

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY PORTRAYAL
OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN
CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

By

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Introduction

Through literature and books children create worlds and make the world they live in more bearable. Children create an image of themselves and the people around them by what they observe. Since books are part of the children's world and also how they identify with others, it is important the books present a positive image of the child as well as others.

The issue is that at an early age children take what they see around them to create their knowledge base and also their reality. For many years children's books have portrayed stereotypical images of minority groups in illustrations and text. This is particularly true for African Americans. In the 1960s, 70s and earlier, many people created the impressions they had of African Americans from what they read, be it the newspaper, magazines, or books. The problem here was that African Americans were not writing about African Americans. Augusta Baker stated, "most authors were white with little knowledge about Black life and yet they wrote as if they were authorities." (Baker, 79) The issue was not that non-whites could not write about the African American experience, but where they were getting their ideas. To write about the experience well, the writer must "immerse himself in the history or period or in the life of the main character, he must in some degree 'wear the shoe' to report the experience accurately." (Thompson, 416) Even with this immersion in history and culture it doesn't mean that anyone and everyone will be able to "wear the shoe." Authors must first be knowledgeable and conscious of African American culture. They must also be aware of

their own bias and prejudices. Authors should also be knowledgeable of stereotypes and other things that may be offensive by African Americans. One example of this is the story of Little Black Sambo. Many whites remember this story with fond memory, but many African Americans find the book offensive. Along with stereotypes, some authors may share misinformation about life or other groups. Sanders says, “if a child perceives them as reality, the story that depicts them as all happy and kind and one that depicts them as all stupid and angry are equally misinforming.” (Sanders, 19). Even if this misinformation is given unintentionally, it can in no way help the child deal with people or life any differently?

For many, children's literature and books assist them in creating their self-image. They look at the pictures and read the words to see how they should be and act. If a child is confronted with dialect and chopped language full of apostrophes or illustrations of a very dark child with white eyes and a large white smile or even a family that is poor and broken, then what will the child realize about himself? This image may increase the feelings of inferiority and low self worth. The images of African Americans in books can not only decrease their self-image, but they can also be very influential to non-African American children and their perceptions of African Americans. One example of this problem is that for a long time, few children knew that African American children were just like them. The books did not show African American children in the same situations or having the same experiences. The images presented in books and early literature reinforced the stereotypes and misinformed beliefs about African Americans.

This study is a review of the contemporary portrayal of African Americans in children's literature. The study will seek to find out if the picture books have become

more positive and realistic in the portrayal of African Americans. The study focuses on recommended picture books from the reference source A to Zoo, in order to answer the question: How are African Americans portrayed in selected, current, children's picture books?

Operational Definitions

Stereotype – Lipmann describes it as follows: “a fixed impression which conforms very little to the facts it pretends to represent and results from our defining first and observing second.” (Katz and Braly, 1958, 41)

Picture Book – “A fiction or non-fiction title with illustrations occupying as much or more space than the text and with text vocabulary or concepts suitable for preschool to grade two.” (Lima, 1998, ix)

African Americans – The race of people originating in Africa, also referred to as Blacks or Americans of African descent.

Image – as defined by American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language refers to the concept of someone that is held by the public, the character projected to the public.

Literature Review

“Heterogeneity breeds generality and thus leading characters become members of the dominant and presumably the best recognized group. (Berelson and Salter, 1946, 187-88)

Many individuals have different beliefs about the power of books. Books in certain hands have the power to reflect the interests of a group or to tell its readers what to think. The Council on Interracial Books for Children was founded in 1966 with the mission to “promote learning materials that embody the principles of cultural pluralism and are free of sexist, racist, ageist, or handicapist bias.” (Council, 1980, 1)

The Council sought to provide guidelines for selection of bias free materials. The Council created guidelines for representation dealing with the many ethnic, as well as other minority, groups. When looking at ethnic portrayals the Council believes it is necessary to examine several areas to create a complete evaluation of the title. The areas needed for coverage are characterization, language and terminology, historical accuracy, cultural accuracy and illustrations. Other areas that should be included are perspective and image.

Perspective

Thompson and Woodward (1969) discuss how Blacks are portrayed in books. They discuss how important the Black perspective is and that books are true-to-life in relation to the Black reality as well as a child’s experience. The authors feel people must ask themselves several questions to decide how the Black experience should be told, such

as: should ethnic experiences be removed for the sake of racial harmony? Do the universal stories, things that almost every child experiences, such as a picnic or getting a new pet, take away from the cultural or historic meaning of being Black?

In her dissertation Cobb (1992) found several trends about the portrayal of African and Hispanic Americans. Cobb looked at the representation of the two groups in respect to images, characterizations and stereotypes. The study found that overall the number of resources about African and Hispanic Americans was very low. The study also found that although the number of books about African and Hispanic Americans was small, there was a favorable representation, but subtle stereotypes did exist.

Shoultz's study (1992) investigated how Black authors portrayed Black characters in children's fiction. A content analysis of books published between 1970 and 1985 was used for the study. She found that Black authors portrayed characters in a positive light. The study answered questions dealing with family relationships, hostility, loneliness, crisis situations, self-improvement, friendship and self-awareness.

Image

Sunar (1978) discusses how power relationships define stereotypes. The study also talks about how certain types of power lend themselves to justify the status of and beliefs about the powerless group. Sunar believes stereotypes "can be explained as the resultant of forces which regularly emerge in a relationship based on coercive power." (p. 525) The powerful group has to make generalizations about the powerless group in order to maintain their power, and to support their reasoning behind the poor treatment of the powerless group. Sunar states "the theory holds that all attitudes (or in this case social

perceptions) serve to maintain and enhance the individual's stability and adaptiveness by serving certain functions or fulfilling certain needs in his personality.” (p. 515)

Taylor (1976) discusses how stereotypes affect the discriminated group. Taylor reviewed previous and current research on Blacks and psychological development. He says “Blacks self-esteem suffers because Blacks are continually subjected to negative images of themselves through the reactions of others to them.” (p. 6) Taylor states “a member of a disparaged and discriminated against social category is likely to internalize the meanings appended to the cultures stereotypes and to the social realities of the way he is treated. And [sic] thus come to conceive of himself in cognitive and evaluative terms very similar to the discrediting rejection accorded his group by the society's majority.” (p. 8) He discusses how over time many of the studies about Blacks and psychological development were not well done and could not be used to make blanket generalizations about all Blacks. He recommends further, more reliable studies be done to give a true picture of African Americans.

In 1933, Katz and Braly did a study of 100 white students at Princeton to find out their beliefs of certain ethnic groups. The students were given a list of 84 terms and were asked to assign the terms to 10 ethnic groups. The study compiled the 12 names most frequently assigned to African Americans and the number of respondents who agreed with that designation:

Superstitious	84	Very Religious	24
Lazy	75	Stupid	22
Happy-go-Lucky	38	Physically dirty	17
Ignorant	38	Naïve	14
Musical	26	Slovenly	13
Ostentatious	26	Unreliable	12

Katz and Braly found that public and private attitudes were grouped together. The students based their beliefs on private relationships and friendships with people of the particular ethnic group. The public knowledge is also another place where beliefs can arise. An example of this is given in the study in reference to Germans. Germany is known for its devotion to the applied sciences and the advances that Germany has made in that area. In the study, 78% of the students believed that Germans were scientifically minded, though many of the students knew no know Germans and were just relating their beliefs based on what they had heard or read.

Meenes (1943) reproduced the study using Black students at Howard in 1935 and 1942. The results follow:

1935

Musical	85	Jovial	26
Very Religious	83	Imitative	26
Superstitious	71	Ostentatious	22
Happy Go Lucky	51	Talkative	20
Loud	39	Generous	18
Pleasure Loving	33	Kind	18

1942

Superstitious	52	Loud	22
Musical	44	Imitative	19
Pleasure Loving	41	Faithful	18
Very Religious	27	Lazy	18
Jovial	26	Ostentatious	15
Happy Go Lucky	23	Gregarious	13

In comparison the two studies showed that the Blacks and whites had about the same image of Blacks, albeit stereotypical. The studies also show how personal relationships and associations with people, information from other sources, and public opinion can influence beliefs and reinforce stereotypes.

Jones (1971) reviewed the portrayal of Black characters in Nancy Drew stories. The study looked at the first seventeen titles in the Nancy Drew series. There were seventeen African American characters. Only four affected the action of the story and only four of the characters were given names. The seventeen characters included five maids, four porters, two cooks, one elevator operator, one woman who applies for work as a servant and two men with no occupation other than their criminal activities. (p. 121-22) At times the characters are called “darky”, and “negress” among other things. The characters speak inferior English and “waddle” and “shuffle along.” He found the early titles perpetuated stereotypes of Blacks by casting them in menial jobs, by using unintelligent dialect, and by making Blacks refer to other adults as “sir”, “ma’am” or “master”. Jones admits that readers were probably not aware of the African American characters or their characterization when following Nancy’s adventures. However, the characterizations could reinforce harmful beliefs and stereotypes. The possible damage would not be done until the reader meets an African American and reflects the belief he or she has learned from reading onto the person. The stories are read widely by many children, and the images reinforced adult attitudes about minority groups on a population of impressionable children. This study showed how simple characterization could possibly influence children’s perceptions of African Americans.

Wunderlich (1974) sampled recently published trade books to see if African Americans were being included. She randomly selected twenty-five titles from 175 books purchased for the children’s collection at a mid-western university in 1972. Five of the titles were unsuitable for the study. She found that 25% of the books contained African American main characters and another 5% included African Americans in illustration

only. Wunderlich found that “60% of books presented a positive sensitivity toward minority groups while the remaining 40% had no negative sensitivity.” (p. 283) This research was modeled after a study done by Nancy Larrick, who surveyed 5,206 children’s books published in 1962, 1963 and 1964. “Larrick found only 6.4% of those titles included African Americans and that presence could have been a brown face in a crowd. Also when African folktales and historical stories were eliminated the percentage fell to .8 %.” (p. 282)

This study sought to find the current portrayal of African Americans in books at that time. Wunderlich found that African Americans were included in trade books more often in 1974 than in the 1960s as reported by Larrick. Wunderlich recommends, however, that schools and libraries need to be more conscious of selecting the best materials to represent minorities.

Methodology

The criteria for selection were books about African Americans or containing African American characters published in the 1980s and 1990s. I selected a sample from the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th editions of the reference source, A to Zoo. The subject heading of Ethnic groups in the U.S. – Afro-Americans was used as the population. In each edition, the titles were counted under the subject heading, and a random group was selected from the list. Using a random number table, I selected twenty titles based on their place in the list. For example, if 101 were selected from the table, then the 101st book would be added to the list. After the first twenty titles were selected, they were reviewed to see if the copyright date fell into the decades being studied. This process was continued until fifteen books were selected from each decade.

Using criteria from the Council on Interracial Books for Children and Starting Out Right by B. Latimer, a list of questions (Appendix A) was compiled to use in the evaluation of each book. The questions covered language, illustrations, authorship/illustratorship, character and story line/perspective. Each book was read and reviewed based on the compiled list of questions. On the content analysis form there was a place provided for comments. This section allowed elaboration on some items and also gave space to comment on items that needed to be recorded, but did not necessarily answer a question.

Language

The language section discussed how African Americans spoke in the books. Is the character using dialect, inferior or substandard English? Inferior or substandard English could be the repeated use of the word “ain’t,” or dropping the endings of words. An example of this would be “I’m goin’” or “She’s a kin’ person.” Do all characters in the story use the same language? It is also stereotypical when the language is not appropriate to the story; for instance, a story set in a northern city, with an African American character who speaks with a southern dialect though he and his parents have lived in the north all of their lives, or a southern girl in a current setting who speaks in dialect or inferior English reminiscent of the Old South. Another instance to look for is if the African American character is depicted in a situation with white characters and the African American is the only person using dialect or substandard English. This situation could reinforce feelings of inferiority in African American readers or feelings of superiority in white readers. If the language is necessary for the telling of the story, is it done realistically? This section also looks at the terms used to describe characters. Do adults refer to African American adults as “boy” or “girl”? The text is also reviewed for use of such words as “stupid” or “musical,” or African Americans in menial jobs such as butlers or maids.

Illustration

The illustration section looked for some of the same issues as in the other categories but focused on how they were portrayed in the pictures. The study looks for diverse pictures of African Americans and how they are seen in relation to others. When

viewing pictures of African American characters do they look human? Are features exaggerated; for example, do the characters have large bulging white eyes or large lips? Are the pictures of African Americans, just white characters painted brown? Some illustrations do not include the features that make African Americans unique. Also is the clothing the character is wearing appropriate for the situation? For example, is there a picture of a formal program where the children are wearing dresses and suits but the African American character has on jeans and sneakers? Are African Americans only seen in the background of the pictures or do they have a prominent place?

Characterization

Characterization describes the depiction of the characters. Are African American characters the poor family in the story? Are the characters accepting of their position or status? For example, are slaves happy and content in slavery or is a poor African American mother insistent that her child does not need an education, just a job because having book smarts does not pay any bills. Over time African Americans have been depicted as passive individuals, but history, the civil rights movement for example, proves that that was not the case. Characterization also includes how characters achieve success. Does the character have to have super human skill? An example of this is the boy who plays basketball really well, but that is all you know about him. Another example of this is the character that is complimented with phrases like, “I would never have thought you would be so good at math.” Also to achieve success, does the character have to give up part of himself such as African American friends, or personal identifiers such as clothes or hairstyles? Romanticizing the character and/or the story is another

example of characterization issues. In a story about racism does one little girl solve the problem of segregation in an entire town, with a single act?

Story line/Perspective

The story line/perspective reviews the issues taking place in the story. It deals with the issues by focusing on two areas. The first is the actual story being told, and the second is the perspective from which the story is being told. Is the story accurate or realistic? Does the ending seem too good to be true? For instance, does a poor family with a lot of problems suddenly solve all of their problems, when the daughter wins the spelling bee? This is not realistic and probably would never happen. Stories should have possible solutions. Also does the survival of African American characters depend on the kindness or intelligence of white characters? Do African American characters sacrifice themselves or their health and safety for the sake of a white character? An example, of this is an African American child willingly taking the blame and punishment for something he did not do to save his white friend.

The perspective area examines the honest portrayal of the African American experience. Why is the African American character included in the story? Is the story interesting on its own, or does it depend on the African American character to make it interesting? Is the story or the character mentioned or discussed to fulfill a quota? Does the book give African American readers a positive feeling about themselves, or does it make them feel disrespected? Is the Black experience depicted in the story? An example of this could be a story about the Holiday seasons and a class is discussing the season, but Kwanzaa is not discussed or brought up.

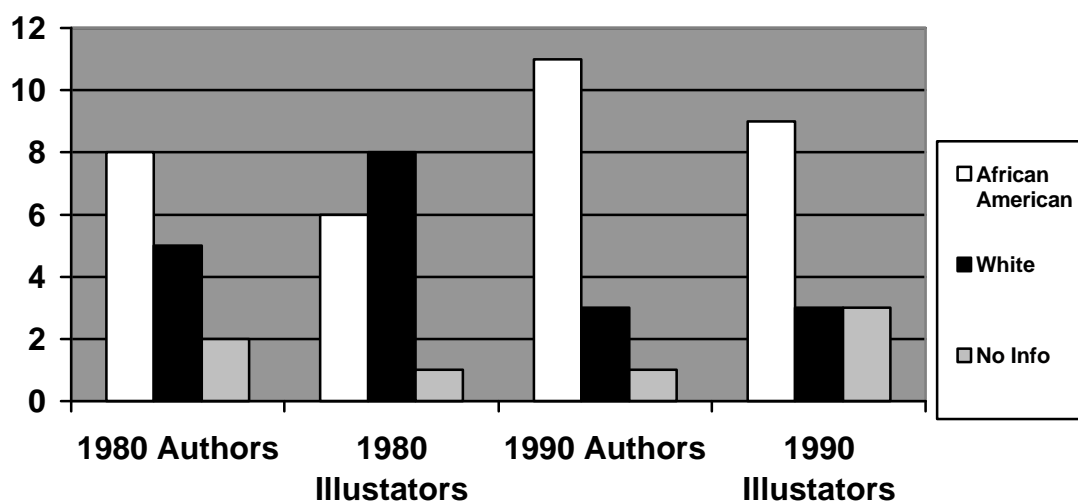
Content analysis was used as the method of research. Paisley defined content analysis as “a phase of information processing in which communication content is transformed, through objective and systematic application of categorization rules, into data that can be summarized and compared. (Holsti, 3) Babbie describes content analysis as follows: “as a mode of observation, content analysis requires a considered handling of the *what*, and the analysis of data collected in this mode, as in others, addresses the *why* and *with what effect*. (Babbie, 310)

The titles were gathered from various libraries. Each title was read, and then the evaluation form was completed for each title. After each book was evaluated, I was interested in finding out the background of the authors and illustrators. This information was used to see if there was any difference in the portrayal of African Americans by African American or white authors or illustrators. To find out their backgrounds, I used Black Authors and Illustrators of Books for Children and Young Adults, Something About the Author, Major Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults and Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators.

Results

Demographics

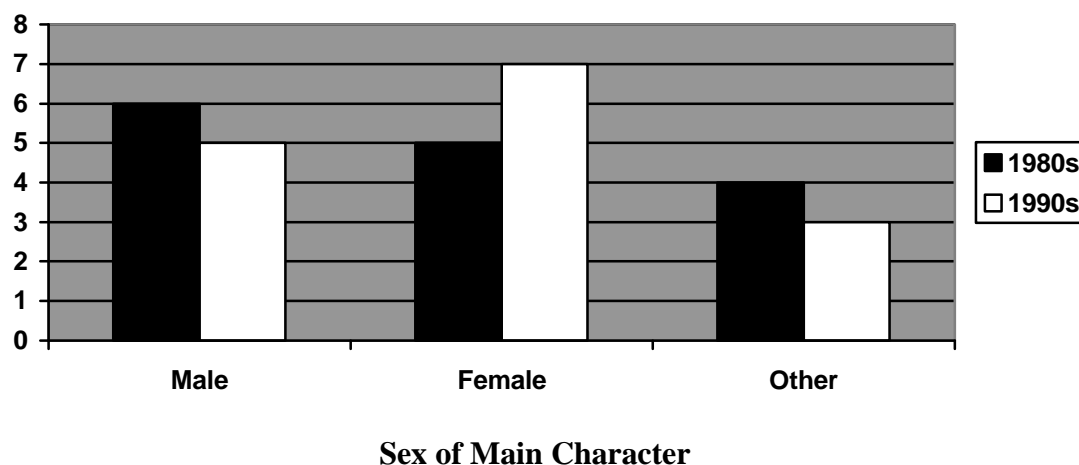
This section will discuss the backgrounds of the authors and illustrators and the sex of the main characters. In some instances the author and illustrator was the same person. In this case, the person was counted in both the author and illustrator categories. Also some authors and illustrators appeared on more than one title. In this instance also, the authors and illustrators were counted twice.



Ethnic breakdown of Authors and Illustrators

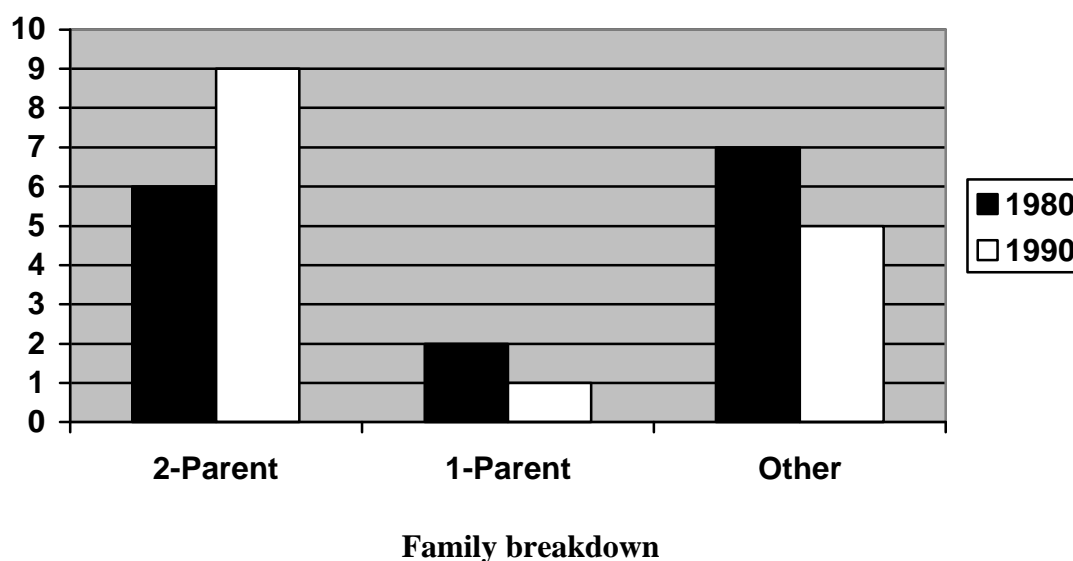
The fifteen books from the 1980s revealed the following information about the authors: African American authors – eight, white authors – five, and no information found – two. The fifteen books from the 1980s revealed the following information about the illustrators: African American authors – six, white authors – eight, and no information

The fifteen books from the 1990s revealed the following information about the authors: African American authors – eleven, white authors – three and no information found – one. The fifteen books from the 1990s revealed the following information about the illustrators: African American authors – nine, white authors – three, and no information found – three. These results show that more African American authors and illustrators were writing about the African American experience than white authors and illustrators.



The main character breakdown by sex yielded the following results. Male - eleven, and female – twelve. The remaining seven books contained no specific main character, or the book centered on a family. The first book included in the other category was Follow the Drinking Gourd, which was about five slaves from two different families. Dancing with the Indians and In for Winter, Out for Spring focused on an entire family more so than a specific family member. Spin a Soft Black Song, Daydreamers, Night on Neighborhood Street, and Children of Long Ago were story poems which included several families. This shows that both male and female characters are being used with

approximately the same frequency in this selection of contemporary African American literature.



Out of the 1980 titles, six stories contained two parent households and two were single parent homes with no mention of a father. The remaining seven included four stories with various families under one title, one story about a grandfather and grandson and one story about a man with no mention of his parents. One title is a single parent family, but the book lets the reader know that the father passed away.

Out of the 1990 titles, nine stories contained two parent households and one was a single parent home with no mention of a father. The other five titles fell into an other category. One title is a single parent family, but the book lets the reader know that the father passed away. The other titles in this category include one title about an entire family, two that do not mention parents at all, and one story that is about a grandfather and grandson.

Language

Question	1980s			1990s		
	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA
Is dialect used?	14	1	0	15	0	0
Does the language reinforce myth of Black inferiority or use of substandard English?	14	1	0	15	0	0
Is there a difference in language between white and black characters?(NA - no white characters)	3	0	12	2	0	13
Is there sexist, racist language or stereotypes?	14	1	0	15	0	0

In the 1980s group, the use of dialect was only evident in one title: Flossie and the Fox. The author noted she used the dialect to tell the story in the original tradition in which it was told. The use of dialect did not, in my opinion, create an atmosphere of the past, as the author wanted. Instead, this particular use of dialect added to the belief that African Americans use inferior or substandard English. Another problem with language arose in Jake and Honeybunch go to Heaven. The story uses stereotypical language to describe the main character. Jake is described as “foolish” and “superstitious,” which many people believe is a trait of African Americans as found in the study done by Katz and Braly (1933).

The books from the 1990s group did not use dialect or stereotypes. In Working Cotton, Shelan, the main character, does use substandard English; however, she is the only person in her family who talks this way. This could be attributed to her age and education level.

Illustrations

Question	1980s			1990s		
	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA
Is the portrayal of the character African American (yes) or brown-washed(no)?	0	15	0	0	15	0
Do Black characters look human?	0	15	0	1	14	0
Are Black features, skin tones, hairstyles and textures shown in their full variety?	0	15	0	0	15	0

Overall the illustrations from the 1980s were positive and realistic portrayals of African Americans in all their diverse forms. In Spin a Soft Black Song, the illustrator took care to draw people in varying shapes, sizes and complexions. Jamaica's Find, showed various realistic pictures. Jamaica wears her hair in braided ponytails. In the picture, the reader can see the wavy texture of her hair. One problem with the illustrations in Follow the Drinking Gourd was the unrealistic presentation of the slaves. The slaves' clothes were very clean. This would not have been the case for actual slaves in history. The clothes were also in great condition. Some of the slaves had patches on the clothing, but the clothing was not representative of the period.

The illustrations from the 1990 decade also contained realistic portrayals. The stories showed the diversity of the culture. Overall the situations and experiences were not particular to African Americans, so many children would be able to relate to the stories. There was one instance where a stereotypical image appeared in John Henry. When John Henry is born, his parents introduce him to the world; in this scene John

Henry strongly resembles a monkey. The images and their effects would depend on personal beliefs and interpretations of the readers.

Characters

Question	1980s			1990s		
	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA
Is the character or story romanticized?	14	1	0	14	1	
How are Black characters shown in relation to whites?(Positive – yes, NA – no white characters)	0	2	13	0	1	14
Are characters only portrayed as living in the ghetto or poor neighborhoods?	14	1		14	1	0

In the books from the 1980 decade, the characterization overall was positive and realistic. African American characters were not shown in an inferior position or in poor living conditions. In Flossie and the Fox, however, there was a conflict with the characterization. It was inferred that the story was taking place either during slavery or during the sharecropping period. In either case, Flossie's characterization was not realistic. If Flossie were a slave, she would not be allowed to move from plantation to plantation alone. If she were a child of a sharecropper, then her mother would not have sent her young daughter into the woods alone with a fox on the loose.

The characters were also seen as complex people with complex feelings. In Jamaica's Find, Jamaica is shown reasoning with herself whether she should keep the stuffed dog that does not belong to her. She is then portrayed as dealing with her guilt after she kept the dog. The books are portraying the characters in regular life with no mention of the economic class or of the characters living in a poor neighborhood or the ghetto. A negative characterization was found in Jake and Honeybunch go to Heaven. In

the story Jake is a comic figure, he walks around stooped over and the people of the town laugh at him. Jake is also poor and lives on the outskirts of Hard Times, the name of the town he is from. The image presented here speaks to stereotypes about African Americans.

In the 1990s the characters were in universal situations to which any child could relate. In Everett Anderson's Goodbye, Everett deals with the death of his father. Other stories dealt with varying topics such as playing in the rain or making music. The families were portrayed in various forms.

Story line/Perspective

Question	1980s			1990s		
	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA
Is there a happy ending that may not be true-to-life?	13	2		15	0	
Is the book taken from the Black perspective?	0	15		0	10	5
If the book is predominately white, how effective is the inclusion of Black characters? (none of the stories were predominately white)	0	0	15	0	0	15
Will story contribute to the positive self-image and respect of Black readers?	3	12	0	0	15	0
Does book illuminate critical aspects of the Black experience? (positive family relationships, Black responses to situations, development of culture, traditions, and institutions, supportive relationships among members of the community, role of each individual)	2	12	0	0	15	0

The story line in the fifteen titles presented a variety of situations. Some titles gave a glimpse into the African American experience, such as Spin a Soft Black Song, while others told stories about things families do together. One negative aspect brought out in one title was the behavior of Jake in Jake and Honeybunch go to Heaven. Jake

begins his travels to heaven, but when he gets there, he breaks in, and once he is inside he steals some wings off a clothesline. This is a negative image of African Americans. In previous books, stories relied on white characters to be the main focus and African Americans were the supporting characters. In this sample of books, African Americans were the main characters and if white characters were in the book, they were supporting characters. Spin a Soft Black Song did present one negative image in the story. In one of the poems a mother locks her child inside the house alone while she goes to work. Although this may be a true picture for some children it does shed negative light on the Black family experience.

The stories in the sample from the 1990s contained universal situations. In In For Winter Out for Spring, the story showed all the things families could do together as the seasons change. Other stories included children playing in the rain or solving a problem of a show-off at school. In this sample, two titles included white characters: Amy the therapist in Tanya and the Tobo Man and Rachel in Rachel Parker Kindergarten Show Off.

Conclusion

The changes in authorship and the feelings of African Americans have caused changes in the portrayal of African Americans in literature. Of the thirty books sampled, only two portrayed African Americans negatively. This shows that authors are becoming more aware of the bias they may bring to their writings. There are also more African Americans writing and illustrating the African American experience, and illustrators from all ethnic backgrounds are showing readers a diverse view of African American culture. This is the case with the variety of images presented in books such as Daydreamers by Eloise Greenfield and illustrated by Tom Feelings.

Another reason for the change in publishing of African American materials is the demand. According to the Statistical Abstract 1998, the estimated population of the United States in 1997 was 267, 901,000 and African Americans represented 33,947,000 of that population. African Americans represent a large portion of the population and they are looking for materials that present the culture in a positive light. It is now more profitable for publishers to print African American materials; however, some publishers do a better job of positive, realistic portrayals of African Americans than other publishers do.

This study found that the portrayal of African Americans over the past 20 years has been consistently positive in its portrayals, realistic situations and exclusion of stereotypes. There has also been a shift to experiences that are more universal among children. Many of the 1990s books reviewed were about spending time with

grandparents, playing with friends or being with your family. For example in Rain Feet, the story is about a little boy playing in the rain. This type of story shows children that overall they are alike. The situations seek to support the fact that African American children are like everyone else.

Overall the sample showed the language used was realistic, and there was not a difference in speech between the African American and white characters. The illustrations depicted the diversity of the African American culture in features, hairstyles and complexion. The characterization was positive, complex and the character's actions mirrored real life. The stories were universal; they could have been the experience of any child.

African American and other authors and illustrators must continue to create and portray African Americans in positive, realistic, and non-stereotypical situations. They must also be sure to show the diverse images of African Americans, be aware of their beliefs and biases, and be sure their biases do not negatively affect their work. Parents, librarians and other book buying and recommending adults should be aware of the power they wield. They must be sure the books they are buying, recommending and sharing with children are positive, realistic and not offensive to particular cultures. All of these suggestions will make the connection between children and books a better link.

Suggestions for Further Research

In another study, a sample of African American titles from earlier decades would be very helpful in studying the trends of African American literature and the portrayal of African American characters.

A study of the link between cultural portrayal in literature and psychological development and self esteem and self image would be beneficial in seeing how literature affects the development of children of a particular culture.

A future study could explore authors' and illustrators' ethnic and racial backgrounds to see how they portray characters of other groups as well as their own and whether the portrayal is realistic and positive.

A reproduction of the Nancy Larrick (1965) extensive study of African Americans in trade books over a period of a few years would be very beneficial.

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Appendix A: Content Analysis Form

Content Analysis Form

Title _____

Author _____ Background _____

Illustrator _____ Background _____

Bibliographic Information _____

_____ Copyright Date _____

Summary

Language

Is dialect used? Does it have a legitimate purpose? evoke disrespect or demean the reader?

Does the language reinforce myth of Black inferiority or use of substandard English?

Does the language work within the story?

Is there a difference in language between white and black characters?

Are loaded words used? (dark, jungle, primitive, boy, girl (ref. to an adult character) mulatto, etc.)

Is there sexist, racist language or stereotypes?

Comments

Illustrations

Is the portrayal of the character Black or brown-washed?

Does their clothing, behavior perpetuate stereotypes?

Are illustrations the only clue, that it is a story about Black experience?

Are Black features, skin tones, hairstyles and textures shown in their full variety?

Are Blacks prominent in pictures or are they back ground?

Do Black characters look human or are their features exaggerated?

Comments

Authorship/Illustratorship

Does the author use a patronizing or paternalistic voice?

Has the author/illustrator written about the Black experience before?

Comments

Character

Do characters accept their inferior position or injustice? Are they made responsible for it?
 Is the “Super-Black” syndrome apparent? (Blacks have to be super or have over-exaggerated skill to prosper)

Are the only characters portrayed those who are acceptable by society?

Is the character or story romanticized?

How are Black characters shown in relation to whites? Is either submissive, inferior passive or subordinate? Is the success/survival/well being from the generosity or concern of white people?

Are Blacks seen as devoid of skills and in need of instruction by whites?

How is success defined for Blacks? (losing dialect, forgetting traditions, acting white, etc.)

Are characters only portrayed as living in the ghetto or poor neighborhoods?

Comments**Story/Perspective**

Are customs and traditions seen as exotic?

Is protagonist sacrificed for the sake of a white person? Or are blacks more concerned about the health and safety of the white child?

Is the solution to the problem offered too simple for complex problem?

Is serious problem treated flippantly?

Is there a happy ending that may not be true-to-life?

Is the book taken from the Black perspective or do they take the Black perspective in account?

What is the purpose of the Black characters in the story? How are Black characters treated?

If the book is predominately white, how effective is the inclusion of Black characters?

Is it token integration?

Is the story interesting in itself or does it rely on Black characters?

How accurate is the story?

Will story contribute to the positive self-image and respect of Black readers?

Does book illuminate critical aspects of the Black experience? (positive family relationships, Black responses to situations, development of culture, traditions, and institutions, supportive relationships among members of the community, role of each individual)

Comments

Appendix B: Title Summaries

Title Summaries

Adoff, Arnold., illus. Jerry Pinkney. In for Winter, Out for Spring. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991.

Poems that tell about the seasons and how Rachel spends them with her family.

Clifton, Lucille., illus. Ann Grifalconi. Everett Anderson's Friend. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1992.

A new family moves into the building where Everett Anderson lives.

Unfortunately it's a family of girls and Everett does not like girls, especially those that can run fast and play ball. Eventually he needs Maria, the neighbor, and they become good friends.

Clifton, Lucille., illus. Ann Grifalconi. Everett Anderson's Goodbye. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1983.

Story of the five stages of grief. Everett Anderson's father dies and the book takes the reader and Everett through the five stages of grief.

Clifton, Lucille., illus. Thomas DiGrazia. My Friend Jacob. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980.

Jacob and Sam are neighbors and best friends. Sometimes they help each other do things. Jacob is older, and bigger and he is also retarded.

Flournoy, Valerie., illus. Diane De Groat. The Twins Strike Back. New York: Dial Press, 1980.

May and Ivy are tired of being mistreated by their big sister and cousin. They decide to play a trick on them so they will learn that twins are just like everyone else.

Giovanni, Nikki., illus. George Martins. (rev. ed). Spin A Soft Black Song. New York: Hill and Wang, 1985.

Poetry written about the Black experience with matching illustrations.

Greenfield, Eloise., illus. Tom Feelings. Daydreamers. New York: Dial Press, 1981.

Story/poem about daydreaming.

Greenfield, Eloise., illus. Jan Spivey Gilchrist. I Make Music. New York: Black Butterfly Children's Books, 1991.

Different way a little girl makes music using instruments and herself.

Greenfield, Eloise., illus. Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Night on Neighborhood Street. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1991.

Story/poems about things that happen in the night on Neighborhood Street.

Havill, Juanita., illus. Anne Sibley O'Brien. Jamaica's Find. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

Jamaica finds a stuffed dog in the park . She turns it in the next day because she feels guilty about keeping it. The next day she meets Kristin in the park and finds out the dog is hers. Jamaica takes her to the lost and found and gets her dog.

Hayes, Sarah., illus. Jan Ormerod. Eat Up, Gemma. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1988.

Gemma has been given food several times but she won't eat. At church, she tries to take fruit off a lady's hat to eat. So her brother makes a replica of the hat with a bowl, plate and real fruit. Gemma eats it up.

Hayes, Sarah., illus. Anne Grifalconi. Happy Christmas Gemma. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1986.

It is Gemma's first Christmas. She "helps", in her own way to get things ready for Christmas. She has a few adventures that day.

Johnson, Angela., illus. Dav Pilkey. Julius. New York: Orchard Books, 1993.

Maya's grandfather brings her an Alaskan pig for a present. The pig's job is to teach her sharing and fun. Maya also teaches the pig about manners. They learn and teach each other a lot and Maya shares the things she learns with her friends.

Johnson, Angela., illus., Rhonda Mitchell. Rain Feet. New York: Orchard Books, 1994.

Little boy has adventures in the rain.

Johnson, Angela., illus. David Soman. When I am Old With You. New York: Orchard Books, 1990.

A Boy tells his grandfather about all the things he will do with his grandfather when he gets old. They will do many things like go fishing, play cards and rock on the porch.

Johnson, Dolores. What Kind of Baby-Sitter is This?. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1991.

Kevin hates having a babysitter, they always ignore him and sit around reading romance novels, until his mom finds Mrs. Lovely, who eventually becomes Kevin's friend.

Koplow, Leslie., illus. Eric Velasquez. Tanya and the Tobo Man: A Story for Children Entering Therapy. New York: Magination Press, 1991. Spanish translation by Alexander Contos.

Tanya is having scary dreams and other fears about the Tobo Man. Her teacher recommends she see a therapist. A neighbor thinks she just needs a spanking. After spending some time with the therapist, Tanya finds out the reasons for her fear and anger.

Kroll, Virginia., illus. Nancy Carpenter. Masai and I. New York: Simon and Schuster for Young Readers, 1992.

Linda learns about the Masai people of East Africa at school. She starts comparing her life and the things she does to those things she would do if she were Masai.

Lester, Julius., illus. Jerry Pinkney. John Henry. New York: Dial Books, 1994.

The story of the legendary John Henry. This story is based on research done by the author and illustrator.

Little, Lessie Jones., illus. Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Children of Long Ago. New York: Philomel Books, 1988.

Poetry about the people and the things children and families of long ago did.

Martin, Ann., illus. Nancy Poydar. Rachel Parker, Kindergarten Show-Off. New York: Holiday House, 1992.

Olivia gets a new neighbor, Rachel, who turns out to be in her class. They get in a big argument and accuse the other of being a showoff. Mrs. Bee their teacher comes up with a plan to make them friends again.

McKissack Patricia., illus. Rachel Isadora. Flossie and the Fox. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1986.

Flossie is asked to take a basket of eggs to a neighbor who is having problems with a fox stealing their eggs. Flossie meets the fox in the forest but wants him to prove that he is a real fox.

Medearis, Angela Shelf., illus. Samuel Byrd. Dancing With the Indians. New York: Holiday House, 1991.

The story of a family who goes to visit and celebrate with the Indian tribe that saved and adopted his grandfather during slavery. Based on the true story of the author's great-grandfather.

Ringgold, Faith. Tar Beach. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 1991.

Cassie Louise Lightfoot can fly. She lies on the tar beach, which is the roof of her Harlem apartment building and takes flight to all the places she cannot go.

San Souci, Robert., illus. J. Brian Pinkney. The Boy and the Ghost. New York: Simon Schuster, 1989.

The boy sets out to make some money to help his family. He finds an old haunted house and when he stays through the night the ghost shows him where he hid the treasure.

Stolz, Mary., illus. Pat Cummings. Storm in the Night. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988.

Thomas and his grandfather are sitting through a storm, the power has gone out. Grandfather tells Thomas a story of when he was young and scared of storms and his dog Melvin.

Walter, Mildred Pitts., illus. Pat Cummings. My Mama Needs Me. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1983.

Jason's mother just had a baby and he wants to help. So he turns down fun things to do because his mom may need his help.

Williams, Sherley Anne., illus. Carole Byard. Working Cotton. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1992.

Shelan and her family take a bus to the fields early in the morning to pick cotton. They are migrant workers. Shelan isn't old enough to have her own sack to pick but she helps out and waits for the day when she will be able to have her own bag to pick.

Winter, Jeanette. Follow the Drinking Gourd. New York: Knopf, 1988,

With the help of Peg Leg Joe and his song, five slaves escape to freedom. They use the words to the song and follow the drinking gourd(the big dipper).

Zemach, Margot. Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1982.

Jake and his mischievous mule, Honeybunch, are killed on a train track. They follow the road to heaven and sneak in. They have many adventures once inside.

Abstract

Tomeka S. Berry. A Content Analysis of the Contemporary Portrayal of African Americans in Children's Picture Books. A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 1999. 36 Pages. Advisor: Brian W. Sturm

This study is a content analysis of children's picture books. Thirty books were evaluated to determine if the portrayal of African Americans in picture books was realistic and positive. The books reviewed were selected from the reference source A to Zoo. Many librarians use this title to recommend materials to children and parents. The books were published during the 1980s and 1990s.

Results showed that overall the portrayal of African Americans is positive, realistic and excludes stereotypical images. The study found that African Americans are writing and illustrating books about the African American experience. Overall the sample showed the language used was realistic and there was not a difference in speech between the African American and white characters. The illustrations depicted the diversity of the African American culture in features, hairstyles and complexion. The characterization was positive, complex and the character's actions mirrored real life. The stories were universal; they could have been the experience of any child.

Headings:

Children's Literature

Content Analysis

African Americans