



Tips for Parents: Multicultural Education

Out of many, one

Some people fear that the study of ethnic diversity will threaten our national unity. The real danger, however, may be the lack of understanding among the various ethnic groups in our society.

As the ethnic make-up of the nation becomes more complex, problems related to cultural identity are likely to grow. A multicultural curriculum seeks to ease these problems by helping students recognize and appreciate how various cultural groups—including their own—contribute to our rich and unique heritage.

A balanced curriculum

Another important aim of multicultural education is to present a more balanced view of the world. Supporters of multicultural education encourage schools to discuss history and society from more than one perspective and to explore both the positive and negative aspects of our society's multicultural development.

The driving force behind multicultural education is numbers. As people of color make up a larger and larger percentage of the population, educators need to acknowledge and respond to their diversity. Women are also demanding that the curriculum include feminist views and give more emphasis to their role in history.

The larger experience

Multiculturalism is not about separatism. Within our diverse cultural groups there are a multitude of values and experiences, some similar, some different. When the various cultural groups interact, their interaction may produce a new cultural experience. These experiences can become one of our country's greatest strengths—providing us with greater knowledge, skills, and values.

Unfortunately, many school curricula do not acknowledge ethnic diversity. Often, children of African-American, American Indian, or Hispanic descent experience alienation—resulting in lack of confidence and direction.

Traditional curricula tend to omit the invaluable contributions and sacrifices made by these groups. The emphasis on the accomplishments of white males to the exclusion those made by women and people of color not only misrepresents history, it is unfair to students.

Textbooks

To implement a successful multicultural curriculum, students must have appropriate instructional material. Reflecting the diversity and complexity of our history is a difficult task facing textbook

publishers. Without revising curriculum materials, multicultural education cannot effectively proceed.

Multicultural Books

As parents, you can expose your children to literature that deals with cultural diversity. This is part of a list of must-have multicultural books compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, in the University of Wisconsin-Madison:

Preschool:

- **What a Wonderful World** by George David Weiss and Bob Thiele, illustrated by Ashley Bryan. Atheneum, 1995.(Multi-ethnic)
- **One Afternoon** by Yumi Heo. Orchard, 1994. (Asian Pacific American)
- **Grandmother's Nursery Rhymes/Las Nanas de Abuelita** by Nelly Palacio Jaramillo, illustrated by Elivia. Holt, 1994. (Latino)

Ages 5-7

- **Drumbeat... Heartbeat: A Celebration of the Powwow** by Susan Braine. Lerner, 1995. (American Indian)
- **Halmoni and the Picnic** by Sook Nyul Choi, illustrated by Karen M. Dugan. Houghton Mifflin, 1993. (Asian Pacific American)
- **Hairs/Pelitos** by Sandra Cisneros, illustrated by Terry Ybáñez. Knopf, 1994. (Latino)
- **Honey, I Love, and Other Poems** by Eloise Greenfield, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. Harper, 1978. (African American)

Ages 7-9

- **My Name Is Maria Isabel** by Alma Flor Ada. Atheneum, 1993. (Latino)
- **From the Bellybutton of the Moon, and Other Summer Poems/Del Ombligo de la Luna, y Otros Poemas de Verano** by Francisco X. Alarcon, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez. Children's Book Press, 1998. (Latino)
- **Golden Tales: Myths, Legends and Folktales from Latin America** by Lulu Delacre. Scholastic, 1996. (Latino)

Ages 9-12

- **Through My Eyes** by Ruby Bridges. Scholastic, 1999. (African American)
- **American Indian Animal Stories** by Joseph Bruchac. Fulcrum, 1992. (American Indian)
- **Bud, Not Buddy** by Christopher Paul Curtis. Delacorte, 1999. (African American)
- **The Birchbark House** by Louise Erdrich. Hyperion, 1999. (American Indian)
- **The Journey: Japanese Americans, Racism and Renewal** by Sheila Hamanaka. Orchard, 1990. (Asian Pacific American)

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