

# Diverse Books Matter

*Compelling Question: Why is it important to be exposed to diverse books that show different people's experiences?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45-90 Minutes	Reading: R1 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2 Language: L4
MS	HS		



### Web Related Connections

#### Lessons

[Who Am I? Identity Poems](#)  
[Identity, Hair and Seeing Myself](#)

#### Table Talk

[Why We Need Diverse Books](#)

#### Other Resources

[Books Matter: Children's Literature](#)  
[Books Matter: The Power of Children's Literature](#)

### Key Words

(See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#))

admire  
character  
community  
culture  
disability  
differences  
diverse  
donate  
gender  
race  
reflected  
qualities  
talent  
unique

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, there has been a lot of attention given to the diversity of children's books, shining a light on the lack of diversity and amplifying the need for more children's and young adult literature that reflect 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 11-year-old Black girl named Marley Dias brought further awareness of the issue by launching the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, highlighting the lack of kids' books with Black 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 improvements are still needed.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the importance of diverse literature, reflect on Marley Dias' campaign, understand data and research about diversity in children's literature and engage in a study on the diversity of books in their classroom or school library. The lesson can also be used as a way to kick off an independent reading/Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) challenge in class or school.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign by Marley Dias.
- Students will understand the importance of "mirror" and "window" books.
- Students will analyze books in their classroom/school libraries in order to determine the diversity of the collection.
- Students will identify and reflect on why we need diverse books.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- 11-year-old holds book drive for stories about black girls video (2016, 4½ mins., CBS This Morning, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=utTSMzfDZcA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utTSMzfDZcA))
- [Libraries have thousands of books about black girls thanks to Marley Dias](#) (one copy for each student)
- [Children's Books about People of Color](#) (to project)
- We Need Diverse Books Campaign video (2014, 4 mins., Indiegogo, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrrh0G-OkBw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrrh0G-OkBw))

- Book Study Graphic Organizer (one for each student)
- We Need Diverse Books Template (one for each student)

## PROCEDURES

### Video Viewing

1. Explain to students that in 2015, an 11-year-old girl named Marley Dias was concerned about the lack of diversity in children’s books, specifically the lack of books about people who are Black. This video explains more about what she did and why. Show the [11-year-old holds books drive for stories about black girls](#) video.
2. After watching the video, engage students in a discussion by asking:
  - What happened in the video?

Who is Marley Dias and how would you describe her?

- What did Marley do and why did she do it?
  - What is diversity?
  - What are your thoughts about the diversity of children’s books?
3. Explain that diversity means *different* or *varied*. Explain that the United States is a diverse country because it is made up of people from different places, different racial and ethnic groups, and many other differences. Explain to students that they will learn more about Marley Dias and about diversity in children’s books later in the lesson.
  4. If you haven’t previously defined race and ethnicity, use these definitions:

**Race:** Refers to the categories into which society places individuals on the basis of physical characteristics (such as skin color, hair type, facial form and eye shape). Example of racial identities include: Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American/American Indian, and White. Explain that the term “people of color” refers to these racial identity groups that are not white.

**Ethnicity:** Refers to a person’s identification with a group based on characteristics such as shared history, ancestry, geographic and language origin and culture.

### Information Sharing: Mirrors and Windows

1. Explain that sometimes when people talk about diverse books, they use the terms “mirrors” and “windows.” First ask students: *What is a mirror?* Take a mirror out if you have one and explain that a mirror is a surface that forms reflections. When you look in a mirror, you see yourself.
 

Ask: *Why do you think the word mirror is used to describe a kind of book?* 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).
2. Then ask: *What is a window?* Point to or stand near a window and explain that a window is an opening where you can look outside.
 

Ask: *Why do you think the word window is used to describe a kind of book?* 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).
3. Have students turn and talk to a person sitting next to them and ask them respond to the following two prompts. Read one prompt at a time and then give 2–3 minutes for each student in the pair to respond to it:
  - If I could write a mirror book, it would be about...
  - If I could write a window book, it would be about...

- Have a few students report back about what they talked about in their pairs. Ask: *Why is it important to read mirror books? Why is it important to read window books?*

### Reading Activity

- Distribute a copy of the article “[Libraries have thousands of books about black girls thanks to Marley Dias](#),” explaining that this is an article about Marley Dias, who they learned a little bit about in the video at the beginning of the lesson. Read the article aloud, having students take turns reading.
- Note:** The above article is from [Newsela](#), a website that publishes high-interest news articles daily at different reading levels from 2nd to 12th grade. This article is at a fourth-grade reading level and the same content is available at 12th, 6th, 5th, 4th and 2nd grade levels. Engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
  - 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?

### Book Diversity Study: Analyzing Graph and Research

- Remind students about the definition of race and the different racial categories you discussed after watching the video.
- Project the [Children’s Books about People of Color](#) graph on the board/smart board. Ask: *What does the heading say?* Explain that this graph shows the percentage of children’s books about people of color (where people of color are the main characters) from 2002-2018. If you need to explain what percentage means, say that percentage tells us how many out of 100. For example, if 70% of the students in this school are wearing sneakers today, that means that 70 out of every 100 students are wearing sneakers.  
  
*Ask students: How many lines are on this graph? What colors are included? What do the colors represent?* Explain that the colors represent books about African American people, Asian/Pacific Islander people, Latino people, and Native American/Indigenous people.
- Engage students in a process where you have them look at each of the colors/racial categories and determine what percentage of the total books related to each of the racial groups. For example, ask students: *In 2002, how many books were about African-American people? What about in 2008? How about in 2018?* Emphasize what the percentage means: in 2002, 5% of books were about African American people, so 5 out of 100. Go through this process with each of the racial group categories and in different years (as time permits) so they see patterns and differences.
- Then explain to students that can we pull all of the information about all the racial groups together. Ask: *If in 2018, I have 100 books, and 11 feature African American characters, 9 feature Asian/Pacific Islander characters, 7 feature Latino characters, and 2 feature Native American/Indigenous characters, how many books is that total with characters of color?* You can record these numbers on the board/smart board into an addition problem or sentence. Then say: *This means there are 29 books with characters that represent people of color. So out of those 100 books, how many of these books feature white characters? 71 books only feature white characters.*
- Show or share with students an updated graph (<https://socialjusticebooks.org/statistics-show-increasing-number-of-diverse-books-for-children-and-teens/> ) from 2022 that shows the following statistics:
  - 12% Black/African
  - 9.3% Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 6% Latino

- 1% Native American/Indigenous
- 7% Not specific brown-skinned character

6. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking:

How did things change from 2002 to 2018? How did they change from 2018 to 2022?

- Why do you think that change may have happened?
- What big idea can we take away from this chart about the characters in children's books?

7. Explain to students that as a class, we are going to do our own study about the diversity of books in our classroom or school library. Explain that there are other categories of diversity we could look such as gender, age, ability, different kinds of families (e.g., families with two Moms or two Dads, etc.), but for this project we will be focusing on racial/ethnic diversity.

**Note:** Be mindful that you are not doing this book study to criticize your classroom or school library. If you use the school library, be clear about your goal and intention with your school's librarian so that they do not view this as a critique. As an alternative, you can conduct the study in a neighborhood or community library or bookstore; that will involve more coordination and possibly organizing a field trip in order to go to the library/bookstore as a class.

8. Explain to students that they are going to work in pairs to look at some books in the classroom/school library and then as a class, all of the information will be compiled to reflect on the collection of books as a whole, just like the study in the graph (above). You may decide to assign the partners or let students choose.

9. When the pairs are formed, distribute a copy of the [Book Study Graphic Organizer](#) to each student. Explain that each pair of two students will look through 3–5 picture books in the classroom or school library. (You can assign the books or have students choose 3–5 books to look at, making sure that there are not duplicates.) Have students look at the books, going through each one and identifying the race/ethnicity of the main characters in the book.

You may want to model how to do this by choosing a book and going through it as a group. Show students how they don't have to read the whole book (although they can) but instead, can page through it to discover information about the main character(s). Explain to students that sometimes they might not be able to tell what race the character is, but they can use clues such as: physical characteristics, language spoken, ethnicity, family celebrations and rituals. You will also want to be available to students to help if they have questions. Make sure the books they choose are randomly selected and use picture books only.

10. When students have completed their book study, have each pair share their findings. Then, as a class, compile all of the data together. Determine how many total books were analyzed and how many contained main characters of color in them. Help students to come up with the percentage by dividing the number of books about characters of color with the total number of books.

**Note:** One way to do this is to form bar graphs that reflect the same categories as the line graphs analyzed above. Use a whiteboard, chart paper, or smart board to construct a bar graph. Each pairing of students could write the title of their books in individual Post-It notes and place it on the bar graph above the corresponding category. Then the class would have a visual representation of the diversity of their library. You could include categories reflecting people of color, or the x-axis could also include a category for white characters. It could look something like [this](#).

11. Engage students in a discussion by asking:

- What was it like to look at books in our classroom or school library to see how diverse the collection is?
- How did your team work together?
- How did our percentage of people of color as main characters in books compare to those in the chart we looked at?
- What did we find out as a class?
- Do you have any thoughts or feelings about our conclusions?

- What did you learn by doing this project?
- What action steps can you take as students in order to have a more diverse collection of books in our classroom/school library? What can we recommend to our school administrators, library staff, teachers and family members?

### Closing: We Need Diverse Books

Have students watch the [We Need Diverse Books Campaign](#) video. After watching the video, ask students: *Why do we need diverse books?* Engage students in a brief discussion, asking them if our class needs more window and/or mirror books and why. Then have students make posters about why we need diverse books by finishing the sentence: “We Need Diverse Books because...” and illustrate them if they want. Students can use the [We Need Diverse Books Template](#) if necessary. Then have students share their posters by holding them up and if time permits, explaining theirs to the rest of the class.

### ADDITIONAL READING

- <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/> (Cooperative Children’s Book Center)
- <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/03/16/racial-diversity-in-childrens-books-grows-but-slowly> (Minnesota Public Radio)
- <https://www.leeandlow.com/about/diversity-baseline-survey/dbs3/> (Lee and Low Books)
- <https://diversebooks.org/>
- <https://www.slj.com/story/Publishing-Makes-progress-Lee-Low-Releases-Results-2023-Diversity-Baseline-Survey> (School Library Journal)
- <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2024/march/the-benefits-of-including-diverse-childrens-books-in-a-classroom/>(Book Trust)

## Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

## CASEL'S SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.



## Libraries have thousands of books about black girls thanks to Marley Dias

By Chicago Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.31.17

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Word Count **540**

Level **740L**



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. Photo by: Cheriss May/NurPhoto/Sipa USA/TNS

Marley Dias is just 12 years old but she is doing grown-up things.

### #1000BlackGirlBooks

Marley lives in West Orange, New Jersey. She is the force behind #1000BlackGirlBooks, a program to collect and donate children's books that have black girls as the main characters. She had hoped to collect 1,000. She is up to 9,500.

She will be in Chicago, Illinois, on June 6 and 7 to speak at an event. She plans to talk about how to turn problems into a way to help others, she said.

In the books she read, she used to see only white boys and their dogs as characters. She decided to push for the stories of black girls like herself.

### Donating Books to Libraries

Marley began her work to change reading lists when she was in sixth grade. She was told to read books like “Old Yeller” and “Shiloh.” However, “Brown Girl Dreaming” and other tales about girls of color were not on the list.

Her mom, Janice Johnson Dias, helped her to start a program online. The hope was to collect 1,000 books with black girl main characters. The books were to donate to libraries.

Booksellers and authors quickly donated books. Ellen DeGeneres gave her a check for \$10,000 to buy books. Dias discovered authors and books she never knew about.

### **Learning About Different People**

Of the 9,500 books she has collected, she said 1,500 are unique titles. One of her favorites is “Aya: Life in Yop City.” It is by Marguerite Aboutet, who was born and raised in Africa.

Marley wants to share the stories of black girls for other kids who are different, she said. Her community has many white kids. She notices how at times they do not “understand our differences,” she said.

### **"Mirrors And Windows"**

Marley said she comes from a different culture, and her ancestors and history are different. “I want to create mirrors and windows for people.”

She explained what she means.

“When I say mirrors, I mean I want these stories to be reflected for the black girls who are reading them,” she said. She wants them to see themselves and learn about their history. “When I say windows I mean open up to people who are different, to understand.”

If she meets someone who is Native American and does not know about them, she can learn more about their lives, she said. That makes her a more open and accepting person, she said.

### **"My Best Self"**

Besides the heroes in books, there are people she admires in real life.

Marley looks at the qualities of the people whom she admires. “I use them to create my best self.” She looks at Madam C.J. Walker, who was one of the first black women to have a million dollars, and can say that she wants to work the way she did.

She does not want to live the life Walker did, but she wants to have some of her qualities.

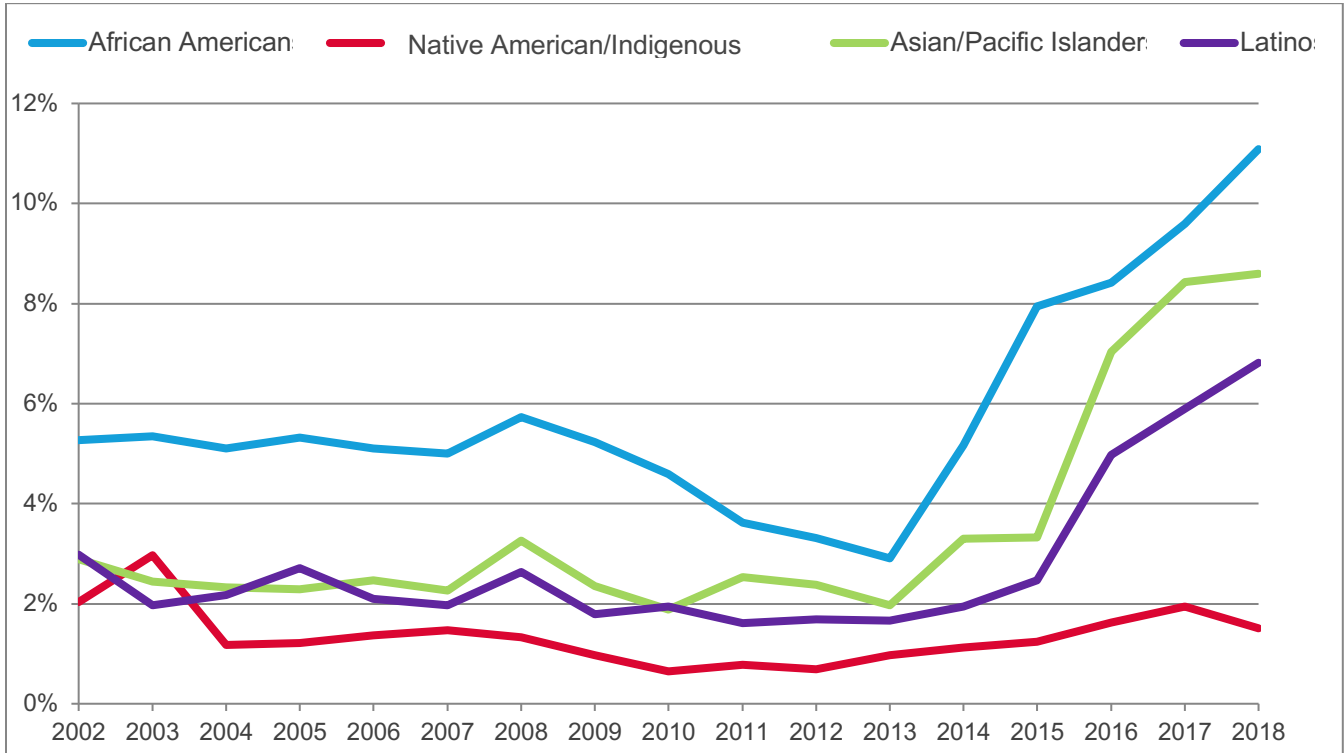
Marley has a book coming out in January. It is called “Marley Dias Gets It Done — And So Can You.” She says it is “a guide for everyone to use their gifts and talents to make the world a better place.”

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# Children's Books about People of Color



Source: Data on books by and about people of color and from First/Native Nations published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

# Book Study Graphic Organizer

Student Names:

Where did we look for the books?

How many books did we look at?

OUR RESULTS	
Title of Book	Race of Main Characters <i>(see below)</i>

Race/Racial Identity Categories:

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/AfricanAmerican
- Latino/Hispanic
- Native American/Indigenous
- White

OUR THOUGHTS
<p>What kind of books were you drawn to?</p> <p>What did you notice as you were looking through the books?</p> <p>Were there any patterns that you observed?</p>

## We Need Diverse Books Template

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

**#WeNeedDiverseBooks**