

# No Place for Hate® Activity Library

## Diversity and Children's Literature

### Lesson Plan and Overview

#### Lesson Plan: Diverse Books Matter

In recent years, there has been a lot of attention on the diversity of children's books, shining a light on the lack of diversity of characters and authors and amplifying the need for more children's and young adult literature that reflects our multicultural society. In 2014, an organization named We Need Diverse Books formed, following a regularly trending hashtag with the same name (#WeNeedDiverseBooks) that helped bring attention to the issue. We Need Diverse Books advocates for changes in the publishing industry "to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people." In 2015, an African-American 11-year-old girl named Marley Dias brought further awareness of the issue by launching the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, highlighting the lack of kids' books with African-American characters. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) compiles annual data about the diversity of children's literature and their statistics indicate improvements in recent years but there is still room for improvement.

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### Grade Level

Grades K–5

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### Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about the effort to increase the diversity of children's books.
- Students will reflect on the importance of diverse children's books, including "window" and "mirror" books.

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### Materials Needed

- Video: [11-year-old holds book drive for stories about black girls](#)
- Article: [Girl campaigns to get 1,000 books about black girls; gets almost 10,000](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books Slideshow](#) (for optional follow-up activity)

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### Words You Might Use

**Culture:** The patterns of daily life that can be seen in language, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, beliefs/values, music, clothing and more that a group of people share.

**Diversity:** Different or varied. The population of the United States is made up of people from different places and from diverse racial and cultural groups.

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## Core Activity

First, show the video, [11-year-old holds book drive for stories about black girls](#), to all students. Engage students in a discussion by asking: *What happens in the video? Who is Marley Dias, what did she do and why? What is diversity? Why do you think it's important to have books with diverse characters?*

Talk with students about “window” and “mirror” books. Elicit/explain that “**mirror books**” are books that contain reflections of people—their culture, family, race, religion, etc.—and enable people to see themselves in books in a variety of ways. Reading books about your racial or ethnic identity can help people feel good about those parts of themselves. If possible, share an example of a mirror book for you (the teacher). Elicit/explain that “**window books**” show the people reading them a window into other people, events and places that they might be unfamiliar with. It helps to expose children to different kinds of people. If possible, share an example of a window book for you (the teacher). Have students turn and talk with someone sitting next to them and respond to the following two prompts:

- If I could write a mirror book, it would be about ...
- If I could write a window book, it would be about ...

Explain the extent to which you think your classroom or school library contains a diversity of books and provide examples.

(Note that in the lesson plan, there is a detailed and structured process for conducting a diversity book study if you want to engage your students in a more formal process.)

Next, read aloud the article: [Girl campaigns to get 1,000 books about black girls; gets almost 10,000](#). This article is written at a 4th grade reading level so if you teach older elementary students (grades 3-5) you may choose to have the students take turns reading it aloud. Discuss the article by asking: *What more did you learn about Marley Dias? Why did Marley start #1000BlackGirlBooks? What does Marley say about windows and mirrors? If you could ask Marley a question, what would it be? Are there other things besides books (e.g. movies, TV shows, dolls, etc.) that should reflect more diversity than they currently do?*

Finally, have each 3–5th grade classroom in the school pair up with a K-2 grade classroom in the school. When in their classroom, the older students will explain to the younger students what they learned about diversity and children’s books, window and mirror books and culminate by reading aloud (book buddy style) a diverse book to a younger student; this can be done one-on-one or in small groups, depending on how many books you have.

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## Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

**Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.**

- Show the video, [We Need Diverse Books Slideshow](#) and discuss it with students. Then have students (and staff) make their own sign that reads “We Need Diverse Books because \_\_\_\_\_ and fill in the blank. Hang these around common areas in school, put on the website or make your own video including everyone’s signs.
- Have all students make their own mirror books. The book can be an “About Me” book or the book can tell a story about themselves that reveals something about an aspect(s) of their identity. After students have made their books, they will pair off with someone in their class or another class and each will read their books to each other, to learn more about each other. Their books can serve as both “mirror” and “window” books.
- Have students write persuasive letters to local bookstores, libraries or publishers to: (1) encourage them to purchase and publish more diverse books or (2) commend them for doing a good job with their book selection for those that have a diverse selection of books. The letter can include what students know about the diversity of books, what they learned in the activity, what having more diverse books means to them and why it’s important for others and society in general. You can then send the letters to the appropriate place and if students get responses, those can be shared with the school community.

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## Home Connection

Share ADL’s Table Talk [Why We Need Diverse Books](#) with families.

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## How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

All students will engage in discussions about identity and the importance of diversity of children’s books and representation in general. Engaging the older students in talking with and reading to the younger children about diverse books will have a school-wide impact with a focus on focus on identity, diversity and inclusion.

# Girl campaigns to get 1,000 books about black girls; gets almost 10,000

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Recommended for: Upper Elementary School–High School

Word Count: 744

Text Level: 6



Marley Dias, 12, of West Orange, New Jersey, is the force behind #1000BlackGirlBooks, a program to collect and donate children’s books that have black girls as the main characters.

Marley Dias is an amazing 12-year-old. She’s the preteen force behind #1000BlackGirlBooks, a campaign to collect and donate children’s books that feature black girls as the lead characters. She had hoped to collect 1,000. She’s up to 9,500.

## “Frustration As Fuel To Help Others”

Marley will be in Chicago, Illinois, on June 6 and 7 for the Social Innovation Summit. A bunch of adults will talk about issues like creating change and use phrases like “increasingly complex global landscape.” Marley will be there, too.

“I’ll be talking about how to use frustration as fuel to help others,” Marley said. “And how I was able to use the problem of only seeing white boys and their dogs as characters as a way to uplift” the stories of black girls.

Marley began her campaign to change reading lists in 2015 when she was a sixth-grader. She had to read “Old Yeller,” “Shiloh” and “Where the Red Fern Grows.” However, “Brown Girl Dreaming” and other tales with girls of color at the center were not on the list.

## Social Media Campaign

Her mom, Janice Johnson Dias, co-founder of GrassROOTS Community Foundation, helped her to launch a social media campaign. The goal was to collect 1,000 books with black girl main characters. The books would be donated to libraries.

Booksellers and authors quickly jumped on board with donations. Ellen DeGeneres gave her a check for \$10,000 to buy books. Marley, who lives in West Orange, New Jersey, discovered authors and titles she never knew existed.

Of the 9,500 books she's collected, she said 1,500 are unique titles. One of her favorites is "Aya: Life in Yop City," a graphic novel by Marguerite Abouet, who was born and raised in Ivory Coast, Africa. A graphic novel is similar to a comic book.

## "To Create Mirrors And Windows"

"My goal is to promote the stories of black girls, not only for black girls, but for other kids who are different," she said. "I come from a community that has a lot of white kids, and I notice how a lot of times they don't understand our differences and how I come from a different culture and my ancestors are different and my history is different. I want to create mirrors and windows for people in communities all across the world."

Marley explains her ideas.

"When I say mirrors, I mean I want these stories to be reflected for the black girls who are reading them," she said. Marley wants them to be able to see themselves and learn about their history. "When I say windows I mean open up to people who are different, to understand and to see and grow from those things we don't understand."

She added, "If I meet someone who's Native American, and I don't know anything about indigenous people in New Jersey, which I kind of don't, which is not really good, I can learn more and more about their lives. And at the same time, I'm showing others that I can be kind, I can be caring, I can be special."

## Role Models And Goals

In addition to the heroes in books, there are people she admires in real life.

"I have role models," she said. "But I take the attributes of the people that I admire, and I use them to create my best self. I can look at Madam C.J. Walker, who was one of the first (black female) millionaires, and I can say, 'I want to be as industrious and I want to be as motivated as her.' Not that I want to live the life she did, but that I want to be my best self and have those traits and abilities of Madam C.J. Walker to allow me to do that."

Marley said that when she's 63 years old, she'll ask herself if she did all she could to channel her inner Madam Walker.

## Making The World A Better Place

"Was I able to reach my goals and be a TV producer or film producer or a magazine editor for my own magazine?" she said. "Was I able to use those skills in my role model toolbox or my activist toolbox?"

Marley has a book coming out in January. "Marley Dias Gets It Done — And So Can You" will be published by Scholastic. "It's a guide for everyone to use their gifts and talents to make the world a better place," she said.



**We need diverse books because ...**

**#WeNeedDiverseBooks**