

Chapter 5

Gender, Sexuality, and Equity

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What is read to children not only leaves an impression behind but also influences the values, and shapes the dreams, of children. It can provide negative images and stereotypes and cut off hopes and limit aspirations. It can erode self-respect through overt and covert racism or sexism. It can also help young people get beyond family troubles, neighborhood violence, stereotyping and prejudice.

—Kohl (1995, p. 61)

Anyone having taught kindergarten through fifth-grade classes for any number of years may have heard such comments such as “Girls don’t play _____” and “Boys don’t like that/do that. . . .” In other words, as teachers we constantly overhear stereotypes of what gender should look like, behave like, or be like on a daily basis in schools. For those of us who believe in equity, whether it be in education, sports activities, occupations, and so forth, and for those of us who would like to consistently emphasize to students the importance of equality for boys and girls and men and women, it can be disheartening to listen to one’s own students express such remarks. As the quote by Kohl demonstrates, multicultural books that depict boys and girls in various roles and capacities can be excellent starting points in engaging students in dialogue about gender issues. This chapter explores issues of gender, especially related to the inequities in children’s trade books that have had very few good role models for girls and that sometimes still perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Closely related to the issues of gender and perceptions of what each gender is capable of or allowed in society is the issue of sexuality and how this plays out in society. Given the recent political controversy around gay marriage and individual

rights, books that show different lifestyles are also included in this chapter as a part of multicultural children's books that are inclusive. An analysis of gender issues as portrayed in children's books is explored, along with a discussion of popular stories such as folktales and fairy tales and gender inequity in these.

GENDER ROLES PORTRAYED IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Many studies have lamented the gender inequity in children's books citing more male protagonists than females (Ernst, 1995; Singh, 1998; Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2006). Although there has been a concerted effort by children's authors and educators to bridge this gap in the last decades, especially in contemporary realistic fiction and specific historical fiction (see, e.g., such books as the *Dear America* series and the *Dear Diary* series), there are still fewer books that have girls as the main character than books that have boys as protagonists. Studies have also speculated and reported on the effects of this gender inequity, specifically on adolescent girls, which result in a flawed self-image, lack of motivation or drive, and gender stereotyping (Fox, 1993; Pipher, 1994; Temple et al., 2006). The changes in perceptions and understanding of gender roles seem to happen around the preadolescent and adolescent ages when children are going through many developmental transformations. As Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (2002) said, "The stereotyping of females in traditional roles is a debilitating message to convey to today's girls" (p. 15).

However, children begin to form their ideas of gender well before preadolescence, in their early formative years. At this age, children are considering their "gender schema, that is, an organized pattern of behavior which they use to sort information about the world with regard to gender" (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999, p. 155). They are beginning to understand what it means to be male or female as they view how society classifies people and the roles they play by gender. They are developing attitudes toward the appropriateness of toys, activities, and occupational roles based on gender.

A quick look at children's books in any collection shows the gender roles portrayed in the average children's books as reiterating many of the stereotypes of society. Men fix things; women are caretakers or homemakers; boys don't cry and need to be tough, whereas girls need boys to rescue them. Many children's books continue to depict women in gender specific roles such as housewives, but not as much as in the more traditional literature, which often portrays helpless, vulnerable female characters waiting for strong, capable men to rescue them, especially in the ever popular fairy tales like *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. At the same time, these stories also stereotype men as perpetually strong, capable, and competent. This is alarming, especially given the fact that most **traditional tales** are usually read to children at an early stage in their

lives as the first stories they hear. Further, these traditional tales are also perpetuated by glossed-over movies for young audiences such as those by Disney. Gender stereotypes are more apparent in these stories than many others. Although it can be argued that Disney could hardly be considered quality children's literature, for the average person, Disney versions of traditional tales are most common and most widely read because of their popularity and mass appeal. While many current titles are changing these stereotypes, it is still true that most of the children's trade books published today still have boys as their protagonists, doing all the exciting things. This is alarming, because when attitudes toward gender are slanted due to inaccurate representations of society, it is possible that the potential and motivation of individuals can be stifled (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999).

CHILDREN'S READING PREFERENCES

“What kinds of books are our children reading? What images are we offering boys and girls in the literature they read?” (Ernst, 1995, p. 66). As recently as 20 or 30 years ago, girls were stereotyped as working in the kitchen, whereas boys were riding bikes. The images often showed boys in more positive images than those of girls. Boys were generally shown as independent, active, problem solvers, and in charge of situations, whereas girls were often portrayed as dependent, passive, problem causers, and as followers.

Gilbert (1989) stated that when much of the past literature was written, gender bias was not a consideration. In fact, if children were introduced to such literature, it's possible they might believe the following: (a) men fix things, (b) animals are male or neuter, (c) women rarely have jobs, (d) fathers make decisions, (e) women serve food but don't eat food, and (f) girls have dolls.

However, there is hope; in a recent survey of girls' reading preferences, Gopalakrishnan and Ulanoff (2005) found that in spite of the imbalance in children's trade books with regard to gender, girls preferred reading about strong and independent women characters who were resilient, resourceful, and clever, such as Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series, Violet from the *Lemony Snicket* series, and many characters from *Shojo Manga* or Japanese girl comics. As a result, many recent authors are recognizing the need for gender equity and much of the current literature for young people includes more relevant issues. We are beginning to see girls in more active roles, such as in *Amazing Grace*, by Mary Hoffman; *Under the Quilt of Night*, by Deborah Hopkinson; *A Chair for My Mother*, by Vera Williams; and *America Is Her Name*, by Luis Rodriguez. America is a strong Latina girl who is a wonderful poet and an independent, well-mannered young lady who overcomes many family struggles with grace and dignity. She is a lovely model for young girls and teens to look up to.

In addition to active female characters, boys are being viewed as friendlier toward girls than in the past, with stories such as in *Angel Child, Dragon Child*, by Michelle Surat, and “Gloria Who Might Be My Best Friend,” from *Stories Julian Tells*, by Ann Cameron, where the main male characters in these two stories each befriend a girl and enjoy sharing in her activities.

GENDER EQUITY AND FINDING A BALANCE

With children's literature being such a powerful tool in today's classrooms, libraries, and homes, how gender is portrayed in children's books can contribute to the image children develop of their own role and that of their gender in society. What they read about and see in illustrations has a strong impact on their own identity if they are not exposed to varying portrayals. Gender bias is often embedded in the content, language, and illustrations of a large number of books. This bias may be viewed as how gender is represented by the main characters in children's books. “A book reflecting gender equity shows equal opportunities for both genders in the workplace and depicts multiple and diverse personal roles for individuals of both genders” (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002, p. 111). As teachers, becoming aware of this in society is important, as gender stereotypic thinking may limit children's choices, interests, and abilities. Reading books that do not stereotype roles and occupations by gender might encourage children to think critically about gender roles. Children's “gender schemas” could then shift to incorporate several possible occupations and roles for men and women in society (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999). It's also important that children have the chance to compare contemporary gender portrayals with the more traditional portrayals as a way to compare the two and provide more options in the way of careers, adventures, friendships, home lives, and so on, that are made available to them.

As we know, early on, children begin receiving messages about their place in society. What do the messages found in books say about their role in society today? There are several stories that include nonstereotyped gender roles and are equitable in nature. *William's Doll*, by Charlotte Zolotow, portrays a young boy who wants his dad to buy him a doll. His father wants to buy him “boy toys” and his brother refers to William as a sissy. When the grandmother buys William a doll, the family realizes it really is no big deal if boys play with “girl toys.” *Toby's Doll's House*, by Ragnhild Scamell, and *Swish!* by Bill Martin, also portray characters in various roles other than those previously seen as boy roles or girl roles. In *Toby's Doll's House*, Toby wants a dollhouse for his birthday, but the family takes that to mean what he really wants is a fort. This causes him to take the situation into his own hands and he builds his own dollhouse. In *Swish!* two girls' teams compete against one another

in an intense and close final championship game with a “no-holds-barred” attitude. Both of these books tweak gender stereotypes and are a bit edgy considering the mainstream of books out there today. On the other hand, a past favorite like *Pippi Longstocking*, by Astrid Lindgren, is still popular today. However, with stories such as this one, it can cause a problem when books try too hard, meaning when stories depict the opposites of the stereotyped gender roles in hard-to-believe ways or are edifying in presentation. A more reasonable title might be that of *The Butterfly*, by Patricia Pollaco, which is a story about two girls who become friends, face prejudice, and find their own strength, as one of the girls is being hidden from the Nazis in the other’s basement.

Realistic fiction like *The Butterfly* is something female readers can relate to directly as they struggle to move through difficult situations while leaning on their girlfriends for support in facing their fears head-on. Such picture books are quite powerful. In addition, for upper elementary (Grades 5 and 6) through middle school (Grades 7–9), teachers who want to expose their students to strong female characters coming to terms with their identity and overcoming familial obstacles will find *Becoming Naomi Leon* and *Esperanza Rising*, by Pam Muñoz Ryan, perfect choices. For high school-age students, rich multicultural novels like *Snowflower and the Secret Fan*, by Susan Lee, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, by Khaled Hosseini, are exceptional portrayals of young women finding themselves, even though their circumstances are often tragic, and of the boys and young men in their lives who model gentlemanly behavior for the women, who have seen evil in their gender counterparts.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It’s most important to create a library collection that balances both males and females in a variety of roles; however, there is still an ongoing trend in children’s literature that highlights active male protagonists, making this difficult at times. While newer books are beginning to address this imbalance, the bulk of books available to children in libraries and classrooms reflect decades of accumulated literature, including the more traditional type, which tends to stereotype gender roles. In contemporary literature, women are presented in many different career positions, including but not limited to caretaker. They are also portrayed as smart, independent, self-assured individuals. When men and boys are not stereotyped, they are portrayed as sensitive people with varying emotions. Both men and women should be portrayed positively in a variety of careers, with a variety of emotions, and as self-confident, independent beings. In turn, children will be exposed to boys and girls, men and women with whom they wish to identify. Just making sure to have female and male gender tags in titles of books does not mean that the books are about characters of that gender or that the portrayal is positive. “How many books with male

characters could we substitute with a female and in how many books with female characters could we substitute a male? This would be an intriguing critical response to a book in which to engage our students in order to examine gender balance” (Ernst, 1995, p. 74). Teachers might decide to try this out using a handful of titles from their own classroom library and have the students do the analysis in small groups. This will not only help the teacher choose appropriate titles, but it will certainly get the students to begin thinking consciously about the books they are currently reading and choosing and those they plan to choose in the future.

A balance of male and female characters is necessary in meeting the needs and interests of children of both sexes and helps these members “understand more fully the perspectives, problems, and feelings of members of the opposite sex” (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002, p. 34). Classrooms, homes, and libraries need collections to include a wide range of topics with a combination of male and female characters portraying a variety of occupations, sports achievements, emotions, family dynamics, and the like. Having such titles available to children helps them see alternative gender behaviors as opposed to their traditional book counterparts. Because “books serve as a touchstone to which children compare their realities and from which they form their sense of the world” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 172), it is important to remember that when adults choose books for children, they also need to discuss these books with them, and they need to be aware that children see books as reflecting how the world really is and should be.

A way to find balance when pulling together a collection of books for children and young adults is to consider female characters who are strong and independent but still sweet and kind, as well as male characters who are sensitive and compassionate yet capable and intelligent. Here are some guidelines: (1) Analyze gender assumptions in the text, (2) raise questions about the portrayal of the male and female characters, and (3) reverse the genders of the main characters to decide if the switch can work and keep the storyline intact (Rudman, 1995). Using these few guidelines can serve as a beginning for developing a balance of male and female characters portrayed positively in books.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND SEXUALITY

More than other types of books, picture books provide visual aids as role models for children. Of course, having stories available that depict boys and girls in a variety of ways will help in providing positive models to emulate, especially since gender stereotypes and sexism act as limits to children's potential growth and development (Narahara, 1998). With this in mind, it is a great responsibility to choose books for children in which they can see themselves as strong, hardworking, and

successful individuals. The development of the self-concept and identification is when an individual accepts the characteristics and beliefs of another as his or her own. A boy may begin to talk like his father or a girl may begin to walk like her mother. This early identification with the parent of the same sex leads to sex typing, the adoption of the sex roles considered acceptable in a particular culture (Brewer, 1997). As sex roles become far less restricted, children should be provided with ways of identifying their own sexuality while remaining free from stereotypes (Glazer & Giorgis, 2005).

Books present models for sex role identification. If children are only exposed to books with female characters as passive and male characters as active, they are learning what kind of behavior is expected of them. Fortunately, many books have been moving away from sex role stereotyping. One can now see female characters as career minded and successful in the working world. Males are now showing tenderness and sensitivity in children's books. No longer are we seeing women working only in the home wearing aprons and raising the children, while men go off to the office wearing suits or working at physical-labor jobs. However, to choose only books that show women working at exciting and interesting careers is "creating an imbalance as much as it is to present only books that show women functioning as mothers or homemakers" (Glazer & Giorgis, 2005, p. 211).

With this in mind, it is important to provide a variety of characters that are not stereotyped. If children are acting or perpetuating stereotypes, one may want to introduce evidence that conflicts with their current beliefs. The teacher who presents *Sleeping Beauty*, about a young woman who waits to be kissed by her brave prince, may also want to present *Jo Jo's Flying Sidekick*, by Brian Pinkney, which presents a young girl taking on her personal demons and challenges by conquering her fears through karate, as a way to show the difference between the behaviors of girls in children's literature. According to Glazer and Giorgis (2005), "Literature allows you to provide a great variety of possible behaviors to broaden children's conceptions of possibilities for themselves" (p. 212). It is then the responsibility of those making literature accessible to children to see to it that an assortment of story lines is available where boys and girls, men and women, are represented in a variety of capacities.

SEXUALITY PORTRAYED IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Anyone who has worked with or spent time with children in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, when youngsters struggle with "raging hormones" and "feelings of inadequacy" while developing physically and experiencing potentially intimate feelings for their peers, knows that it can be one of the most confusing periods in an adolescent's life. Often, preteens and teens find themselves alone, vulnerable,

and fearful of confiding in family or friends about such emotions, because going through this time period can be a very lonely experience as children begin to identify with peers of the same sex and opposite sex. Having characters in books whom readers can associate with closely offers boys and girls other people, places, and events familiar to them so this loneliness is not as blatant. It's quite calming to find a relevant story to escape into when the real world is confusing and overwhelming for boys and girls going through such a difficult stage, especially when a topic like intimate relationships is on the table.

Because of this, secondary teachers might want to examine their school curriculum and consider incorporating literature that includes the concept of healthy relationships, be they heterosexual or homosexual. Teachers might also want to explore the history and role models in said relationships, just as has been done with relevant literature about diverse cultures, women, and people with disabilities. The dilemma over whether books with sexual themes and characters should be used in middle and high school is one that will continue to be debated for years to come, but choosing appropriate stories that reflect the youngsters being taught can provide models for our youth. And although American schools have actively and appropriately addressed cultural issues related to ethnic and gender discrimination, one can expect these same schools to face the dilemma associated with close relationships and the possibility of discrimination based on sexual orientation (Whittingham & Rickman, 2007). Meeting youngster's questions head-on, through appropriate literature and in a safe environment for discussion, will likely be more productive in the long run.

Seeing as romance stories are popular with preteens and teens, especially girls, who find themselves becoming more aware of their growing sexuality, it is important, once again, to maintain a balance of books addressing identity issues. Some stories for preteens show attraction between members of the opposite sex as well as members of the same sex. More often than in the past, there are more stories available that portray the struggle of young people coming to terms with a homosexual or lesbian sexual orientation, whereas other stories show the cruelty toward young homosexuals or lesbians (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002). The book *Annie on My Mind*, by Nancy Garden, is the perfect example of relevant literature for young people who have the need to identify with characters they are reading about in stories. Although *Annie on My Mind* is one of the censored books during the 1990–1999 decade, according to the American Library Association, it is still one that addresses a key issue about sexual identity. Coming to terms with falling in love is difficult enough, but when it's with someone of the same sex, it is even more confusing. *Annie on My Mind* is a wonderfully engaging book for anyone who has dealt with the oppressive and ignorant nature of those who would otherwise wish to ignore the issue of sexual identity. It addresses the topic without hitting the reader over the head in an obvious way or crude manner.

Although it is important to maintain the more subtle approach, books such as *Kissing Kate*, by L. Myracle, and *Keeping You Secret*, by J. Peters, raise important points about the ramifications of coming out and the concept of homophobia and how teens today have the pressures of such issues to contend with. In *Keeping You Secret*, a young lady, Holland, begins an intense relationship with CeCe, a girl who identifies as a lesbian. Holland experiences serious consequences attached with being a lesbian, but ultimately she is proud to have taken the risks. In *Kissing Kate*, 16-year-old Lissa's relationship with her best friend of 4 years changes after they kiss at a party. Kate had leaned in to kiss Lissa, and Lissa kissed her back. Then, Kate pretends Lissa doesn't exist. Confused and alone, Lissa is left questioning everything she thought she knew about herself. Luckily, with the help of a new friend, Lissa begins to find the strength to realize that sometimes falling in love with the wrong person is the only way to grow in this regard. In both books, the story line is less subtle than in the previously mentioned books, but they are just as important all the same. Our youth today often feel alone and isolated. Without books such as these, that feeling of loneliness only can be intensified. When young people know they are not alone during highly stressful situations, they are more likely to talk to others in their same situation or seek help for questions they have. They only want to be accepted, and having like-minded people to share with is the first step in moving forward.

That being said, teens who identify as heterosexual and are also coming to terms with their sexuality and feelings of attraction at this stage in their lives go through just as many changes and have just as many concerns in regard to falling in love, having their heart broken, questioning their own sexual behavior and choices, questioning their masculinity and femininity, wondering if they are pretty enough or handsome enough, and wondering whether anyone will ever love them.

A coming of age story that was popular in the late 1960s but still holds true today and is still read by teens all over the world is *The Outsiders*, by S. E. Hinton. Realities that perplex today's youth are no different than 40 years ago and can be found in this story. Such concerns include dating and love, masculinity, life and death, and many other issues our youth deal with today. It's a story that most likely will never go out of style and is continuously reprinted. While this book has a stronger, masculine quality to it, it is read by both girls and boys and carries with it strong and meaningful discussions for both genders.

Two other titles that concern themselves with heterosexual identity and experimentation with love in the teen years are *Someone Like You*, by Sarah Dessen, and *Too Soon for Jeff*, by Marilyn Reynolds. In *Someone Like You*, Halley and Scarlett, girls who have been friends for a long time, deal with the struggles of friendship once Scarlett finds out she is pregnant with her boyfriend's baby after he is killed in a motorcycle accident. This story is one young women will read and feel less alone, whether the reader is pregnant, in a new relationship and considering sex, trying to be a good friend, or simply worrying about such issues. In *Too Soon for Jeff*,

aspects of the teen pregnancy problem stem from the young man's point of view. In this story, Jeff, just 17 years old, has decided that he must be honest with his girlfriend Christy and tell her that he no longer wants to have a relationship with her. Then he is shocked to find out that she is pregnant. This really throws off his plans of college and freedom. However, by the end, both Jeff and Christy have matured enough to be parents to their baby son. Both of these books are strong choices available for teens in the midst of going through such experiences.

More current young adult novels do tend to deal directly with issues of sexuality. These issues often surround coping with sexual behavior and its consequences, including the identity of sexual orientation as well as physical growth changes (Temple et al., 2002). A book that deals with these types of issues includes the often censored and challenged book, *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret?* by Judy Blume, which addresses female menstruation to the dislike and discomfort of many in terms of the appropriateness in consideration for young girls. Other titles, such as *Caddie Woodlawn*, by Carol Brink, and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, by Ann Brashares, also address such concerns related to identity.

In *Caddie Woodlawn*, an 11-year-old tomboy would much rather run around the woods playing with her brothers and being adventurous than become a "lady." It's one of the stories that supports girls coming to terms with their identity as equals to boys, while still maintaining their feminine traits. In *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, four female best friends each assume their individual identities over their summer vacation as they all spend it apart from one another. Each finds that she is unique, strong, capable, sexy, and smart. These two books couldn't be more different, but they are both effective in introducing young girls to several different individuals, all who are self-identifying their sexuality and their place in the world.

With regard to sexism in literature, its subtleness can be dangerous if not approached and delivered carefully. It can subtly condition boys and girls to accept the way they see and read the world, which might reinforce gender images (Fox, 1993). This reinforcement influences children to not question existing social relationships, thus accepting what they are presented. At the same time, books containing images and story lines that conflict with gender stereotypes provide children the opportunity to reconsider their gender beliefs and assumptions. "Texts can provide children with alternative role models and inspire them to adopt more egalitarian gender attitudes" (Singh, 1998, p. 3) as they begin to form their identities.

Gay and Lesbian Families Addressed in Children's Books

Those who have taught for several years and have worked with a variety of non-traditional families may find it difficult to find appropriate curriculum to address the needs of children stemming from same-sex parent homes. In the last decade or

so, children's literature always seemed to be a place one could turn to in order to make the learning environment more inclusive and relevant for the children who identify with said families, be it as the child of the same-sex parents, a friend, cousin, and so on. Through the years, more and more book choices depicting families with parents who are gay or lesbian have become more readily available and accessible as well as necessary, especially as we see the need increasing in the future.

Things have changed in the more current literature available to children and young adults today that lends itself to addressing such issues. These issues include divorce, stepparents, stepsiblings, and the like, but it's only part of the real-life circumstances children of same-sex parents might have to face. Thirty or so years ago, the feelings of loneliness, guilt, shame, and fear were rarely depicted in the story lines children were privy to through the curriculum at that time. Having characters to relate with who shared similar circumstances would have made all the difference between keeping attentive at school, because students might no longer feel alone or lose focus while worrying more about their home lives. Luckily, children's literature portraying idyllic family structures of the past have slowly given way to more realistic depictions of families of divorce, blended families, foster children, adoptive children, and single parenthood. For the most part, these books have been viewed as enriching the literature selection possibilities and are a welcome reflection of the various family structures and issues that exist in today's society (Mitchell, 2003). However, a family structure that continues to be excluded is one in which there are same-sex parents. Because there are children who live with two moms or two dads, it's important that they are mirrored in book selections and collections.

Over the decades, schools have become populated with children whose home life does not fit the nuclear family model. Unfortunately, books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies*, by Lesléa Newman, and *Daddy's Roommate*, by Michael Willhoite, have hardly been embraced by schools, libraries, and parents. In fact, both books are on the ALA's list of 100 most challenged books during the 1990–1999 decade for various reasons, and they continue to make that list today. However, there are children who desperately need to be able to see themselves reflected in what is being read to them or what is accessible for their own reading. These two titles are only a couple that are appropriate for opening discussions with children who can relate to the story line in one way or another.

There are several books available that depict such families, and with more and more publishers making note of this literature, there will continue to be more books written and published. Unfortunately, fear of censorship as well as the displeasure of teachers, librarians, and parents about the topics, are likely to keep them out of the hands of young people. There are many children living in loving families with gay or lesbian parents, siblings, or other family members, but they are often excluded when it comes to being reflected in the stories they read at school, the library, and at home.

Books validate for children that their lives are normal and that they are part of the culture. If they are exposed only to books with two-parent families, they might question whether something is wrong with their single-parent family. If they see only a mom and a dad as parents, children might question what is wrong with their two-mommy or two-daddy family; just as if they see only families that are happy all the time, children might wonder what is wrong with their family because their parents argue, as do their siblings. Succinctly stated by Diana Mitchell (2003), "Children expect the world as they know it to be represented in some of the books they read. If they see no reflections of themselves or the world they live in, they begin to wonder about themselves" (p. 172).

Many characters in picture books and novels for children face moments of crisis, situations of difficulty, or circumstances in which life-changing decisions must be made. The situations often reflect what children will face in their own lives (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002). Nontraditional family dynamics including children with lesbian or gay parents face said crisis. Through stories, children can understand more fully these difficult life-changing issues that the characters face and can then dialogue about the consequences and outcomes that may result from the circumstances or the character's choices. For teachers, parents, and librarians, these kinds of books will open the door to rich discussions that may otherwise have been avoided. Such books are also vehicles with which to solicit discussion should topics of concern be at the forefront of children's lives.

In *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, by Tomie dePaola, children are introduced to Oliver, who is portrayed as a sissy because he takes dance lessons instead of playing ball or the like. This is often the case when young children veer from the stereotypical norm of what boys usually play and what girls usually play. This book invites children to meet Oliver and celebrate his talent with him rather than ridiculing him for doing what the girls like to do. Although *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* is not specifically designated for discussing homosexuality, it does imply that if boys and girls veer away from their stereotypical activities, their peers may label them gay or lesbian. This is one of those books that would encourage dialogue should a situation of sorts be occurring with one's children.

Additionally, same-sex parents have had few resources to turn to in the way of children's literature in order to meet the needs of their children. This, too, is changing over time with publishers like Two Lives, which was launched by Bobbie Combs, a former buyer for Koen Kids, and Sally Lindsay, the vice president of merchandising and marketing at Koen. The publishing company focuses primarily on children's books with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender themes. Their target audience is children in gay and lesbian families. With publishers such as Two Lives, gay and lesbian families will have access to more relevant and more appealing literature for their children. Bobbie and Sally saw a "real need for this kind of publishing as more and more gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are starting families, and they want to provide a continuous output of books for them" (Britton, 2001, p. 19). One title that serves children

trying to grapple with the fact that they have same-sex parents is *Zack's Story*, by Keith Greenberg. This is one of those stories that comes directly from an 11-year-old's perspective as he describes what his life is like having two moms. Books like these that are more realistic in nature make the text more relevant and accessible to the reader. On the other hand, fairy tales that depict a prince and a princess getting together to live happily ever after do not support those coming from families where the prince and princess live happily ever after. *King & King*, by Linda deHaan and Sern Nijland, is a suitable example to use for those whose families veer from the traditional fairy tale. In addition, *King & King & Family* carries on the story to include an adopted child from another country, making it an even more reflective choice for children with same-sex parents. However, the illustrations and text might confuse a younger crowd (0–8 years old), but older children (9–14 years old) and young adults might enjoy the creative pictures, quick pace of the story line, and nonsubtle point. Finally, this story's appeal lies in its fairy tale narrative, making it possible for those who live a life outside of the tidy prince and princess package like that of Cinderella or even Shrek, to identify with. At least with Shrek, the characters aren't perfect in the way of looks and make the best of a situation. That's exactly what *King & King* opens the door for, a different story line with varying possibilities.

USING CHILDREN'S BOOKS TO PROMOTE EQUITY AND UNDERSTANDING

Because children are in the process of developing their identities, it seems that children's thinking is open to environmental influences. It is vital, then, that teachers, parents, librarians, and the like acquire children's literature that will encourage a more equitable and reflective view of the world. If we want children to view a variety of occupations, activities, identities, family structures, and their roles in society, roles not limited because of stereotypic views, it is important that in the early years they be exposed to nonstereotypic models. A valuable resource for exposing children to such nonstereotypic models is high quality children's books. The use of children's literature is a powerful medium for influencing their attitudes.

Oftentimes, new teachers, especially, inherit classroom libraries that are older and disjointed. Parents aren't always certain which books are appropriate or interesting for their children. Unfortunately, libraries don't always have the available funds to increase their collections year to year. Ideally, all children's literature should include well-rounded male and female characters. Although that is not always the case, it is possible to take active steps to ensure the use of books that promote gender equity among the sexes, address sexual identity, and include nontraditional families such as gay and lesbian households.

When selecting books, one might want to consider the following:

- Individuals are portrayed with distinctive personalities irrespective of their gender.
- Achievements are not evaluated on the basis of gender.
- Occupations are represented as gender-free.
- Clothing is described in functional rather than gender-based terms.
- Females and males participate equally in physical activities.
- Individuals are logical or emotional depending on the situation.
- Families are not solely distinguished as two-parent or male and female couples.
- Characters are encouraged to self-identify.
- Both female and male characters are shown as having a wide range of sensibilities, feelings, and responses.
- Traits such as strength, compassion, initiative, and courage are treated as human rather than gender-specific (Narahara, 1998; Rudman, 1995).

Books can also be selected that have countersex attitudes embedded in them that can help children recognize stereotypical messages. Also, one might choose to combine traditional and contemporary books to elicit discussion of how genders and family dynamics are portrayed in different books. Also, the message of respect for both genders and various lifestyles should be subtly contained in the texts. It is important to avoid books that have preachy messages on gender equity, as readers tend to reject books that “hit the reader over the head” with the point of the story line.

When discussing books with children, it is important to validate both feminine and masculine voices and to listen to opposing opinions. Some children already embody attitudes that are stereotyped toward certain issues. They need to be encouraged to make choices that are consistent with their own personalities and that are self-empowering. It is also important to keep in mind that rethinking stereotypes, be it toward gender roles, sexual identity, or the like, is an ongoing process, one that can continue only if presented with material to keep the discussion and reflection going. Rich, meaningful, and appropriate children's literature is such a tool to keep this happening and children engaged.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE TEACHER

1. What is the ratio of girl protagonists to boy protagonists in the books that I have in my classroom?
2. In the illustrations and in the content of these books, what gender stereotypes are propagated?

3. What criteria can I set and look for in a book with gender equity?
4. Using many of the points given in this chapter, how can I portray a balanced view of gender roles through children's books in my classroom?
5. What are my views and limitations on using books with gay and lesbian families in my classroom? How can I implement an equitable approach given this view?
6. What are my biases and limitations in terms of addressing any questions that may arise in my classroom due to my having books that show every type of family?

SAMPLE RESPONSE LESSON 5.1

Gender Roles

Primary Grades: In the Classroom, by Parents, Tutors, and Librarians

Duration: 1 Day

Overview

On a two-column chart paper divided into "boy roles" and "girl roles," the students will break down stereotypical and traditional gender roles before the read-aloud of *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, by Tomie dePaola. After, students will use the revisited gender role chart to illustrate and label the interchanging activities for boys and girls. Having an immediate awareness about how and what one's children perceive to be male and female roles helps create a rich dialogue about the appropriateness of such roles. Other titles can be used for this same activity, or in addition to it, such as *William's Doll*, by Zolotow; *Jo Jo's Flying Sidekick*, by Pinkney; or *Toby's Doll's House*, by Scamell.

Materials

Two pieces of blank chart paper, markers, blank white paper folded in two (vertically), a copy of *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, by Tomie dePaola (preferably in big book format)

Key Vocabulary

Sissy

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Anticipatory Set

1. *Focus:* Students will identify stereotypical and nonstereotypical gender roles.
2. *Objective:* By the end of the lesson, students will illustrate and label an activity for a boy and for a girl that is typically reserved for the opposing gender.
3. *Transfer:* Students will use this information as a foundation for discussion as more books are read aloud to them about nonstereotypical gender roles.

Instruction

1. Prior to a read-aloud of *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, by Tomie dePaolo, the teacher will lead children through an activity of breaking down typical gender roles. On chart paper segregated into two columns labeled "boy roles" and "girl roles," have students share out and categorize typical male and female roles. Start by asking children who they perceive certain roles to belong to, such as being a teacher, a doctor, a mechanic, a professor, a dancer, an artist, a basketball player, and so forth. Place these titles in the column the children express.
2. Give a very brief explanation about what this story is about, then read aloud *Oliver Button Is a Sissy*, by Tomie dePaolo. Read the story from cover to cover and avoid stopping to review, predict, summarize, or clarify. Just read the story without interruptions because the children have already begun the lesson by building schema about what the point of the story will be.
3. Following the read-aloud, dialogue with children about whether they can swap the gender titles on the chart paper and then assign and the roles in each column to the new gender. Reflect on the story to make the connection for the children by referencing the many "boy activities" that Oliver did not relate to but the "girl activities" that he demonstrated extraordinarily.

Guided Practice

1. Fold a piece of blank chart paper in two (vertically), then tape it to the board. Label the sides "Boy" and "Girl."
2. On the first side, "Boy," have the students choose a nonstereotypical activity for a boy (e.g., ballet dancer or caregiver). The teacher will then illustrate and label the activity.
3. On the second side, "Girl," have the students choose a nonstereotypical activity for a girl (e.g., firefighter or race car driver). The teacher will then illustrate and label the activity.

4. Review the updated gender chart one more time and ask the students if there are any more nontraditional activities that can be assigned to each side of the gender role chart. Add these activities.

Independent Practice

Have students refer to the updated gender role chart. Hand out blank white paper and have the children fold it in half vertically and label the sides "Boy" and "Girl." Have the children replicate the activity modeled by the teacher using the gender role chart as a reference.

Closure

Having children discuss the misconceptions about male and female roles in society brings the issue to life and makes concrete meaning of this topic to them. Children's literature such as this story is the perfect vehicle with which to extract discussion. Although it is important to dialogue about equitability among the genders, it is also important to do the following:

1. Refrain from saying that "boys can do anything girls can do" and vice versa. In many regards, not all girls will be strong enough to be football players or fire fighters, and not all boys will be flexible and graceful enough to be ballet dancers.
2. Explain that heredity and genetics play a key factor in what we physically and intellectually can and cannot accomplish as easily as others. This is neutral in terms of gender, because clearly there are male dancers and nurses as well as successful female basketball players and scientists.
3. Finish by reviewing with the children that (a) *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* allows for a boy to be successful in a role typically reserved for girls. His achievement, as celebrated by his family and peers, demonstrates and celebrates nontraditional gender roles, and (b) it is just as acceptable to embrace the more traditional gender roles as portrayed in many of the books available to them, although in the United States today, boys and girls, men and women have more choices than once offered.

Evaluation

Using a 4-point rubric, teachers will review student's illustrations and labels, looking for their understanding of nontraditional gender roles.

Modifications: English Language Learners

English language learners (ELLs) will be paired with peers of higher English language development (ELD) levels for translation to support student understanding and practice. In addition, if possible, use *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* in "big book" format to ensure that all students can see the pictures, because the illustrations strongly depict the text.

SAMPLE RESPONSE LESSON 5.2

Gender and Coming of Age

Secondary Grades

Duration: 1 Day to Open and Several Days to Read and Act Out the Play

Note to the teacher: As important as it is to distinguish gender equity in children's literature, it is also essential that children have "coming of age" books available to them, which depict their realities as they struggle to come to terms with their sexuality and sexual identity. Gary Soto's *Novio Boy* does just that. Not only is it a book about young men and young women engaging in the dance of first dates and unfamiliar emotions, it does so in play format. This book offers a lovely story portraying the real experiences of boys and girls coming to an age when they find themselves interested in one another but awkwardly so.

Overview

Novio Boy can be broken down into characters and performed as a play. Group work and summaries for each section of the play will be included for comprehension, prediction, and critical thinking purposes and will be assessed accordingly. Students will rewrite, in play format, the outcome of the story.

Materials

Class set of *Novio Boy*, by Gary Soto, and reflection journals for each student

Key Vocabulary

Novio

Anticipatory Set

1. *Focus:* Students will identify a variety of perceptions both boys and girls have about dating through the characters' actions in the play.
2. *Objective:* By the end of the book, students will have summarized scenes and predicted actions in upcoming scenes from daily readings. Mixed or gender groups will work together to rewrite, in play format, the outcome of the story.
3. *Transfer:* Students will use this information as a foundation for discussion as the class reads more books about relationships and considers how it relates to their own lives as they consider the dating scene.

Instruction

1. In small groups, have the students focus their dialogue on the rituals of dating and the perceptions boys have about girls and vice versa. Set some boundaries for discussion (i.e., be polite, respectful, realistic, etc.). This can be accomplished as either a mixed or a gender group. Oftentimes, having the genders separated helps to elicit more honest discussions without the fear of backlash from the opposite gender group. However, mixing the groups opens the door for the other to hear directly about misconceptions and understandings of one another.
2. Have students come together as a whole group and share ideas that were formulated in small groups. Chart responses on a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram or a Double Bubble Thinking Map from each of the mixed or gender groups as a way to make their thoughts concrete and organized. The teacher should add any ideas that the students may have left out.
3. Over the next several days, students will use the text to act out the play. The teacher will assign character roles each day so that all students get a turn to perform.
4. At the end of each day, have students get into their mixed or gender groups and reflect on that day's reading. After 5 to 10 minutes, give students time to summarize that day's reading in their reflection journal and predict what they think will happen in tomorrow's scene.

Guided Practice

1. Using the graphic organizer with students' ideas, the teacher will model how to use their comments to either confirm what is happening in the scenes or refute the realism of the scenes. This will model how to write an appropriate summary and prediction. The first one will be done together so the students get a clear idea about what the teacher expects. After the first day, students will do this on their own following their discussion groups for that day's reading.
2. Have two or three volunteers share their summary and prediction each day as examples for those who are struggling.
3. After the sharing of information, ask the students if they would like to add to the Venn diagram about how boys and girls perceive dating rituals or what they expect from one another given what they have read in the story so far.

Independent Practice

At the end of the book, students will use their summaries as reference tools to rewrite, in play format, the outcome of the story. They will develop a new ending scene with their mixed or

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gender group to be acted out in front of the class. The students in the audience will be part of the evaluation process.

Closure

After performing the plays, have students revisit the charted responses on the graphic organizer one last time. If the gender groups were separated, bring them together. Using the book as a reference point, the participants can decide if their perceptions of one another have changed or been confirmed. Keeping the dialogue going as a mixed group, chart the changes or new thoughts the students have about the opposite gender in regard to coming of age, dating, emotions, and the way in which they might want to be considered by one another in the future. *Novio Boy* brings to life characters and scenes with which many students can relate immediately and specifically. This book may be a catalyst for change in their lives when it comes to considering how they want to be treated and how they want to treat others when it comes to dating and relationships.

Evaluation

As students perform their rewritten scenes, the students in the audience will write a reflection on the realism of the changes, the level of interest using a 1–4 star scale, and ways they could have improved the scene. This can be done on a half sheet of paper prepared in advance by the teacher. These will be turned in to the teacher to be used for evaluation of those who performed and also by those who critiqued. In addition, on completion of the book, every student will write a book report (format to be decided on by the teacher) to be turned in a week later as a formal evaluation.

Modifications

English Language Learners

ELLs will be paired with peers of higher ELD levels for translation to support student understanding and practice.

Parents, Tutors, and Librarians

A scaled-down version of this lesson can be implemented in your practice at home or at school. If you are working with one student or a small group, continue with the discussions (though they may be one sided if there are only two of you and of the same gender), use of the graphic organizer (again, could be one-sided), summaries, predictions, scene rewrites, and book report.

SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brashares, A. (2003). *Sisterhood of the traveling pants*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers.

A strong friendship lies at the heart of this coming-of-age novel, in which a pair of jeans has some kind of magical quality and can fit each of four girls, all of varying shapes and body types. During the first summer the four girlfriends are separated from each other, they share a pair of second-hand jeans. They experience happiness, heartbreak, and all the complications of growing up apart from one another.

Brink, C. (1997). *Caddie Woodlawn*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Eleven-year-old Caddie grows up with her six brothers and sisters on the Wisconsin frontier in the mid-19th century. She infuses herself into a variety of activities that aren't thought of as being "ladylike." She would much rather run through the woods with her brothers, cross a lake on a raft, visit an Indian camp, or listen to the stories of the circuit rider. Caddie's wonderful adventures provide an exciting picture of life on the Wisconsin frontier in the 1860s. Caddie learns what growing up truly means, that it is not so very different today.

Cameron, A. (1981). *Stories Julian tells*. New York: Random House.

This book relates episodes in 7-year-old Julian's life, which include getting into trouble with his younger brother, Huey, planting a garden, trying to grow taller, losing a tooth, and most importantly, finding a new friend, Gloria, a girl, in "Gloria Who Might Be My Best Friend."

deHaan, L., & Nijland, S. (2002). *King & king*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

When the queen insists that the prince get married and take over as king, the search for a suitable mate does not turn out as expected. The prince is introduced to several suitable women but only has eyes for the brother of one of the ladies he encounters. It does turn out to be "Happily Ever After," but not as originally planned by the queen.

deHaan, L., & Nijland, S. (2004). *King & king & family*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

Newlyweds King Lee and King Bertie travel on their journey into the noisy jungle. The kings are greeted by wild animal families, but the royal couple comes upon something more significant in the trees. King and King soon discover that there's no adventure more wonderful than starting a family of their own and when they return to the castle, they introduce the new addition to their family.

dePaola, T. (1979). *Oliver Button is a sissy*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.

A little boy must come to terms with being teased and ostracized when his brother, father, and classmates expect him to be more like a "boy" and play sports or more "boy" types of games rather than read books, paint pictures, and tap dance. He shows his family and peers that he can be just as successful at the activities he enjoys most.

Dessen, S. (2004). *Someone like you*. New York: Penguin Group.

Halley and Scarlett have been friends for a long time. Scarlett is known to be popular and outgoing whereas Halley's the quieter soul and happy that way. In the beginning of their junior year, Scarlett's boyfriend is killed in a motorcycle accident and she soon finds out that she is pregnant with his child. For the first time, Scarlett really needs Halley and although this is a difficult time of adjustment, they remain friends.

Garden, N. (1992). *Annie on my mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Two teenage girls, Liza and Annie, fall in love with each other, and even after a disaster at school, they allow love to triumph over the ignorance of people.

Greenberg, K. (1996). *Zack's story*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner.

Zack is 11 years old. He lives in New Jersey with his mom and Margie. Margie is his second mother. His mom and Margie identify as lesbians. They love each other and have a relationship together. Sometimes kids say mean things about gay people, and some kids think that having lesbian mothers is different and even weird. But Zack thinks they live the way every family does. They do the same things most families do when they spend time together.

Hinton, S. E. (2006). *The outsiders*. New York: Penguin Young Readers Group.

In this book first published by Viking in 1967, three brothers struggle to stay together after their parents' death, as they search for an identity among the conflicting values of their adolescent society in which they find themselves "outsiders." This coming-of-age story includes issues related to dating and love, masculinity, life and death, and many other issues our youth deal with even today.

Hoffman, M. (1991). *Amazing Grace*. New York: Dial.

Grace loves to act out stories. One day, her teacher asks who would like to play the lead in the play *Peter Pan*. Grace raises her hand, but Raj tells her she isn't a boy, and Natalie tells her she can't because she is Black. Her grandmother sets her straight: She can do anything she sets her mind to. With this thinking, Grace tries out for the play and wins the part.

Hopkinson, D. (2001). *Under the quilt of night*. New York: Atheneum.

A young slave girl leads her loved ones away from the slave master who worked them hard. We read about how part of her family is about to be sold off so they must escape right away. Readers are also exposed to the good, kind people along the Underground Railroad who help the runaways find safety in Canada.

Hosseini, K. (2007). *A thousand splendid suns*. New York: Penguin Group.

This is a story set against the volatile events of Afghanistan's last 30 years—from the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban to post-Taliban rebuilding—that puts the violence, fear, hope, and faith of this country in intimate, human terms. The depiction of Mariam and Laila's plight is a sadly accurate version of what many Afghan women have experienced.

The romantic twists and fairy-tale turns make it fiction, but they are precisely what make the novel such a compelling read. Childhood promises are sacred; true love never dies; justice will be done; sisterhood is powerful.

Lee, S. (2006). *Snowflower and the secret fan*. New York: Random House.

In 19th-century China, in a remote Hunan county, a 7-year-old girl named Lily is paired with a *laotong* (“old same”) in an emotional match that lasts a lifetime. The *laotong*, Snow Flower, introduces herself by sending Lily a silk fan on which she’s painted a poem in *nu shu*, a unique language that Chinese women created in order to communicate in secret, away from the influence of men. Over the years, the girls send messages on fans and compose stories on handkerchiefs, reaching out of isolation to share their hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. Together, they endure the agony of foot-binding and reflect on their arranged marriages, loneliness, and motherhood. The two characters in this story find solace, developing a bond that keeps their spirits alive. But when a misunderstanding arises, their deep friendship is suddenly threatened.

Lindgren, A. (1976). *Pippi Longstocking*. New York: Penguin Putnam for Young Readers.

At the edge of a Swedish village, Tommy and his sister, Annika, have a new neighbor, Pippi Longstocking. She has crazy red pigtails, no parents to tell her what to do, a monkey for a friend, a horse that lives on her porch, and a way of getting into one adventure after another.

Martin, B. (1997). *Swish!* New York: Henry Holt.

Two girls’ basketball teams, the Cardinals and the Blue Jays, play a close and intense game as they fight for the championship.

Muñoz Ryan, P. (2002). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.

Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their life of wealth and privilege in Mexico to go work in the labor camps of Southern California, where they must adapt to the harsh circumstances facing Mexican farmworkers on the eve of the Great Depression.

Muñoz Ryan, P. (2005). *Becoming Naomi Leon*. New York: Scholastic.

Naomi Soledad Leon Outlaw has been through a lot in her young life. Besides her clothes, sewn in polyester by Gram, her difficulty speaking up, and being “nobody special” at school, her Gram says most problems can be overcome with positive thinking. And with Gram and her little brother, Owen, life at Avocado Acres Trailer Rancho in California is happy, until their mother reappears after 7 years to claim her. Naomi runs away to Mexico with her great-grandmother and younger brother in search of her father.

Myracle, L. (2004). *Kissing Kate*. New York: Penguin Young Readers Group.

Sixteen-year-old Lissa’s relationship with her best friend changes after they kiss at a party. Kate was Lissa’s best friend for 4 years. Then one night at a drunken party, Kate leans in to kiss Lissa, and Lissa kisses her back. Then, Kate pretends Lissa doesn’t exist. Confused and

alone, Lissa is left questioning everything she thought she knew about herself. With the help of a new friend, Lissa begins to find the strength to realize that sometimes falling in love with the wrong person is the only way to grow.

Newman, L. (2000). *Heather has two mommies*. Los Angeles: Alyson Wonderland.

After visiting her playgroup, Heather feels bad because she has two mothers and no father. She eventually learns that there are lots of different kinds of families and the most important thing is that all the people love each other.

Peters, J. (2005). *Keeping you a secret*. New York: Megan Tingley Books.

This book raises important points about the ramifications of “coming out.” The main character, Holland, is experiencing a tough school schedule, responsibilities as student council president, college applications, a serious boyfriend, and a meddling mom when open lesbian, CeCe, transfers to her school. Their immediate connection begins as flirtation and then moves to an intense relationship. Holland is thankful she “risked change,” despite the serious consequences.

Pinkney, B. (1995). *JoJo's flying sidekick*. New York: Aladdin.

A young girl takes on her personal demons and challenges by conquering her fears through karate. She is strong physically and mentally, just like the boys in her karate class and at home.

Polacco, P. (2000). *The butterfly*. New York: Philomel Books.

Monique and Sevrine, a young Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis in Monique's basement in her French village, become secret friends, whispering and giggling late at night after their families have gone to bed. Eventually, Monique's mother finds out about Sevrine and her family hiding during the Nazi occupation. The emphasis is on friendship and heroism and is relatable to any reader, as two friends experience prejudice and learn of their own strength.

Reynolds, M. (1994). *Too soon for Jeff*. Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Press.

Aspects of the teen pregnancy problem stem from the young man's point of view. In this story, 17-year-old Jeff has decided that he must be honest with his girlfriend, Christy, and tell her that he no longer wants to have a relationship with her. Then he is shocked to find out that she is pregnant. This really throws off his plans of college and freedom. However, by the end, both Jeff and Christy have matured enough to be parents to their baby son.

Rodriguez, L. (1998). *America is her name*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press.

Set in the Pilsen barrio of Chicago, a Mixteca Indian from Oaxaca, Amãerica Soliz, survives the poverty and hopelessness of her circumstances and surroundings, made more endurable

by her desire and determination to be a poet. This book gives a heartwarming message of hope. América is a student who is unhappy in school until a poet visits the class and inspires the students to express themselves creatively, in Spanish or English. This story deals realistically with the problems in urban neighborhoods and has an upbeat theme: You can succeed in spite of the odds against you.

Scamell, R. (1998). *Toby's doll's house*. London: Levinson Books.

What is wrong with wanting a big doll's house for your birthday? Well, in Toby's house, nobody's listening. His dad, auntie, and grandpa think he would like things such as a toy fort, a barnyard filled with animals, and a multistory parking lot. But that's not what Toby wants.

Soto, G. (1997). *Novio boy*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.

Rudy anxiously prepares for and then goes out on a first date with an attractive, older girl, Patricia. He can't believe she even agreed to go out with him. Rudy has to come up with the money, the self-confidence, and the right conversation to go through with it. This one-act play is heartwarming and heart-wrenching, as it follows Rudy from his search for guidance from family and friends, through the date itself, to its successful conclusion.

Surat, M. (1990). *Angel child, dragon child*. New York: Scholastic.

Ut, a Vietnamese girl attending school in the United States, is lonely for her mother left behind in Vietnam, but she makes a new friend, a boy named Raymond, who presents her with a wonderful gift.

Willhoite, M. (1991). *Daddy's roommate*. Los Angeles: Alyson Wonderland.

This straightforward story of a young boy discusses his divorced father's new living situation, in which the father and his gay roommate share regular everyday events like eating, shaving, sleeping, arguing, doing chores, playing, loving, and living. This new concept is explained to the child as "just one more kind of love."

Williams, V. (1982). *A chair for my mother*. New York: William Morrow.

A child, her mother, and her grandmother save coins to buy a comfortable armchair after all their furniture is lost in a fire.

Zolotow, C. (1985). *William's doll*. New York: HarperCollins.

William is a happy little boy who wants only one thing: a doll. His brother thinks he's a sissy, and his father buys him "boy" toys like a basketball and a train, but these do not make him want a doll less. Then, when William's grandmother learns what William wants, she takes him to the store and chooses a doll for him. She knows that William needs the doll to cuddle and love and to help him become a caring father one day.

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