

DECOLONIZE YOUR LIBRARY: 5 TIPS TO CREATE AN ANTI-BIAS LIBRARY

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You may be wondering why an article on decolonizing your library is appearing in this restorative justice newsletter. I firmly believe that as a justice and inclusion warrior, I am responsible for both working to dismantle the systems that cause or allow injustice, as well as using restorative justice when harm happens. I will admit that decolonizing your library is a laborious task. Below I will share with you what to expect and the steps you can take to create an inclusive, equitable, diverse library that provides both mirrors and windows for children while introducing them to an array of people presented with dignity and depth.



WHAT TO EXPECT AS YOU ENGAGE IN THIS WORK:

1. **Be willing to get uncomfortable.** There may be beloved childhood books and new books in your current library that don't make the cut. You will be faced with the daunting task of deciding what to do with such books.
2. **Know there will be a grey area.** Many books will fall in the grey area. The examples of this grey area are too many to list. What I have learned is that they tend to be good teaching tools, providing an opportunity to discuss discrepancies or a stereotype and model being a critical lover of books.
3. **You will find gaps in your personal library.** You may find that the books you purchased for your home library are monolithic and provide narratives about people who match your race, ability, socio-economic class, etc. There may also be books that are affirming and provide examples of the possibilities life has to offer. Your collection is off to a great start since it is important for us to all have mirror books, books that allow us to see ourselves in them. What may be missing are books that have central characters that are different from you and your family's identities. Not to worry, the next section will provide you will ways to fill in the gaps.
4. **Considerations for School Librarians.** Librarians often take guidance from the "classic" lists and award winners, collecting books that reflect the school community and dominant cultural narratives. Note that "classics" and award winners do not mean that they do not cause harm to groups of people. A library should include as many narratives as possible, even if that group of people is not present in the community. Using the five tips listed below will help librarians remove harmful books and acquire positively reviewed diverse books.

HOW TO GET STARTED DECOLONIZING YOUR LIBRARY AND CREATING AN ANTI-BIAS ONE:

1. **Author review.** Check if the books in your library have been positively evaluated on [Social Justice Books](#), [American Indians in Children's Literature Blog](#), and/or [Anti-Defamation League's](#)
2. **Books Matter Recommendations.** Next, conduct multiple web searches using the author's name and "controversy," "criticism," and "problematic." Do the same with the title of the book. Some negative reviews may be because someone does not want the narrative told. Think critically about the source as you engage in your research.
3. **Illustrator and illustration review.** Look through the book and notice if the illustrations contain problematic stereotypes or negative biases. Know that you will be able to identify problematic stereotypes and biases for the parts of your identity that you have explored or the parts where harm has been experienced. You should then conduct multiple web searches using the illustrator's name and "controversy," "criticism," and "problematic."
4. **Check for negative and harmful stereotypes.** Use Social Justice Books: <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/> and Children's Literature with Negative Portrayals & Stereotypes for Curriculum: <https://wcls.bibliocommons.com/list/share/606377252/606389837>.
5. **Own Voices.** Notice if the book is written by someone who holds the identity/ies of the main character(s). As you purchase new books, make it a priority to support Own Voice authors. You will find several book lists if you search for "Own Voice Books" online.
6. **Rebuild and close the gaps.** You can use Diverse Book Finder: Identify and Explore Multicultural Picture Books: <https://diversebookfinder.org/> and [Social Justice Books](#).

I hope this has been helpful and wish you the best as you create a diverse, decolonized, inclusionary library that contains narratives that treat everyone with dignity and depth.