

Sugarcoated History: Turning the Spotlight on "Woke" Books to Expand the Narrative

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Sugarcoated History: Turning the Spotlight on “Woke” Books to Expand the Narrative

Abstract: Opponents of books in schools that depict racial and LGBTQ+ histories and narratives argue that education should be raceless and avoid political advocacy. These sentiments are succeeding in states across the country. The result of their success is the loss of an empowering and comprehensive education for all the children in the United States. Educators, who are well informed on the diverse histories of our nation and are armed with a plethora of well-written and factually sourced information, are prepared to face rampant misinformation and culture war rhetoric in our society today. The purpose of this article is to share examples of nonfiction and historical fiction books that teach factual information to students but are not part of the traditional canon. The canon as it is currently established is overwhelmingly filled with dominant White (European) authors, information, and perspective. We specifically chose to recognize historical fiction books, as well as nonfiction, as they should be harder to be challenged. These texts are rooted in historical understanding and perspectives. The texts we share are those that offer diverse perspectives, uncommonly taught in history classes, history texts, educational curriculum or as part of the canon of literature. We hope to share authentic and excellent nonfiction and historical fiction PK-12 trade books that can all be traced to factual historical documents.

Keywords: trade books; historical fiction; nonfiction; diverse perspectives; culturally responsive teaching

Introduction

Mariah stood there in frozen fear, staring at the black water, reckoning it to be more than a hundred feet wide, terrified at the thought of how deep.

Mariah stood there in frozen fear as the bluecoats walking backwards began to pull up the bridge, with the four rifle-ready soldiers behind them, guns still trained on the people on the north bank.

“Please, no!”

“Stop!”

“Don’t leave us!”

“Have Mercy!”

(Bolden, 2017, p. 208, used with permission.)

In *Crossing Ebenezer Creek* (2017), Tonya Bolden spotlights the horrors of the Ebenezer Creek Massacre, a story seldom told about the murder of newly “freed” enslaved Blacks by those they believed were their saviors, the Yankees. Few people know of this massacre. It never appears in K-12 history books. But what *Crossing Ebenezer Creek* does is offer a counternarrative based on historical fact that challenges the notion of the Yankees as the hero. This fact changes the narrative for an honest discussion about incidents that actually happened in the United States during the aftermath of the Civil War. This article explores the increasing need for counternarrative curriculum content and encourages the use of quality nonfiction and historical fiction trade books. All trade books shared in this article encourage exploration into voices too often challenged, banned, or simply invisible in history textbooks. These voices need to be heard because as W.E.B. DuBois once said:

One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over...The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth (1935, p. 722).

The Curriculum Debate

The United States is currently mired in a debate over school knowledge. What this debate highlights is the issue that most fundamentally creates discord in public schools: content. At its core, beyond pedagogy, beyond learning styles, the basic element of *what* content is taught in schools drives the curriculum. Herbert Spencer, historical educational researcher, raises the essential question, “What knowledge is of most worth?” (Spencer, cited in Portelli, 1987, p. 358) This question leads to multiple additional core questions: Whose knowledge is worth knowing? What history is more valuable? Whose perspective should students learn? When curriculum marginalizes, isolates or purposefully selects particular content, that selected content is deemed the most “worth knowing.” The result is what Elliot Eisner (1985) titled, not the hidden curriculum, but “the null curriculum-what the schools do not teach” (p. 45). The exclusion of certain content, and the addition of sugarcoated, or whitewashed content, therefore, maintains power of what is “of most worth.” And in the arena of history, the lost knowledge is critical. As James Loewen (1995) states, “Citizens who are their own historians, willing to identify lies and distortions and able to use sources to determine what really went on in the past, become a formidable force for democracy” (p. 318).

Sugarcoating K-12 Content

The restriction of content in K-12 schools is not a recent phenomenon. However, the rising uproar and increase in banned and challenged K-12 books can be traced to two recent events, the

murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that followed. Mr. Floyd's death saw an uprising of people of all races and ethnic groups across the United States and beyond. Many people turned to anti-racism scholars and their books. Sales for books on anti-racism sky-rocketed over 2000% after the protests (McEvoy, 2020). This phenomenon caused a backlash and precipitated former President Trump to sign Executive Order 13950. Executive Order 13950 barred federal agencies from conducting diversity and inclusion training, because it promoted "divisive concepts" and "race or sex scapegoating". President Biden revoked the executive order on the day he was inaugurated.

At the same time, conservative activist Christopher Rufo recognized an opportunity to start a culture war by misrepresenting a theory taught in law school, Critical Race Theory, as something insidious that was indoctrinating children in K-12 schools (Wallace-Wells, 2021). On the coattails of this political rhetoric, 36 states introduced 191 gag orders to stop K-12 and higher education institutions from teaching about race and LGBTQ+ issues in the years 2021 and 2022 (Young & Friedman, 2022). Although only 19 of the gag orders have passed, they are quite punitive, carrying heavy fines and the loss of state funding for schools, and termination and possible criminal charges for teachers who violate the order.

There exists, however, an entire breadth of books that spotlights important historical events which currently are not being challenged or banned. These books are hidden gems, ones being left out of school curricula, whether purposefully or not, due to the counternarrative they present (Diamond, 2017). These fiction and narrative nonfiction books, specifically the counternarratives based on historical fact, are available to students and teachers, and with more awareness, are encouraged to be used widely in our schools.

Definition of Historical Fiction

Included in the following recommendations is a set of mostly historical fiction trade books.

According to *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature: A Brief Guide* (2019), historical fiction is a blend of two sources, “fact and imagination—the author’s information about the past and her or his power to speculate about how it was to live in that time” (Kiefer & Tyson, p. 243). Historical fiction texts, and the counternarratives foster inquiry into the time period through the imagined characters and inspire critical conversations around the impact of historical events.

Definition of Nonfiction

According to Kiefer and Tyson (2019), “Literature scholars use the term *nonfiction* books to designate literature for children that is based in the actual rather than the imagined” (p. 267). Based on that definition, there is a plethora of subgenres that fall within this genre. This includes biographies and autobiographies, memoirs, essays and informational texts. Most recently the genre of narrative nonfiction, also known as narrative literary nonfiction, has emerged as a popular subgenre of nonfiction (Masterclass, 2021). Narrative nonfiction uses the written structure (plot development) of narrative writing while telling the story of a nonfiction event, person, or concept. An important understanding of narrative nonfiction is that the story reads as a fiction text, but it is completely true and based on actual events and people.

United States History in High School Textbooks

As part of the research to prepare for this article, seven history textbooks spanning 2005-2022 were examined for how they approached the narratives present in many of the trade books we selected. These textbooks (Cayton, Perry, Reed, & Winkler, 2005; Boyer & Stuckey, 2005; Davidson, 2009; Lapsansky-Werner, Roberts, Levy, & Taylor, 2010; Henretta, Hinderaker, Edwards & Self, 2014; Roark, Johnson, Furstenberg, Cohen, Stage, Hartmann, & Igo, 2020; Newman & Schmalbach, 2022) revealed glimpses of historical events from the perspectives of

people who have often been marginalized in American society. For example, in every textbook examined, Indigenous Americans' stories included specifically the attempts of the United States government to assimilate children in boarding schools and the appropriation of Indigenous land and resources. Interestingly, the Indigenous leaders such as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Red Cloud were portrayed as heroes fighting for their land and people. However, only two textbooks (Henretta, et al., 2014; Roark, et al., 2020) mentioned the cruelty Indigenous children endured in the boarding schools.

When African Americans were discussed in colonial times, they were referred to as “slaves” or in “slave revolts” rather than contributing members of the community. For example, there was no mention of Fort Mosé, the African Community of Freedom portrayed in the young adult novel *Copper Sun* by Sharon Draper (2006); however, the Stono Rebellion of 1739 that led many enslaved people to march to the community is mentioned (Cayton, et al., 2005; Davidson, 2009; Henretta, et al., 2014).

The Civil War was discussed at length in all the textbooks that covered the time period, but events that directly affected African Americans, such as the massacre at Ebenezer Creek depicted in Tanya Bolden's (2017) book *Crossing Ebenezer Creek*, were never mentioned. The next period of time when African Americans were featured was during the race riots of the early 20th century that occurred after the migration of Black citizens from the south to northern cities such as Chicago. The textbooks often mentioned the Chicago Race Riot of 1919 and one textbook (Boyer, & Stuckey, 2005) blamed the violence on White gangs. The Tulsa Race Massacre was only mentioned in detail in two of the history textbooks (Henretta, et al., 2014; Newman & Schmalbach, 2022). Those textbooks describe the successful Black community and

the African American World War I veterans who attempted to protect their community when Whites attacked after a young Black man nudged a White woman in an elevator.

Mexican Americans were also targeted during the early part of the 20th century. Under both Presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the federal government promoted the repatriation of Mexican citizens and deported them back to Mexico. Between 1929-1937, approximately half a million people of Mexican descent were deported. However, historians have estimated that more than 60 percent of those deported were legal citizens, making the actions of the U. S. government unconstitutional (Henretta, et al., 2014, p.757).

The internment of Japanese Americans under Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 during World War II was thoroughly discussed in all the textbooks. The textbooks described the conditions of the internment camps and the reason for the internment, "Home-Front Security" (Roark, et al., 2020, p. 750); however, only one textbook mentions what the Japanese American citizens lost. When the Japanese Americans were held in the internment camps, their homes, businesses, and wealth were taken away as well as their freedom (Roark, et al., 2020).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was heavily covered in all the textbooks. Many Black leaders were highlighted including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., U.S. Congressman John Lewis, and Fannie Lou Hamer. In addition, the textbooks did not shy away from mentioning the violence Black people in the movement faced. Civil rights movements of Asian Americans were never mentioned, and the only event highlighted around the civil rights of Mexican Americans was *Mendez v. Westminster* (Cayton, et al., 2005; Boyer & Stuckey, 2005; Henretta, et al., 2014; Roark, et al., 2020). *Mendez v. Westminster* of 1945 was a court case in California where Mexican American fathers sued a local school district for placing their children in a separate Mexican

school. This case became the basis for the seminal U.S. Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The Gay Rights movement of the 1960s and 70s was only examined in the latest textbooks (Henretta, et al., 2014; Roark, et al., 2020; Newman & Schmalbach, 2022). Those three textbooks discussed the Stonewall Inn Riot that sparked the movement. The Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village was regularly raided by police including the night of June 28, 1969. That particular raid did not go as planned when the patrol wagons were slow to arrive which meant patrons from the bar were mingling on the street. When one patron was roughed up, gay community members gathered outside of the bar began to riot. The riot at the Stonewall Inn is widely considered an important event leading up to the Gay Rights movement.

In the past, history textbooks were often written to highlight the positive parts of U.S. history. From this examination, it seems recent historians who write textbooks for high school students are attempting to include multiple perspectives. Overall, the histories of traditionally marginalized groups of Americans were mentioned, sometimes in great detail, in the high school history textbooks examined. The detail in which the events were described depended on the textbook. For example, one Advanced Placement (AP) textbook (Henretta, et al., 2014) chronicled events thoroughly and seemed to take care to include multiple perspectives, but the other AP textbook (Newman & Schmalbach, 2022) glossed over events often leaving out the names of individuals important to the history of the event or period.

History textbooks must cover multiple events across hundreds of years. Therefore, it is important for educators to seek out supplemental texts that are rich and authentic in detail. Texts, such as those mentioned above, and *We are Not Free* by Traci Chee (2020) or *In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse* (2015) by Joseph Marshall III and Jim Yellowhawk that are written from the

perspective of people who lived the historical events give students insight into history that cannot be gained from a textbook.

Trade Books

Trade books play an enormous role in schools by encouraging students to engage in information that enhances the curriculum taught in schools. Trade books present diverse content and perspectives, offer new and interesting facts, and spark inquiry (Hodges, Wright, Coleman, Swain, & Schweiker, 2019). Historical fiction and nonfiction text encourage discussion, analysis, and critical thought. Through the use of intentional book and text selections, teachers can engage their students on a deeper level, utilizing historical fiction and nonfiction literature to create and foster a socially responsive classroom community.

We specifically choose to recognize historical fiction and nonfiction books for three major reasons. One, books are harder to challenge when based on historical facts. Two, both nonfiction and historical fiction offer students a means for exploring multiple perspectives, difficult topics, and engaging in critical debate (Diamond, 2017). And three, the stories in these books are not only educational, but fun, inspiring and filled with important voices. As Loewen (1995) states, "American history is full of fantastic and important stories. These stories have the power to spellbind audiences, even audiences of difficult seventh-graders" (p. 13).

Book Criteria

Books selected for this article had to meet certain criteria. First, the books had to be either nonfiction or thoroughly researched historical fiction. Secondly, the books had to be about a specific historical event, person, or place that had a major impact on United States history and offered a counternarrative to dominate knowledge. Finally, books needed to be authentic and written by a member of the community represented in the book or have won an award(s) from

the community. For this project it was critical that the books were viewed as authentic, factual, and an honest representation of the history. In addition to National Book Award winners, books chosen include winners of the American Indian Youth Literature Award, the Coretta Scott King Book Award, the Pura Belpre Award, the Stonewall Award, the Walter Dean Myers Award and others.

Recommended Trade Books with Alternative Perspectives

A Few Red Drops: The Chicago Race Riot of 1919

Author: Claire Hartfield, Genre: Nonfiction Topic: The Great Migration and Racial Violence

Coretta Scott King Award Winner, 2019

Carter G. Woodson Book at the Secondary Level Award, 2019

Summary

A Few Red Drops details an important time in Chicago history that led to the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. On July 27, 1919, five Black Chicago teenagers were trying to beat the heat by heading to a beach on Lake Michigan. Even though Illinois was the first state to strike down Black Laws and ratify the 13th amendment, city areas were segregated. White Chicagoans used the 29th Street beach, while Black Chicagoans used the 26th Street beach. Eugene Williams was swimming with four friends when the raft they had made floated into the “White side” of the water. George Stauber, a White teenager, began to throw rocks at the Black youth. A rock hit Eugene in the head, knocking him unconscious and causing him to drown.

Teaching Takeaways

A Few Drops of Red will give secondary students an understanding of the time period in United States history after Reconstruction and World War I when many formerly enslaved Black

families migrated from the south to the north and west looking for jobs. *A Few Drops of Red* along with *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* (Weatherford, 2021), *Black Birds in the Sky* (Colbert, 2021) and *Crow* (Wright, 2013) would support a unit on the great migration and the racial violence that followed.

Crossing Ebenezer Creek

Author: Tonya Bolden Genre: Historical Fiction Topic: Civil War

Kirkus Reviews- Young Adults - Best Books, 2017

School Library Journal- Young Adults - Best Books, 2017

Summary

Crossing Ebenezer Creek is the haunting tale of Sherman's March to the Sea, where he and the Yankee army released many of the enslaved people from plantations, to then follow him on his way to Savannah, Georgia. The story follows the main character Mariah who leaves the plantation with her younger brother and a mentally ill 'grandmother figure' to be free. During the journey south, Mariah aligns with a subset community, one that includes a free-born Black man who has a carriage, which makes their journey quite a bit easier. While the freedom, and the process of freeing enslaved people from the northern army is typically associated with positive historical association, *Crossing Ebenezer Creek* showcases the animosity of some of the generals/leaders of the northern army towards people who were enslaved, as well as the treacherous massacre at the end of this march.

Teaching Takeaways

The events of Ebenezer Creek specifically highlight power and tension within groups, even those that were historically known to have "been on the same side." It should be reinforced through the reading of this text that there has forever been a hierarchy of value; and history has covered up

how that power has been maintained. Even in moments known for the freedom it afforded some, it clearly restricted that freedom/power from others.

From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement

Author: Paula Yoo Genre: Nonfiction Topic: Asian American Movement

The Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Nonfiction, 2021

National Book Award, Young People's Literature-Longlist, 2021

Excellence to Young Adult Nonfiction Finalist, 2022

Summary

From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry accounts the tragic death of Vincent Chin, a twenty-five-year-old Chinese American and aspiring photographer in the racially charged climate of Detroit in the 1980s. This nonfiction book for young adults and adult readers details the events the night of Vincent's death when autoworker Ronald Eben and his stepson, Michael Nitz beat Vincent to death over an altercation at a nearby bar. Autoworkers in Detroit were angry that sales for American-made cars were down because Japanese car sales were rising which brought on simmering resentment toward Asian Americans. When Eben and Nitz were given probation and a \$3000 fine for their crime, Asian Americans in Detroit protested. These protests led to a federal civil rights trial, the United States v. Eben and Nitz and became the first case prosecuted under the 1964 Civil Right Act for violations against Asian-Americans.

Teaching Takeaways

Mention of the Asian-American Rights movement in the 1980s in high school history books is scarce, or non-existent. By reading this book, students will learn that the 1980s was the first time that Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese Americans banded together to gain civil rights

in the United States. This book details the events that led up to the movement and gives insight into Asian American leaders who were a part of a pivotal moment in civil rights history. This book can be part of a multimodal unit of study including the award winning documentary, *Vincent Who?* from filmmaker Curtis Chin (2018) and tied into current instances of racial violence against Asian Americans with articles such as “Teaching About Anti-Asian Violence: Start with Yourself and Your Community” (Facing Today, 2022).

I Am Not a Number

Authors: Dr. Jenny Kay Dupuis, Kathy Kacer, Translators: Muriel Sawyer Geraldine

McLeod Genre: Historical Fiction Topic: Indigenous Residential Schools

Red Cedar Award for Information Book Winner, 2018

Hackmatack Award Winner - Atlantic Children's Choice Book Award, 2018

Diamond Willow Award Winner, 2018

Summary

I Am Not a Number is based on a true story of a young girl, Irene, who is taken away from her family to attend an Indigenous residential school. Upon arriving at school, Irene is given a number that is her identifier by which she will now be called. In the late 1800s, the governments of the United States and Canada decided to colonize North America’s Indigenous people by forcing them to conform to European ways. One way this was accomplished was to send Indigenous children to residential schools where they learned European culture, religion, and language and spent the rest of their time cleaning the school and tending the garden. The children were made to physically conform to White standards by dressing the same and cutting their traditionally long hair. *I Am Not a Number* tells a version of this experience. The story ends with Irene being home on holiday, and the family having to weigh the risks of making sure their

children won't go back. Taking place in Canada, *I Am Not a Number* is our only selection outside of the United States. We chose to still include this text as it has historical content that is significant to the Indigenous populations of the United States. *I Am Not a Number* is also available in a dual language edition, in Nishnaabemwin (Ojibwe) Nbisiiing dialect and English.

Teaching Takeaways

I am Not a Number should be taught with a lesson on valuing all peoples and cultures. It should lead into exploration into different cultures, their traditions and ways. Final points should be made to include the fact that no one-culture is better than another, nor that we should try to change others to resist their culture and traditions.

In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse

Authors: Joseph M. Marshall III and Jim Yellowhawk Genre: Historical Fiction Topic:

Indigenous History

American Indian Youth Leadership Award, 2016

Summary

Jimmy, a Lakota youth, is struggling to find his place, be proud of his heritage, and avoid bullying in school. He sets off on a journey with his grandfather to retrace the steps of Crazy Horse, learning his journey from youth to leader. In this process, Jimmy is brought to actual locations in North Dakota, South Dakota and Nevada, that memorialize the battles between the Indigenous people and the U.S Military. At each of these locations Jimmy's grandfather shares the harrowing stories of the battles from the Indigenous peoples' perspective, a perspective seldomly covered. Marshall uses *In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse* as an opportunity to set the record straight. Marshall sets up each battle for the root causes and tensions that were building up, and the maltreatment of the Indigenous peoples during this time. Where history books

oftentimes present the Indigenous culture as the aggressors, this text switches the narrative. In this storytelling, exploration and journey with his grandfather, Jimmy returns home with a new sense of pride and understanding for not only his people, but his tradition, and everything that they have overcome.

Teaching Takeaways

One of the greatest Takeaways from this book is the importance of perspective. It is vitally important for students to understand perspective and how the story-even historical events-change based on the lense/perspective it is coming from. This wonderful book can set students up to dig deeper into other historical events to get a broader understanding, specifically when subordinate cultures in America are up against the U.S. government. An additional take-away is the pride instilled in Jimmy from learning the true history of his people.

Last Night at the Telegraph Club

Author: Malinda Lo Genre: Historical Fiction Topic: LGBTQ+, The Red Scare

Michael Printz Honor Winner, 2022

Stonewall Award Winner, 2022

Asian/Pacific American Award for Youth Literature, 2022

Summary

Last Night at the Telegraph Club tells an amazing story of strength, courage and love in a time rarely spoken of in United States history, The Red Scare. Readers are exposed to numerous often ignored critical historical events. Starting in the 1920s, Chinese Americans lived in fear of deportation, harassment and physical harm from those who feared that being Chinese equals being a communist. Along with the Red Scare, the 1950s were a time of the opening of more and more underground clubs for those who identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. In

1955, the Daughters of the Bilitis, the first lesbian rights club in the United States, opened in San Francisco. This resulted in a time when being a young Chinese-American teen and a member of the LGBTQ+ community had to be hidden from family and community. In this rarely explored historical time period, Lily Hu navigates her emerging personal identity and new love, while hiding her visits to the Telegraph Club from her parents for fear of backlash and deportation.

Teaching Takeaways

The idea of intersectionality, that people have multiple perspectives, experiences, and identities helps students become critical thinkers as they navigate stereotypes built on historical inaccuracies and heroification. *The Telegraph Club* will work well as a mentor text in a unit on identity; the following titles would pair well *When My Name Was Keoko* (Park, 2002), *Code Name Verity* (Wein, 2012) and *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (Curtis, 1995).

Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation

Author: Duncan Tonatiuh Genre: Nonfiction Topic: Segregation

Carter G. Woodson Book Award - Winner, 2015

Pura Belpre - Illustrator Honor, 2015

Robert F. Sibert - Honor, 2015

Orbis Pictus - Honor, 2015

Summary

In the rarely taught story of Sylvia Mendez, readers learn about the racist ideology of White Californians who segregated White students and Mexican students into different schools.

Arriving at her new home and eager to continue her education, Sylvia and her brothers are told they must attend the dilapidated Mexican school across town, while her cousins, who appeared White, could attend the nearby well-resourced White School. Because of the strength of Sylvia's

father and others, a suit is brought forth that sets the precedent for *Brown v. Board of Education*. The horrors of what racism, prejudice and privilege are in American society are visible using actual language from the court transcript. Through commitment and a belief in the power of the law, Sylvia's father (born in Mexico, U.S. citizen) pulled together support from enough families in California, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Japanese American Citizens League, the American Jewish Congress and others to overturn the segregated school in California, setting the legal and moral groundwork for school desegregation. This lawsuit also contained two key leaders of school integration, Thurgood Marshall and Earl Warren, both of whom supported the case. When Sylvia asked her mother why so many people whom she had never met would help them, her mother (born a U.S. citizen in Puerto Rico) said, "Cuando la Causa es justa, los demás te siguen." "When you fight for justice, others will follow."

Teaching Takeaways

The *Brown v. Board of Education* case is taught in schools as the only time people stood up for their educational rights. It leaves students seeing desegregation as only a Black/White issue. However, when teachers include the Mendez story, especially with direct quotations about the stereotypes presented about those who identify as Mexican/Latinx, it broadens the conversation and expands the narrative. Use *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* (Bridges, 2009), *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (Taylor, 1976) and *Fatty Legs* (Jordan-Fenton & Pokiak-Fenton, 2010) together in a unit with *Separate is Never Equal*.

Stonewall: A Building. An Uprising. A Revolution.

Author: Rob Sanders Genre: Nonfiction Topic: Gay Rights Movement

Florida Book Awards Silver Medal Younger Children's Literature, 2020

Living the Dream Book Award, 2020

Summary

The Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village is an important landmark in the civil rights movement of LGBTQ+ Americans. Rob Sanders' picture book, *Stonewall: A Building. An Uprising. A Revolution.*, beautifully illustrated by Jamey Christoph, tells the history of the building, starting in the 1840s as two horse and carriage stables that eventually became the Stonewall Inn. The story is told from the perspective of the building and the history that it witnessed. The book presents repeated and unprovoked police raids at the Stonewall Inn when it became a place for people in the LGBTQ+ community to socialize. The police raid of June 28, 1969 was the last straw. It began an uprising that sparked the Gay Rights Movement of the 1970s.

Teaching Takeaways

Teachers can use this picture book to introduce students to the Gay Rights Movement of the 1970s and the history of LGBTQ+ Americans. Other Rob Sanders' books such as *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* (2018), *The Mother of the Movement: Jeanne Manford—Ally, Activist, and Co-Founder of PFLAG* (2022), *Two Grooms on a Cake: The Story of America's First Gay Wedding* (2021), and *Stitch by Stitch: Cleave Jones and the Aids Memorial Quilt* (2021) would round out a unit on LGBTQ+ rights.

Undocumented: A Worker's Fight

Author: Duncan Tonatuih Genre: Nonfiction Topic: Undocumented Workers

ILA Young Adults' Choices Reading List, 2019

Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People, 2019

Summary

Juan crossed over into the United States from Mexico when he was only 18 years old, in search of a more prosperous life. Having taken risks just to come to the United States, he continues to take risks in keeping a job and fighting for what is right. After being hired to work, Juan learns that he is being paid half of what the minimum wage is at the time. He decides to take it upon himself to file a grievance against his boss for higher wages. Of course, Juan cannot do this alone. *Tonatuit* tells a tale of a passionate immigrant who works to be compensated for his hard work, whether he has legal papers or not. As shown in this book, it takes the strength of a community to make a difference.

Teaching Takeaways

Students can and should learn the importance of fighting for what is fair and not feeling the need to settle. It also shows how a group, when they come together, can stand up against bullies who are taking advantage of their vulnerability.

Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre

Author: Carole Boston Weatherford Genre: Nonfiction Topic: Tulsa Massacre

Coretta Scott King Book Awards for Author and Illustrator, 2022

Caldecott Honor Book, 2022

Sibert Honor Book, 2022

Summary

Unspeakable showcases the successful district where the Black community was financially thriving, allowing the Black community to have privileges that not only matched, but rose beyond those of their counterpart White population across the train tracks. Greenwood District, known as “Black Wall Street” had some of the most prominent Black surgeons, doctors, and lawyers in the country. All of the businesses owned in the Greenwood district were Black

owned, creating an outward sign to all that a Black community can achieve wealth, success, and recognition. The year was 1921, and positioned in the deep-rooted-segregated south, the success of Greenwood district did not sit well with everyone. *Unspeakable, the Tulsa Race Massacre* outlines the plotting, destruction, and blatant racist reactions of the White community against the Greenwood community. Through calculated action, and a media encouraged outcry, the White population completely destroyed the entire Black community, burning down everything that this community had worked for, forcing many to flee, having lost all of their wealth and success.

Teaching Takeaways

A major take-away from this text is the power and hatefulness associated with greed. An entire thriving community was destroyed over jealousy. The jealousy came from the perceived notion that the White community deserved better than their neighbors, a notion seen in other historic episodes.

We Are Not Free

Author: Traci Chee Genre: Historical fiction Topic: Japanese Internment Camps

Michel L. Printz - Honor, 2021

National Book Award for Young People's Literature - Finalist, 2021

Walter Dean Myers - Honor, 2021

Summary

We Are Not Free personally follows the multiple journeys of San Francisco Japanese teenagers and families from before January 19, 1942 and the issue of Executive Order 9066, to the final closing of all internment camps and the aftermath. Most of the teens in the book are sent to the same camp in Topaz, Utah, where their friendships are tested by conditions, loyalty and love. What is most remarkable about *We Are Not Free* is how many historical facts so often either

taught in isolation or not taught at all are so well explained, especially when families and friends collide on different sides of the issues. Readers learn what a No-No was, about the rescue of the Texas Lost Battalion by the segregated Japanese 442 Unit Regimental Combat Team, the murder of an elder trying to save a dog, and the revolts; all historical facts that rarely, or never, are part of school history.

Teaching Takeaways

We are not Free carries a variety of important lessons that can be reinforced with this novel. The first being, there was no *one* experience in the internment camps. It is important to not fall into the trap of generalizing this experience. The second is the importance of the whole story from a variety of perspectives. This novel allows for critical comparison of a variety of stories that make up a whole. And finally, lesson surrounding the love for your family, your friends, and your country, yet the fact that they can still be ill-treated by society. These lessons are imperative for students to know and understand.

Discussion

The books shared in this article are only a small portion of the exceptional nonfiction and historical fiction books for students in K-12 schools. We specifically set out to draw attention to books and events not currently being consistently taught in schools that offer a counternarrative. As Jupp (2011) pointed out “Counter-narratives, rather than reach for generalizable notions of history as social progress, emphasize specific events, struggles, and ruptures in history and provide a backdrop for recognizing struggles taking place elsewhere” (Jupp, 2011, p. 101).

By including counternarrative historical trade books as a regular part of their curriculum, educators acknowledge a history less taught, creating validation to the individuals with whom that history represents. It is therefore vital these texts not only have a place in classroom

libraries, but also in regular rotation as read alouds, in the curriculum, and as recommendations for students' independent reading.

As noted with each book, they are not simply to be read and enjoyed but to be specifically taught. These trade books should create conversations, inspire inquiry, and guide curriculum in specific ways. We identified *potential* teaching ideas associated with each text, but these should act as springboards, rather than stopping points. Utilizing these texts should encourage students' curiosities, offer counternarratives, and encourage critical reflection on why certain aspects and people in history are accepted while others are invisible.

In closing, counternarratives are not only critical, they are factual. They bring stories out of hiding that may be uncomfortable for some, but empowering for those whose voices are so often silenced, because as mentioned above, "Whose knowledge is of most worth?" The question is, when will the systematic whitewashing and sugarcoating of knowledge give way to teaching true knowledge, all of it. We are reminded by the African proverb (King, 2014), "Until the lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter." (p. 2).

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