerto Rican Americans, Asian Americans, and Mexican Americans are often neglected in these kinds of resources. Mexican Americans are not included in *Understanding Minority Groups*, edited by Joseph Gittler. *To Serve the Devil* by Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau is an extremely useful documentary history of American ethnic groups which totally neglects Filipino Americans, an ethnic group which numbered 343,060 in 1970. When evaluating multiethnic resources or basal textbooks for school adoption, teachers should check to see that they include these groups in a meaningful way: (a) Afro-Americans, (b) Asian Americans (including Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans), (c) Mexican Americans, (d) Native Americans (Indians), and (e) Puerto Rican Americans.

Teachers should also check to see if multiethnic resources and basal textbooks discuss major events and documents related to ethnic minority history. Events such as the removal of Native Americans to Indian Territory in the 1800's, and the large migrations of Puerto Ricans to the United States mainland which began in the 1920's should be

included in every multiethnic and American history textbook. Key legal documents, such as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, should also be included. To be able to determine which key events and documents should be included in basic sources, the teacher will need to read at least one general book on each of the five major ethnic groups.

These general books are recommended: (a) John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; (b) H. Brett Melendy, *The Oriental Americans*; (c) Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *The Chicanos: A History of Mexican-Americans*; (d) Edward H. Spicer, *A Short History of the Indians of the United States*; and (e) Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland*. *Teaching Ethnic Studies: Concepts and Strategies*, edited by James A. Banks, contains a chapter on each of these groups.

Age and Interest Level Important

In addition to the guidelines suggested here, the teacher should determine the *age level* for which a particular book might be

appropriate. Both interest and reading level should be considered. Some books are excellent for adult reading but are inappropriate for school use; others are fine for older readers but inappropriate for young children. The type of *classroom situation* should also be considered when selecting ethnic studies materials. A particular book might be appropriate for use with some classrooms but not with others. The teacher should bear in mind whether his class is, for example, all Black, all American Indian, all Asian, all White, or integrated.

The teacher should also consider how he will *use* each resource. Some books are excellent for basic information but will not give the students a feeling for the ethnic group. Other books have superior illustrations but poor and distorted texts. Some excellent books, like *The Jazz Man*, are not appropriate for all students, all purposes, and in all kinds of settings. The teacher must exercise sound judgment, sensitivity, integrity, and insight when selecting and evaluating ethnic studies materials for his or her class. In the final analysis, only the teacher can determine which materials can best help to achieve his or her instructional goals. □

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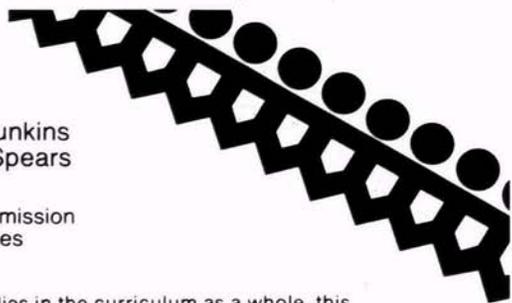
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