



“Most of all, we need books that authentically and realistically portray the diversity of all students, from both historical and contemporary perspectives.”

# MOSAIC

## *Multicultural Literature Selection and Promotion*

CHRISTINE HAEFFNER

**L**ibrarians and educators are often challenged to provide diverse books for school communities. There is a common frustration that books involving diversity are a rare and precious find for collection developers, especially titles that earn popular appeal and won't simply sit on shelves gathering dust.

Popular campaigns such as “We Need Diverse Books” (<http://weneeddivebooks.org/>) serve as a call to action to identify, purchase, and promote great books about contemporary, diverse characters. There is a growing awareness that diverse books and characters matter deeply to students. In order to serve all students well, schools and libraries must support authors and publishers who are creating diverse literature by purchasing and promoting quality titles.

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. With thousands of titles published yearly for children and young adults and with limited resources in terms of time and funding, it is a challenge for educators in schools and libraries to know how to best develop multicultural collections. Certainly there are annual award lists and “best of” lists, but these only encompass the tip of the publishing iceberg. Students deserve variety, quantity, and quality in the materials and resources available to them. If we are doing our job right, all students should find themselves represented in enough quality titles to satiate their learning throughout their educational career. We need fiction and nonfiction, picture books and chapter books, hi-lo readers, and highly challenging texts. Most of all, we need books that authentically and realistically portray the diversity of all students, from both his-

torical and contemporary perspectives. It is not enough to have books about diverse cultures—the books need to be *good, really good*—knock-your-socks-off and change-your-worldview good.

For 25 years, Lincoln Public Schools has been meeting this challenge through an initiative known as MO-SAIC. A dedicated group of librarians, educators, and community members systematically seeks out the newest and best titles by and about diverse cultures and people. The committee reads and rigorously reviews each title according to the quality of content and the perspective of cultural authenticity for an outline of the main categories addressed through the review process). Only titles that meet the committee criteria for excellence become part of the MOSAIC collection. These titles are then actively promoted to teachers, librarians, administrators, curriculum specialists, students, and families so that they can be purchased by individual school libraries; integrated into curriculum; and, most importantly, put into the hands of the students who need them, whether as a reflection and affirmation of their own lives or as a

## MOSAIC Review Key Categories

Accuracy and authenticity  
Content and perspective  
Design and artwork  
Characterization and setting (fiction)  
Literary quality

means to better understand the lives and experiences of others.

When MOSAIC began in Lincoln Public Schools in 1991, it was a strategy for the district to meet Nebraska Department of Education Rule 16, legislation requiring all schools to provide current and unbiased information about African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic cultures. The original display was a small event, drawing from previously published titles and the few newly published multicultural titles available at that time. The MOSAIC committee reached out to local cultural centers, which provided authentic artifacts and a commitment to help support the initiative with materials, resources, and community involvement. The culminating event was a month-long display at the district central office, where stakeholders could see the depth and breadth of multicultural resources available to them, with the goal that teachers and curriculum specialists would identify titles to be integrated into classroom instruction and made available to students through their libraries. After the event, the MOSAIC titles became part of the permanent, central professional collection for use by district educators.

Twenty-five years later, MOSAIC continues to impact our district by informing teachers, librarians, and curriculum designers about high-quality



multicultural resources. The committee of literature-savvy teachers and librarians scours educational journals and reviews sources to identify newly published multicultural materials. Titles from both major publishing houses

and small independent publishers are purchased to create the collection. Reviewers receive continual professional development in cultural proficiency and have developed detailed rubrics to guide their decision making as they





analyze and evaluate resources. Many hours of research and consideration are involved in the review process to ensure that titles do not perpetuate stereotypes or misinformation. Often, reviewers call on the expertise of diverse colleagues and students to provide authentic perspective. The priority is always to identify titles that are accurate, authentic, and of high literary quality. Only titles that receive excellent reviews are promoted to the MOSAIC collection.

Although MOSAIC is no longer limited to a month-long display, a new display of the most current MOSAIC resources is launched each year. We

display MOSAIC in September, with all of the featured titles, artifacts, and resources on display at the district central office. School board members, district staff, and the community are invited to attend. Once the initial celebration display is over, it is divided into several smaller, grade-level-specific displays that travel to schools across the district throughout the year. Schools host the smaller MOSAIC display for a month, allowing teachers, students, and families to experience the display, check out and read titles, and recommend titles for purchase by their school librarians. By the end of the school year, the multicultural books and materials will have

been seen and experienced by teachers and students at 22 elementary schools and 16 secondary schools.

## MORE IS NEEDED

In 2015, more than 280 titles were chosen to be a part of the MOSAIC display. All had been published within the last two years, and every title met the rigorous evaluation criteria of the MOSAIC committee. The selections included a healthy balance of fiction and nonfiction, a variety of reading levels from preschool to professional, and nearly every genre and format imaginable. We no longer limit the collection to the original four cultures defined by Rule 16. We have expanded it to include books and materials that attempt to eliminate stereotypes, racism, and bigotry of all kinds and in all cultures around the world.

In an age when there is a recognized shortage of diverse books, 280 titles seem like a wealth of options. However, when broken down by interest and reading level and further categorized by specific culture, we still find that we do not have enough quality resources to serve all of our children well. What Lincoln does have is a system in place for intentionally increasing the amount and quality of multicultural literature available in our schools. There is a district expectation that teachers and librarians continually expand their knowledge and awareness of multicultural literature and integrate it into instruction. Additionally, we strive to impact the publishing of quality resources that are a small but much-needed market in our libraries and classrooms. We provide publishing companies with our thoughtfully written reviews in the hope that we may



## YA FICTION

## AWARD WINNERS

Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. **The War That Saved My Life**. Dial, 2015. 320p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780803740815. Grades 5-8. Set during World War II, this Newbery Honor book centers on Ada, 11, whose mother is cruel to her because of Ada's club foot. But when the girl and her brother are evacuated from London, the woman who takes them in treats them with respect. Ada begins to blossom under the kindness, but fears that she'll have to return to London. Satisfying and moving.

Albertalli, Becky. **Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda**. B&B, 2015. 320p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780062348678. Grades 8-11. Narrator Simon, 16, wrestles questions like, Why do gay teens have to come out and straight ones don't? His online exchanges with a classmate lead to a sweet romance, marred by a fellow student who blackmails Simon, not for money but for help getting a date. Simon's friends and caring family enrich this delightful William Morris award winner.

Shabazz, Ilyasha with Kekla Magoon. **X: A Novel**. Candlewick, 2015. 384p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780763669676. Grades 8 up. What was it like to be a poor, young black man in the 1940s? This award-winning novel about Malcolm X puts readers in his shoes as Malcolm leaves his Michigan foster home for Boston. There he's enthralled with big bands, booze, drugs, and a beautiful woman. His frustration at being limited by racism is palpable, understandably leading to bad choices. A vivid, powerful story.

Shusterman, Neal. **Challenger Deep**. Harper, 2015. 320p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780061134111. Grades 9 up. Caden, 15, is losing his grip as he sinks into mental illness. Chapters about his life in a psych ward alternate with the surreal story of his journey by ship to the earth's deepest point. The narratives converge as Caden starts navigating his troubled waters a bit more clearly. Evocative illustrations perfectly suit the complex story that won the National Book Award.



have a small yet significant voice in informing publishers that authentic, accurate, and quality multicultural literature does indeed have a market in our schools and is worth the investment.

### MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS

As we look to the future, our intention is to ignite a renewed interest in and excitement about the MOSAIC display by reformatting it to be more interactive for our audience. In addition to our traditional showcase of books, our plan is to create a display that engages students through technology and hands-on experiences. We envision pairing QR codes with specific titles, leading students to video or audio clips that may pique interest or further their learning about the ideas and information presented in the book. We imagine a station where students

can access popular music from around the world and another where they use virtual reality technology to walk down the streets and experience major world cities and historical sites. One station may challenge students to create art or music that is directly inspired by an individual book; another might challenge participants to write persuasively to challenge a particular sort of stereotype or bigotry. With the use of iPads, students can add their own family stories and cultural experiences to a digital collection that grows and develops as the display travels from school to school. Our definition of "multicultural" materials will grow to include digital resources, websites, apps, ebooks, and audiobooks. Because of the online nature, many of the resources will be available to students and teachers even after the MOSAIC display has moved from their school.

Regardless of the format, the goal

**In addition to our traditional showcase of books, our plan is to create a display that engages students through technology and hands-on experiences.**

*article continued on page 38 >*