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Characters of Colour as Depicted in Canadian Children's Picture Books

by

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A Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study

Abstract

Picture Books designed for children can be a way for children to learn about themselves and others. While a growing number of Canadian children's picture books are labelled racially/ethnically diverse or multicultural and characters of colour (CoC) in these books might have increased over time, it remains unclear if or how they are advocating for the promotion of social justice and diversity portray Persons of Colour (PoC). To illuminate if/how racism and oppression operate in contemporary Canadian children's picture books, this thesis research examines how CoC are depicted in both text and images of the six selected books included in the Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank of the Canadian Children's Book Centre by applying Critical Race Theory and Critical Content Analysis. The six books (Pre-K to Grade 2) published since 2016 containing one or more CoC with central themes of racial/ethnic diversity and/or multiculturalism. While the representations are mostly without overt racism towards CoC, each of the books can be identified as problematic in various ways, including lack of explicit statements of the race/ethnicity of CoC in text, lack of culturally authentic details in text and images, persistence of racial/ethnic stereotypes or cultural deficit discourses in text and images, and absence of overtly addressing racism in text and counter-storytelling of CoC. Examining the depictions of CoC in these books has enabled us to develop a clearer understanding how contemporary Canadian children's picture books reflect authentic/stereotypical representations of PoC, or reproduce dominant ideologies that reinforce their marginalization.

Dedication and Acknowledgment

This thesis is sincerely dedicated to Dr. Donna Varga and Dr. Rhoda Zuk, who inspired and introduced me to the world of children's picture books, guided me to observe, reflect, and think about literature and the real world, taught me to amplify my own voice, bravely challenge injustice, and who, like lighthouses, illuminated my path forward.

This is to express my gratitude to the following people listed: my parents and sister who tried their best to help me during my thesis and supported me unconditionally in every decision I made; my husband who accompanied me in chasing my dream and became a part of my dream come true; my friends, colleagues, and the people who supported, encouraged, and helped me throughout this journey; and myself for being true, original, and bold.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review

Over 9.64 million Persons of Colour [PoC] live in Canada according to the 2021 Census of Population, accounting for approximately 26.1% of the national population (Statistics Canada, 2022). PoC by 2036 are anticipated to make up about one-third (31% to 36%) of the population (Statistics Canada, 2019); part of this population growth is due to increased immigration (Statistics Canada, 2018). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that more PoC will be portrayed in Canadian children's literature in these decades.

Books designed for children can be a way for children to learn about themselves and others. Cole and Valentine (2000) explain that "children's literature has the potential to model and teach powerful lessons to multiethnic children" (p. 306). de Bruijn et al. (2021a) emphasize that being exposed to ethnic diversity in children's books might not only facilitate children of colour's identification with the characters, but could also contribute to a more inclusive world view by White children. The renowned children's literature scholar Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) metaphorically compares books to mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors; books can be a mirror for children to see the reflection of their own lives, a window into the lives of others, or a sliding glass door that allow children to enter the story and engage in the world created or recreated by the author. There are different functions that children's books can offer to their different readers. Indeed, children's literature has the potential of providing readers with insight into social issues and sociopolitical topics in their lives (Sembiante et al., 2018). Picture books for young children, as a form of children's literature, become a mirror, a window, and a sliding door to reflect, understand, and engage with these issues.

Young children need opportunities to talk about topics of injustice, especially race and racism (Fontanella-Nothom, 2019), as children are able to notice differences in people from what they are generally aware of by the age of two, and by the age of three to four are able to

categorize different faces of people by race, as well as may gradually develop prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs and practices (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010; Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009; Pauker et al., 2017). Moreover, children's ethnic or racial attitudes towards others and their own ethnic or racial identities may be influenced by stories and illustrations in picture books that depict diverse ethnic populations (Cole & Valentine, 2000; Wilson, 2014). Thus, when analyzing picture books aimed at young age groups, especially those labeled as racially/ethnically diverse and/or multicultural, it is essential to focus on the representations of a variety of racial/ethnic groups.

Nancy Larrick's *All-White World of Children's Books* (1965) proposed a need to increase representation of PoC in children's books by the publishing industry as "...most of the books children see are white" (p. 63). Yet, the all-White world of children's books that Larrick noted nearly 60 years ago continues to exist. As Huber (2021) stresses, a persistent problem is that communities of colour are underrepresented in children's books. A number of studies have examined the degree of picture book ethnic diversity of the main characters, authors, and illustrators which has revealed a predominance of White characters, authors, and illustrators (de Bruijn et al., 2021a; Dionne, 2014; Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010; Koss, 2015). Other studies have found that many children's books further contribute to misunderstandings and prejudice through stereotypical and inauthentic depictions of the ideologies, views, and lifestyles of non-dominant cultural groups (Chaudhri & Schau, 2016; David, 2001; Edmonds, 1986; Nel, 2014; Pescosolido et al., 1997). In particular, Nel's (2014) article provides some instances of the presence of stereotypes against PoC in the artworks of Theodor Seuss Geisel – the American children's author and cartoonist with a well-known pen name Dr. Seuss. If the Cat in *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* (Geisel, 1958) ties in with African-Americans, then Seuss's Cat with prodigious procreative abilities—having 26 offspring—may perpetuate the stereotype that

African-Americans allegedly have abundant sexuality (Nel, 2014). It should be noted that most of the aforementioned studies were conducted in the United States and examined children's books created by American authors/illustrators or published in the U.S..

In contrast to American academic studies of picture book ethnic diversity, in Canada, while also as a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural society, there has been a relative lack of critical analysis of the representations of characters of colour [CoC] in Canadian children's picture books. One possible reason for this is the widespread myth that Canada is not a racist country, but a society that is inclusive of all ethnicities and cultures (Aylward, 1999; Backhouse, 1999). Under this myth, it is plausible that some Canadians share the belief that there is no need to be overly concerned about the representation of PoC in children's books. While a growing number of Canadian children's picture books are labelled racially/ethnically diverse or multicultural, it remains unclear if or how they are advocating for the promotion of social justice and diversity portray PoC.

The research undertaken aims to develop a clearer understanding of if/how racism and oppression operate in Canadian children's picture books published since 2016. The study focuses on these two guiding questions: 1. How do the picture books included in the Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank of the Canadian Children's Book Centre represent CoC? 2. In what ways do the books reflect authentic/stereotypical representations of PoC, or reproduce dominant ideologies that reinforce their marginalization?

There are some terms needing to be defined. For the purposes of the discussions that follow, the terms PoC/CoC, and Indigenous persons are defined using the explanations provided by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation [CRRF]. Therefore, the term PoC/CoC refers to those whose skin colour and/or other bodily features indicate their belonging to non-White racial or ethnic groups other than Indigenous (CRRF Glossary of Terms, "People of Colour", n.d.).

Indigenous persons are those who "have a historical continuity with pre-invasion, pre-settler, or pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories" (CRRF Glossary of Terms, "Indigenous", n.d.). Ideology refers to "the body of beliefs that guides individuals or groups" (Yoon et al., 2010, p. 110); and those shared beliefs that "serve to justify the interests of dominant groups" are identified as dominant ideologies (Giddens, 1997, p. 583). Canadian children's literature refers to books in English published by Canadian publishers or authored/illustrated by Canadians.

Literature Review

There is a gap in research on the assessment of Canadian children's literature resulting because, as mentioned above, most North American research on children's literature has examined books written and published in the United States (Thomas, 2015). Notwithstanding the marked increase in the quantity and quality of Canadian children's literature (Bainbridge & Fayjean, 2000; Brenna et al., 2021), studies examining contemporary Canadian picture books about PoC or with CoC are very limited. Previous studies examining PoC in Canadian children's pictures can be divided into two main branches, one focusing on the representations of characters, authors, and illustrators of colour in picture books, and another branch concentrating on assessing the content of and messages conveyed by picture books involving PoC.

Picture Book Representations of Characters, Authors, and Illustrators

The following discussion provides a review of research regarding the representations of characters, authors and illustrators of colour in Canadian and American children's picture books. There are four articles focusing on Canadian children's picture books and one article on American children's picture books.

Bainbridge and Fayjean (2000) wrote a summative description of the development of Canadian children's literature. Apart from explaining the importance of Canadian children

reading Canadian children's literature, Bainbridge and Fayjean explored the distinctive elements of the genre of Canadian children's literature. They also provided annotations and brief discussions of five Canadian picture books in English published between 1993 and 1999 on how they might reflect diverse Canadian contexts, including ethnicity, history, religion, regionality, landscape, and community. They concluded that Canadian children's literature in the early twenty-first century, particularly picture books, featured characters from diverse ethnic groups and social backgrounds, reflected the diversity of the Canadian population, and that they could provide an avenue for multicultural understanding among Canadian children. A good example is *Ghost Train* (Yee & Chan, 1996), one of the picture books studied in their research, which tells the story of Choon-yi, who comes to Canada from China in search of her father and learns about the hardships of the Chinese labourers who constructed Canada's railway through a mythical train journey. Bainbridge and Fayjean argue that Yee and Chan's *Ghost Train* demonstrates to readers the harsh conditions faced by early Chinese immigrants and the shocking history of the construction of the Canadian railway.

It should, however, be noted that Bainbridge and Fayjean's did not use a theoretical approach in their analysis of the picture books. Moreover, although information regarding the ethnic or racial groups of some of the characters in the picture books was identified, they did not engage in a discussion of how this information might reflect issues regarding cultural authenticity or stereotypes. Furthermore, given the limited examples, it is difficult to conclude that the picture books analyzed accurately reflect the diversity of the Canadian population, or even the experiences of PoC in Canada.

According to Dionne (2014), a significant gap has existed between the demographic reality of Canada and the representation of visible minorities in picture books. To determine if Canada's cultural diversity was reflected in Canadian children's picture books published in

French, Dionne analyzed 1,132 picture books mostly published by French Canadian authors between 2003 and 2012. This research employed a quantitative content analysis method. Dionne examined each book to obtain the proportion of people from diverse racial or ethnic background as protagonists, and racial or ethnic background of the authors and illustrators as well. Dionne found that only 5.4% of the characters were visible minorities, while people belonging to visible minorities made up 20% of the population in Canada. In other words, the books offered no reflection of Canada's demographic reality at the time. Results of this research also indicated that there were remarkably low numbers of authors (1.41%) and illustrators (2.65%) who were part of visible minorities. However, since this research only investigated French Canadian picture books, it might not provide a clearer picture regarding the representativeness of PoC in English Canadian picture books.

Thomas's (2015) research investigated how ethnic minority characters were portrayed in English Canadian children's picture books between 1980 and 2010 and if there were changes in their representation over the thirty-year period. In this study, Thomas conducted a qualitative content analysis of 36 ethnic minority characters in 11 Canadian picture books and discussed three central themes obtained through the analysis so as to further explain the representation of ethnic minority characters in Canadian children's picture books under study. This study showed an increase in the diversity of ethnic minority characters in the examined Canadian children's picture books that were published from 1980-2010. Another main finding was that the ethnicity of characters was often implicit, as the majority of the picture books hardly stated the ethnicity of the characters explicitly, but rather used various physical features, dialogue, or settings to imply ethnicity. In such case, Thomas argued that readers would be likely to make generalizations about different ethnic groups if the ethnicity of the characters depicted in children's books was not identified, and that this might perpetuate stereotypes and negative assumptions towards some

ethnic minority groups.

Thomas's study provides insightful perspectives on the representation of ethnic minority characters in Canadian children's picture books and contributes to qualitative research in this area. However, the findings may not be reflective of the current representation of ethnic minority characters in most popular children's books, as the sample for this study was based on available titles from one library and was generated through purposeful sampling techniques. In addition, it is necessary to note that "ethnic minority" in Thomas's study refers to a group of people in the community that has different national or cultural traditions than the dominant populations and may not have the exact same scope as PoC.

Koss (2015) conducted an examination of the representation of diversity in contemporary children's picture books in the United States, including the content of the books (representations of ethnicity, gender, and disability) and the creators (ethnicities and genders of the authors and illustrators). Using a critical content analysis approach and the theoretical frameworks of critical race, gender schema, and critical disability theories, Koss analyzed 455 titles published in 2012 by U.S. trade book publishers. Koss found a lack of diversity of characters and a consistent lack of non-White populations as main characters in a non-stereotypical way. Koss also reported that the majority of picture books were created by White authors (90%) and illustrators (83%), suggesting that contemporary children's picture books in the United States rarely included the perspectives and voices of non-White people.

Koss's findings have implications for research on issues of diversity in children's literature, providing researchers with a greater understanding of the representations of diverse populations in contemporary children's picture books published in the United States and the range of ethnic diversity represented by the authors and illustrators of these books. Nevertheless, it is unclear regarding the representations of the non-White characters, authors, and illustrators in

Canadian children's picture books, as Koss's research examined only picture books published in the United States.

The research by Brenna et al. (2017) provided a comprehensive exploration of 177 Canadian picture books, 57 published in 2005 and 120 in 2015, in terms of forms and formats (i.e., sequential/non-sequential format; conventions for readability), perspectives (i.e., multiple perspectives; previously unheard voices), boundaries (i.e., setting – diversity in terms of characterization and culture references; subjects previously forbidden; unresolved endings), and additional information (e.g., story frame; gender of author and illustrator; age/gender/parents/ caregivers of main character; target audience-age). The books included in this study were published in either 2005 or 2015 by Canadian publishers and at least one of the collaborators (the author or artist) was Canadian. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, Brenna et al. analyzed each book and compiled the data to identify similarities and differences between data from two sample sets for a better understanding of "the patterns in books of the 21st century and the future changes that can be predicted from these patterns" (p. 45). They found that the diversity in characters portrayed in both sets of books was limited, but a large portion of the books provided segments on various characters, including particular cultures of PoC or Indigenous persons. Another noteworthy finding was that 12 (10%) of the 120 picture books in the 2015 set contained Indigenous content, an increase of 6.5% over the 2005 set.

Brenna et al.'s research did not specify whether racial or ethnic information about the characters was examined in this research. However, it is possible to assume that they were aware of the race or ethnicity of the characters based on their identification of Indigenous content. One limitation affecting reliability of the research is that the collected data for the research was insufficient as the 2005 sample set was 65 books less than the 2015 one. As such, the results reported in this research regarding the possibilities for active shifts in the content of

contemporary Canadian picture books need to be considered with caution. Moreover, although this research identified that most books in the two sample sets provided depictions about various characters, including particular cultures of PoC or Indigenous persons, Brenna et al. had no further explanation or discussion on this finding, except for the Indigenous content. Hence, it is unclear how PoC are portrayed in these picture books, and whether their cultures are accurately and authentically illustrated.

Content of and Messages Conveyed in Picture Books with CoC

From the 1990s, scholars began to evaluate the content of and messages conveyed in Canadian children's picture books involving PoC. Again, given the lack of research on CoC in Canadian children's picture books, the research by Yoon et al. (2010) also included an examination of children's picture books that were published in the United States in relation to this branch.

Over three decades ago, Shklanka (1990) examined the presence of stereotypes in eight Canadian picture books featuring the Chinese and Japanese experiences published between 1971 and 1989 and identified three of these picture books as the ones that best depicted Chinese and Japanese beyond stereotypes. Shklanka found that most of the illustrations in the books did not differentiate and personalize the characters, thereby reinforcing the racial stereotype that East Asians, especially Chinese and Japanese, looked alike, did things in groups, and rarely expressed their feelings. Moreover, the absence of female characters or the depiction of them in passive domestic roles served to bolster historical and cultural stereotypes of women as weak, unimportant, and uninteresting. Shklanka indicated, however, that the extent of racial and gender stereotyping was difficult to gauge and that it was uncertain whether these stereotypes were unreasonable exaggerations or an accurate reflection of historical and cultural realities. Shklanka concluded that a greater number of picture books are needed to tell the stories of Chinese and

Japanese, presenting their various occupations, lifestyles, and even the problems they might encounter living in a White or multicultural society.

Shklanka's article may be the first analysis of racial and gender stereotyping in Asian Canadian picture books published in a Canadian scholarly journal. Yet it is necessary to be aware that Shklanka undertook this study without employing a theoretical framework. Moreover, one of the research conclusions appears to dismiss stereotypes, which may then mislead the reader into assuming that the stereotypical content of the book is acceptable if it is based on historical or cultural realities. Racial and ethnic stereotyping must not be tolerated, whether or not it is based on historical/cultural realities. Furthermore, the research of Shklanka was limited to Chinese and Japanese groups and did not provide an analysis of the representation of those from other Asian groups (e.g., Koreans, Filipinos, or Indians) or other CoC in Canadian children's picture books. In addition, Shklanka did not provide a discussion of how an author's background and experience might play a role in the book's cultural authenticity. In this research, Shklanka identified four books that best inform readers about Chinese and Japanese cultures; also, the authors of these four books belong to the same cultural groups as the characters in the books.

Kim's (2008) study also examined whether there were racial stereotypes and biases in Canadian children's books that included Korean and Korean-Canadian characters. Kim aimed to understand how an author's or illustrator's racial identity might shape their perspectives on creating books for young children. Kim conducted a content analysis of 10 Korean-Canadian books, including picture books, utilizing key principles of Critical Race Theory to qualitatively determine the observable biases contained in them. This investigation revealed that racial stereotypes and biases towards Koreans and that Korean culture was not treated as distinct from other Asian Cultures in these books, or was linked to Chinese culture. For instance, Kim found three books that mentioned Korean or Korean-Canadian characters who were frequently mistaken

for being Chinese because of their appearance and then subjected to racial slurs. Also, Kim found that the range of experiences represented was limited and contended that this was a result of most books not being created by Korean-Canadians. As such, Kim concluded that Canadian children's books lacked voices from the Korean-Canadian community to tell their own stories for children.

There is no doubt that Kim's study adds to the body of research about how PoC, particularly Korean Canadians, are portrayed in Canadian children's books. However, it might not shed light on the presence of racial bias in Canadian children's books involving other Asian groups (e.g., Filipinos, Indians, or Vietnamese) or other PoC.

Howard (2013) explored three Canadian multicultural children's picture books about the Nova Scotia's Black community. This research employed one of the conceptual tools of Critical Race Theory, counter-storytelling, and Saldanha's (2008) refined dual concepts of "home" and "away" to elaborate on the meaning and significance of these three picture books. Howard emphasized that multicultural themes had rarely been explored in the past through Nova Scotia children's books and that the books analyzed potentially mark the emergence of new voices. Howard found that each of the books not only "depict[ed] the complex relationship of this historic [Black Nova Scotian] community with the Canadian mainstream", but also provided "insights into community, power, prejudice, and identity within the Nova Scotia Black community" (p. 20). Howard also contended that the books presented counter-stories to the usual narrative of Canada as a generally tolerant and welcoming multicultural society, since they directly or indirectly mentioned the historical isolation and discrimination experienced by the Black groups in Nova Scotia.

Through an in-depth analysis of the text and illustrations of the books, Howard's research expands the understanding of what content is incorporated in Canadian multicultural picture books about Black groups. Yet, as the books portray the experiences of the Black community in

Nova Scotia, they might not be an accurate representation of other Black groups living outside of Nova Scotia, or of the experiences of other PoC whether they live in Nova Scotia or elsewhere.

Yoon et al. (2010) investigated how the ideologies of assimilation or pluralism have been addressed in multicultural Children's picture books. Using two theoretical positions, assimilation and cultural pluralism, along with critical discourse analysis, Yoon et al. analyzed 12 multicultural picture books in the library of a U.S. middle school to answer two questions: what ideologies were embedded in them, and how the ideologies of assimilation or pluralism were presented. In this research, four books (33%) were identified as portraying assimilation ideology, two (17%) were identified as pluralism ideology, and the rest were neutral/unclear. Yoon et al. were particularly concerned with the analysis of the four books classified as assimilationist, which refers to "the messages contain the idea of assimilation into a dominant cultural norm and system" (p. 112). They then revealed that these four books shared a common theme of the main characters moved from resisting the new culture to being assimilated by the dominant culture.

While Yoon et al. might fill a research gap regarding the ideologies of assimilation or pluralism presented in multicultural picture books, the findings need to be generalized with caution taking into account the limited number of books being examined. Additionally, since Yoon et al.'s research only examined American multicultural picture books containing characters of colour, it is unclear if Canadian multicultural texts are embedded with an ideology of assimilation or pluralism.

According to Chen (2017), Canadian children's books on multiculturalism, racism, and colonialism might have an implicit dominance of white characters and Western-derived ideas and practices. The goal of Chen's research was to provide "a critical sociological understanding of what messages a growing body of children's literature is sending out about issues of racism, culture, colonial history, identity, and belonging within the Canadian nation" by examining how

mainstream Canadian children's literature addressed issues of racism, multiculturalism, and social justice (p. 183). For this research, Chen conducted a textual analysis of 27 Canadian children's picture books that were considered as potential resources on diversity and explored some of the themes that emerged from the textual analysis through two theoretical tools: "multicultural governmentality and cultural racism" (p. 184). Chen identified a problematic pattern in contemporary Canadian children's literature as the tendency of some picture books to portray non-Western cultures as implicitly contrasting with the West, "thereby entrenching a binary, hierarchical understanding of humanity that ultimately subordinates Othered cultures" (p. 192). Bridges's (2002) *Ruby's Wish* was used by Chen to explain this point. The text of *Ruby's Wish* mentioned that it was unusual in China for girls to learn to read and write at the time when the grandmother was little girl. Chen contended that this book might send a culturally racist message that, "in opposition to the West, China is where discrimination against girls exists" by not including the perspective that "the education of girls in the West was also unusual in the early twentieth century" (p. 190). This problematic pattern, Chen further stressed, might have an important role in reproducing racist ideology.

Chen's research contributes to some extent to previous literature regarding the implicit racist content of Canadian picture books. However, the research does not explicitly list information on the racial/ethnic backgrounds of the racialized minority characters included in the books examined, and it is difficult to determine whether the range of minority groups referred to in this research overlaps with groups of PoC. In addition, since this research focused on examining the text of picture books, it is unknown whether the illustrations contain explicit or implicit racist content as well.

Through a review of research about Canadian children's picture book representations of PoC, two main branches of existing research come clear. One focuses on the representations of

characters, authors, and illustrators of colour in picture books, and another concentrates on assessing the content of and messages conveyed by picture books involving PoC. It should be noted that some of the research reported in this literature review section analyzed both branches of content. A review of literature attributed to the first branch suggests that characters of colour in Canadian children's picture books might have increased over time; however, the proportion of CoC in general might not reflect the diversity of the Canadian population. By reviewing literature attributed to the second branch, it was found that Canadian children's picture books, whether labelled as multicultural or not, do contain stereotypes and biases against PoC; furthermore, while such books might be considered as potential resources about diversity, they might implicitly or explicitly present non-Western cultures as subordinate.

Chapter 2. Theoretical and Analytical Framework and Method of Data Collection

The theoretical and analytical frameworks that have been employed in this research, Critical Race Theory and Critical Content Analysis, are described in this chapter. An explanation is also provided of the criteria and process of selecting the Canadian children's picture books for the research, and identification of those that have been analyzed. Then a brief description is given of how Critical Content Analysis is applied to the selected picture books.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Short (2017) asserts that Critical Content Analysis [CCA] differs from content analysis in the use of a critical lens as a priority in the research framework. Short explains that the word "critical" in CCA requires the researcher to hold a particular theoretical perspective as the frame for developing research questions, and for selecting as well as analyzing texts. Such a critical lens, Short emphasizes, typically focuses on social issues related to race/ethnicity, class, or gender, and how language is used to shape the representations of others who may or may not be similar to the intended audience. Given that Critical Race Theory [CRT] is a theoretical framework in line with the social justice positionality of a CCA (de Bruijn et al., 2021b; Huber et al., 2020), CRT has been utilized as the critical framework for analyzing the picture books selected for the research.

CRT is a framework that gives special attention to race and racism (Solorzano, 1997), with a central goal of bringing about changes to society that will lead to social justice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Though CRT has its roots in legal scholarship (Huber et al., 2020), it has been applied in numerous areas of the social science research, including education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1997) and psychology (Crenshaw, 2011). CRT in education is defined by Solorzano (1997) as the work of scholars and practitioners in their attempt to develop an explanatory framework "for the role of race and racism in U.S. education" and to work to identify

and challenge racism "as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education" (p. 7). Solorzano (1998) proposed five tenets that constitute the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT in education, which are: "(1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (2) the challenge to dominant ideology, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the interdisciplinary perspective" (p. 122).

CRT has been used to analyze the content of and messages conveyed in children's literature that include CoC (Brooks, 2009; Chetty, 2014; Franzak, 2003; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009; Koss, 2015; McNair, 2008) by utilizing its conceptual tools such as counter-storytelling, interest convergence, whiteness as property, and colourblindness (de Bruijn et al., 2021b; Huber et al., 2018). However, "few studies have engaged a critical race analysis by employing the five tenets of CRT in education" (Huber et al., 2018, p. 15). Huber et al. emphasize that using CRT as a theoretical lens in education, all five tenets of the framework require application throughout the research process. Moreover, Huber et al. (2020) indicate that the use of CRT in educational studies is adaptable, with scholars and related practitioners being encouraged to use and extend the five tenets in as many ways as possible to examine the everyday experiences of communities of colour.

CRT has an important role in the critical analysis of children's literature. Huber et al. (2020) have stated that CRT might not only illuminate the "ideological underpinnings" of narratives of race, class, and gender for PoC in children's stories, but might also reveal the "implicit meaning[s]" of the representations of PoC in them (p. 7). Given that, the purpose of the research undertaken is to critically examine how PoC are represented in recently published picture books that Canadian children are exposed in order to determine whether the implicit ideologies of these depictions reinforce their marginalization, and thus CRT serves as an

appropriate theoretical lens for my research.

Analytical Framework: Critical Content Analysis

CCA, a methodological tool developed by Short (2017), adopts a critical lens to analyze a text or a group of texts and strives to explore the hidden messages that may be embedded in those texts, especially in relation to issues of power. Huber et al. (2020) explains that CCA intends to explore power-related implicit messages and "dominant discourses related to power that operate within the storylines of children's books" (p. 11). Illuminating the dominant ideologies in these children's stories offers the possibility of uncovering how racism and oppression operate in the world of children's books. It is clear that the focus of CCA is consistent with the concerns of the research undertaken.

Koss (2015) utilized CCA to examine the representations of ethnicities, genders, and disabilities of the characters, and the ethnicities and genders of their creators (i.e., authors and illustrators) in 455 picture books published in 2012. Koss found a lack of diversity of characters in the books and that most of the books were created by White authors and/or illustrators. In this research, using a CCA approach, with the application of theoretical lenses (i.e., critical race, gender schema, and critical disability theories), enables the researchers to analyze the patterns of the books and provides the possibility of deeper interpretation of the content implied in them.

de Bruijn et al. (2021a) conducted a content analysis to examine the representations of authors, illustrators, and characters of colour in picture books published in the Netherlands. In comparing the results to the Dutch population de Bruijn et al. revealed that authors of colour were slightly underrepresented in the books and that there was room for improvement in the representation and prominence of PoC, especially women. In another study by de Bruijn et al. (2021b), the same collection of books was used and re-selected by different criteria. The selected books were analyzed through the lens of both CRT and Critical Multicultural Analysis [CMA] to

examine the content of and messages conveyed in them. de Bruijn et al. (2021b) found that 15 of the 18 books included less or no cultural specificity or authenticity, and some prevailing ideologies were identified, such as colorblindness, White supremacy, and Eurocentrism. Based on de Bruijn et al.'s research, we can learn that the use of the lenses of CRT and CMA provide an opportunity to gain insight into the messages conveyed in children's books, particularly regarding the cultural specificity and authenticity and potentially dominant power relations. Although de Bruijn et al. did not specify whether CCA was utilized, they used Huber et al.'s (2018) five guiding analytic questions of Critical Race Content Analysis to examine the books throughout their analytic process.

Book Selection Criteria

In the research undertaken, I have analyzed Canadian children's picture books selected from those listed in the Canadian Children's Book Centre in its Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank. Founded in 1976, the Canadian Children's Book Centre [CCBC] is a national non-profit organization which is dedicated to encouraging, promoting, and supporting the reading, writing, illustrating, and publishing of Canadian books for young readers (CCBC, n.d.). It maintains a collection of children's books created by Canadian authors and/or illustrators from 1976 onwards, including picture books, fiction, non-fiction and multimedia (CCBC, Regional Collections, n.d.). The CCBC claims that its programs, publications, and resources assist teachers, librarians, booksellers, and parents in selecting the best titles for young Canadian readers.

The CCBC developed its "Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank"—which at the time of this writing (August 6, 2021) included 447 titles with a focus on social justice and activism, or that feature the stories of diverse characters or people (CCBC, 2018). There are four genres listed in this book bank: picture book, fiction, non-fiction, and plays. The introductory webpage for the book bank does not indicate whether it is updated annually (CCBC, 2018).

The inclusion of Canadian books on diversity, social justice, and activism in this book bank enables me to access hundreds of Canadian children's books that are include PoC/CoC. Moreover, considering the potential influence of the resources released by the CCBC, it is possible that more parents, teachers, young readers, and those concerned with social justice and diversity issues could be exposed to the books include in the book bank. Thus, it is important to analyze the content of and messages conveyed by the books of this book bank to examine whether they are consistent with the CCBC's claim that "our programs, publications, and resources help teachers, librarians, booksellers and parents select the very best for young readers" (CCBC, n.d.).

Each title in this book bank provides the following information: book title, image of the book cover, name(s) of the author(s) and illustrator(s), filed tags, publisher, publication date, ISBN number, recommended school grade range, story synopsis. Also, the webpage offers a search filter; however, since I could not ascertain the accuracy of it, I looked through the information about each book to select them instead of using it.

To identify a selection of books for analysis, I reviewed all the titles provided in the book bank to develop a list for further selection and in-depth analysis. For the purposes of the research undertaken, the books analyzed are those that have both text and images. Books were selected based on the following criteria:

- Contain one or more main CoC;
- Recommended for children from Pre-K to Grade 2 (3-8 years old);
- Published from 2016 and after (for the purpose of ease of access to the materials through libraries or book sellers);
- Relate to themes of racial/ethnic diversity and/or multiculturalism.

Characters of Colour (CoC)

Picture books that contain one or more main CoC are the focus of this research. The following is the explanation of how to determine what is a CoC. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, children recognize racial/ethnic differences early on, so a focus on race/ethnicity is essential when selecting picture books that involved stories with PoC. This means determining the race/ethnicity of the main characters. However, some researchers suggest that the terms race and ethnicity are distinct. According to Quintana (1998), race may be used to refer to groups of people with similar biological features, while ethnicity may refer to groups of people with sociological or anthropological features such as shared customs. Elsewhere, Quintana (1994) argues that it is the physical, racial characteristics that children's understanding of ethnicity is initially grounded in. In Brown and Langer's (2010) study, ethnic groups are grounded in shared culture, origins, history. In addition, Keita et al. (2004) assert that classifying study populations by "race" as a unit in the scientific literature may be inappropriate, but rather a detailed description of the study populations and their specific histories should be provided. From the aforementioned arguments, it can be concluded that race and ethnicity are socially constructed terms that are under debate and may be distinct from one another.

Based on the literature review of children's books about PoC, few researchers categorized races and ethnicities with greater breakdowns, instead using the following designations to group characters: Asian, Black, Latino, Native American/Indigenous, and White. From this, I have determined that it is acceptable to use the two terms race and ethnicity interchangeably. Also, in the research undertaken, I determined a particular race/ethnicity of a character according to the skin colour, hairstyle, name, clothing, the race/ethnicity of the book author/illustrator, and cultural motifs shown in the images and/or setting information of race/ethnicity presented in the book.

Pre-K to Grade 2 Recommended Age

The grade recommendations identified by the book bank are applied to the book selection. Picture books for younger children, especially those targeted at Pre-K only, are often designed to teach information about common concepts (e.g., shapes, counting, body parts, and colours) with colourful illustrations paired with text—often single words (Ferreira, 2020). Ferreira states that picture books designed for children above Pre-K may have lots of illustrations (usually on each page) and a complex story with 500-1000 words. As children grow older, they are more likely to be exposed to books with fewer pictures, replaced by more and more complex language and story lines (Nodelman, 2010; Varga & Dempsey, 2017).

According to Pauker et al. (2017), children may categorize individuals based on race from the age of three years. Varga and Dempsey (2017) state that the age range of three to eight years frames a critical period in children's ability to make connections between story content and their own lives. Since the age range of Pre-K to Grade 2 closely matches the three to eight years old range, it is reasonable to limit the selection of picture books to the range of Pre-K to Grade 2.

Themes of book selection

Picture books that feature CoC as protagonists and center the themes of racial/ethnic diversity and/or multiculturalism are what I focus on in current research. "Racial [ethnic] diversity is the acknowledgement and celebration of difference between racial [ethnic] groups" (Howard University School of Law, n.d., para, 1). Racial Equity Tools Glossary (as cited in Howard University School of Law, n.d.) states that diversity not only recognizes and values differences within and between racial identities, but also accounts for the intersectionality of many groups, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status.

Process of Book Selection

For this thesis research, I examined information for 447 titles available on the book bank

webpages, particularly their front covers, filed tags, publication dates, recommended school grade ranges, and story synopsis. Following the book selection criteria, I selected those that had at least one main CoC, and then removed those that were not in the picture book form, those with publication dates prior to 2016, and those with story themes not relevant to my research. Six books with Indigenous stories were identified, five of which were created by Indigenous authors (see Appendix A); 10 other books with non-Indigenous stories otherwise generally fit the selection criteria (see Appendix B). The six books with Indigenous stories were not included in the current research analysis as their purpose and themes were distinct from the other 10 books and therefore would require a different analytic approach than that applied here.

Through the Mount Saint Vincent University Library and Novanet Library Catalogue (an electronic consortium of university and community college libraries in Nova Scotia, and Mount Allison University, New Brunswick), I accessed the 10 print books on this preliminary list. After an initial review of their text and images, 4 were excluded from the study. *Where Oliver Fits* features a non-human protagonist—a puzzle piece. Neither the text nor the images give information about whether Oliver, shown as half blue and half brown, is of any particular race/ethnicity. It was thus excluded from the final analysis as it might be impossible for younger children, who lack literary understanding, to independently understand Oliver as a CoC. *Malaika's Costume* was excluded because it is one book in a three-book series that has continuity from living with her grandmother in Jamaica to moving to Canada to be reunited with their mother and stepfather, and then welcoming a new member of the family. Analyzing just one book of the series might not comprehensively reflect the main CoC and their experiences. Although *Ara the Star Engineer* that I retained on the list also has a sequel, *Ara the Dream Innovator* (2021) its story has no relevance to that of *Ara the Star Engineer*. *Who Do I Want to Become?* is designed to encourage readers to pursue a positive personal identity but lacks cultural authentic

details. The race/ethnicity of some CoC may be identified by their skin colour and/or hairstyle in the illustrations; it is however possible for them to be changed to any race and ethnicity without changing the story. The book conveys to the reader an idea that it is more worthwhile to think about "who you are and who you want to be", rather than "what you want to be" (*What Do I Want to Become?* n.d., para. 2). The contradictory nature of this book, which attempts to engage readers in discovering themselves while giving little or no information about who the main CoC is, caused it to be excluded from the research study. In addition, despite the book bank's categorization of those on the initial list being grade range within Pre-K to Grade 2, *Greetings, Leroy* is more suitable for children above Grade 2 due to its more complicated story lines and greater density of the text, and therefore was not included in the study.

The remaining six listed below were deemed as having met the criteria for selection. Considering that the analysis of visual content is a significant component of this research, the illustrators of the six books are also identified, in square brackets, if different from the author:

- Komal Singh [Ipek Konak], *Ara the Star Engineer*
- Kari-Lynn Winters [François Thisdale], *French Toast*
- Thao Lam, *My Cat Looks Like My Dad*
- Shauntay Grant [Erin Bennett Banks], *The Walking Bathroom*
- Susan Hughes [Ashley Barron], *Up! How Families Around the World Carry Their Little Ones*
- Jillian Roberts [Cindy Revell], *What Makes Us Unique? Our First Talk About Diversity*

All of these contain one or more main CoC. Two of the books—*Up!* and *What Makes Us Unique?*—are not in the form of narrative stories, and rather than featuring one major CoC, they include multiple CoCs, in images only. These books were included in the study because visual

analysis is an integral part of this research. The recommended school grade ranges for the books conform to the criterion from Pre-K to Grade 2 (3-8 years old). Of these six books, three are recommended for children from Pre-K to Grade 2 and three for children from K to Grade 2. Their publication dates span the years 2016-2019; specifically, two books were published in each of 2016 and 2017, and one in each of 2018 and 2019.

Critical Content Analysis Application

I have applied critical content analysis with the theoretical framework of CRT to examine the selected books. Huber et al.'s (2020) analytical questions (see Appendix C) were utilized for the analysis of the books to determine if the representations of PoC incorporate cultural authenticity or stereotypes, or reproduce dominant ideologies that would reinforce their marginalization. Huber et al.'s questions are listed below:

- What identities or characteristics are assigned by race, class, gender, immigrations status, language, etc.? What roles do CoC play (i.e. central, tangential, hierarchical)? In what ways does the story become raced, or not?
- What are the dominant ideologies and how do they operate (e.g. white supremacy, patriarchy, cultural deficits, other forms of power)?
- How are the realities and/or experiences of PoC represented, or not (cultural authenticity vs. generalizations, simplifications)?
- Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (historical, political, social, geographic, temporal, etc.), or not?
- How is focalization of the story constructed?
- How does power operate within the narrative devices of the story (i.e., vantage point, story closure, assumptions)? Who has power? Who has agency?
- How are dominant ideologies/deficit perspectives challenged? How does resistance

emerge?

Chapter 3. Analysis

In this chapter, each selected book is provided with a description of the author, illustrator, publisher and year of publication, as well as a brief description of the book content. Some promotional reviews in terms of diversity that are included either on the book covers, publisher websites, or Amazon.ca. Then, story content and CoCs are introduced. Since the two books, *Up! How Families Around the World Carry Their Little Ones* and *What Makes Us Unique? Our First Talk About Diversity*, do not take the form of a story narrative, I explain how some of the illustrations and text convey the purpose of the books by elaborating on their content. To develop a clearer understanding of if/how racism and oppression operate in these books, two questions are used to guide the analysis and discussion: how do the picture books included in the Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank of the CCBC represent CoC? and in what ways do the books reflect authentic/stereotypical representations of PoC, or reproduce dominant ideologies that reinforce their marginalization? Next, a discourse analysis of the contents utilizing a CRT and CCA framework is conducted. That is, I discuss how PoC are presented through the characters and the narrative to explain in how the books reflect authentic or stereotypical representations of PoC/CoC.

Ara the Star Engineer

Ara the Star Engineer, written by Komal Singh and illustrated by Ipek Konak, was published by Page Two Books in 2018. The author, Komal Singh, is a Google Engineering Program Manager on the Ads Infrastructure team, and lives with her husband and two children in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario (Cooper, 2018; Singh, n.d.b). The author is an immigrant/Indian-Canadian (Cooper, 2018), who moved to Canada from India in 2003 to study and work (Singh, n.d.a). There is no information on the book website regarding the race/ethnicity of the book's illustrator Ipek Konak, but we can learn from the illustrator's profile that she currently lives in

Turkey and has been working for Google as a guest Doodler for the past several years (Adventures of Ara, n.d.). Geena Davis (n.d.), Founder and Chair of Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, comments that "…with this story, girls can see leaders and be inspired to become one. A book for all ages and genders!" Likewise, the review by Jennifer Flanagan (n.d.), President and CEO of Actua, states "…this book shows girls there is a place for them in the tech world and that their voices matter…" As such, the book is presented as stressing the importance of gender diversity in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, and is intended to inspire young women to visualize themselves as innovators and problem solvers, and to provide them with information about computational concepts and encourage them to engage in STEM activities in particular. Yet the book reviewers made no mention of the book's potential to inspire girls of colour.

The protagonist, Ara, is a six-year-old girl who has a droid assistant named DeeDee, and they appear together in most of the images. Fascinated by "BIG numbers", Ara desires to know how many stars there are and wonders, "how do I program you [DeeDee] to count stars?" She then visits Innovation Plex and seeks assistance from four tech "superheroes"—real-life Google engineers of diverse backgrounds—to program DeeDee to count stars.

The engineers assist Ara in solving the problem of how to count the stars. Kripa, a "Prolific Problem Solver" in the Data Center of Innovation Plex, is the first engineer that Ara meets. With her inspiration, Ara creates a plan to count the stars, one galaxy at a time. Next, she meets Parisa, an "Intrepid Innovator" in the Ideas Lab, who introduces Ara to the computer science concept – algorithm. Ara then begins to create an algorithm of her own for the counting plan. To improve DeeDee's capacity, Ara learns from Diane, who is the "Code Commander" in the Coding Pods, how to turn her algorithm into code. After a failure of launching DeeDee for the counting task, Ara goes to Marian who is the "Tenacious Troubleshooter" in the X-space, in hopes of fixing

DeeDee. The repaired DeeDee conducts a second operation and successfully calculates the number of stars.

Except for the darker skin of Marian, the facial and physical features of Ara and other engineers do not clearly identify them as CoC. To resonate with many people around the world, the image of Ara was intentionally designed to be "culturally-neutral as much as possible", even though her prototype references the author's daughter (Cooper, 2018). The representation of Ara provides minimal details of facial features, making her racial/ethnic distinctions barely noticeable, but with a typical Euro-Anglo hairstyle; similarly, the facial and physical features of the other engineers are limited. With this style of representation, race/ethnicity as a major element of the story is hidden and is never mentioned in the narrative or the scientists' profiles. The author and illustrator may attempt to downplay the cultural specificity of a CoC to make it resonate with diverse readers. These characters are therefore "cultural neutral" women to be read by children of colour or not.

Although the story text does not specifically identify Ara or the engineers as CoC, the reader might identify them as such because of their skin, hair and facial features. The brown skin, hair and eyes distinguish Ara and the four engineer characters who assist her from White characters shown in a couple of scenes. The races/ethnicities of the engineers could be inferred by readers from the information given about the four women in engineering that the characters represent in the profiles in the penultimate double spread. For example, the photo of Marian Croak shows that she is a Black woman, while that of Diane Tang shows her as being East Asian.

Moreover, the reader might identify the characters' race/ethnicity by their names. The regional/ethnic basis of Ara's name is unclear, but with possible Arabic or Armenian origin (Nameberry, n.d., para. 1). The author, Komal Singh, explains that the name derives from Ada Lovelace, the "mother of computing" (Cooper, 2018). Diane Tang has a possible Chinese

background as indicated by her last name; Kripa Krishnan is from India (Kripa Krishnan: Management, n.d.), and Parisa Tabriz is Persian, from Iran (Daily Mail, 2014).

While Ara is the protagonist of the story, the engineers might be considered main characters as their presence advances the plot of enabling Ara to achieve her goal of counting stars. The representation of the four engineer characters appears to be intended not only to encourage girl of colour to be interested in STEM, but also to convey the message that women of colour can excel in these fields. However, not explicitly identifying the characters as CoC in the story, or PoC in the profiles, may not provide girls of colour with relatable literary experiences that get them interested in exploring STEM. The author and illustrator present the engineers with photos and full names of the real engineers in the profiles but no culturally authentic details, and indicate the characters' race/ethnicity through their skin colour in the illustrations/photographs only, which suggests that the book might not be striving for cultural authenticity. As Kurz (2012) explains, "[culturally generic picture books] portray characters of colo[u]r but with few or no culturally authentic details…the only indication of a character's race/ethnicity is confined to the illustrations" (p. 134).

Furthermore, the story does not identify issues of race and racism encountered by the women of colour in STEM. The obstacles that most women of colour in engineering might struggle with in their careers are not included. Women in STEM might leave their jobs for reasons such as feeling underpaid and underrepresented (Leech, 2022; Maryville University, n.d.). Women, and particularly women of colour, are significantly underrepresented in STEM workforce (Maryville University, n.d.) and earn less than their male counterparts across all racial and ethnic groups (Fry et al., 2021). In Fry et al.'s (2021) study, sizeable pay gaps were found between men and women as well as across racial and ethnic groups; Black and Hispanic women in a STEM job have the lowest median earnings ($57,000 each), whereas Asian men have the

highest ($103,300). A Pew Research Center survey found that 62% of Blacks and 44% of Asians STEM workers have experienced racial/ethnic workplace discrimination, compared to 13% of Whites; half (50%) of women report they have experienced workplace discrimination because of their gender (Funk & Parker, 2018). Perceived isolation, mistreatment by colleagues and management, and lack of advancement opportunities are the reasons cited by women and ethnic/racial minorities for leaving these fields (Jefferson, 2019). Although these studies are from the United States and take into account the impact of the U.S. tech industry on Canada, it is likely that the findings reflect the difficulties experienced by Canadian women of colour in STEM fields.

Given that all four of the scientists have a Google employment background, as well as the locations where the engineers work and innovate (i.e., the places mentioned in the story are inspired by GooglePlex) and the Google elements (e.g., the meta logo on Ara's T-shirt, Google's signature colours) inserted in the images may render the book as a Google promotional brochure. Google, one of the first companies in the technology industry to release a report detailing the race and gender of its employees, has claimed for years to be committed to improving its diversity (Glaser, 2020). In Google Diversity Annual Report 2022 (n.d.), some gains have been achieved in its representation and diversity goals—best year for hiring women globally, as well as Black and Latino employees in the U.S. However, Google remains controversial in terms of its diversity and inclusion efforts (Glaser, 2020; The Guardian, 2022) and has difficulty retaining women of colour (Lyons, 2021). Also, Google has focused on increasing access to early STEM education, such as Made With Code, Black Girls Code program, CS First (Dockterman, 2014; Google Diversity Annual Report 2022, n.d.). Thus, the book, which proclaims to narrow the gender gap in STEM and features Google elements, may be seen as a marketing ploy to glorify Google's ongoing struggle on diversity, but there is still room for improvement in achieving the value of promoting

diversity.

French Toast

French Toast, written by Kari-Lynn Winters and illustrated by François Thisdale, was published by Pajama Press in 2016. The author, Kari-Lynn Winters, whose race/ethnicity is White, is a professor in Educational Studies at Brock University (Winters, n.d.). Neither her CV nor her profile on the Brock website indicates expertise in the area of race/ethnicity studies or representation (Brock University, n.d.; Winters, n.d.). Illustrator François Thisdale, also White, lives in Montreal, Quebec, and his "work blends traditional drawing and painting with digital imagery using collage, acrylic, watercolor, and computer manipulation" (Pajama Press, 2019, para. 3). Quill and Quire (n.d.) comments that "*French Toast* looks as delectable as its title… In this effective picture book, she engages her readers' imaginations – and their stomachs. She also doesn't dwell on negativity, but spins the story into one of self-affirmation…." Getting Kids Reading (n.d.) comments: "*French Toast* is a delicious treat of a picture book that lets you explore a sophisticated topic in a way that is helpful and positive, but not simplistic." "When you are blind, you don't see skin color and you truly know that everyone is the same…Their talk helps Phoebe to look at things in a different light" (The International Educator, n.d.). The book therefore is promoted as aiming to engage readers' imaginations in celebration of their culture and skin colour.

The book attempts to convey the protagonist's—Phoebe's—resilience against, and ownership of, the epithet "French Toast" by linking skin colour to foods. Phoebe, of Jamaican and French-Canadian parents, takes a weekend walk through her neighborhood with her sightless Jamaican grandmother ("Nan-ma"). As they pass by Phoebe's school first, Phoebe, who is worried about name calling happening, wishes her grandmother could quickly pass by the boys who are there. Despite Phoebe's attempt to physically distance herself from their slur, one of the

boys shouts at Phoebe, "hey, French Toast", and another laughs at this. She seems aware that this is a racist act, but this is never directly stated. As Phoebe pulls her grandmother to walk faster, her grandmother asks, "do they call you that name because of your accent?" Then, the text reads "if it were anyone else asking, I would yell, '*None of your business!*' But with Nan-ma, it's different…'And…maybe because of my…skin.' My[Phoebe's] voice sounds uneven." The grandmother is presented as if she has never experienced racism or does not know what it is. Rather than being presented as a Black character, she seems to be positioned as a character with disability—sightless.

This leads to a conversation between Phoebe and her grandmother regarding their skin colours and that of their family members. Phoebe describes the colour of skin to her grandmother, who has never seen it, through connection to food. Phoebe describes hers as being "like tea, after you've added the milk". She then tells the grandmother that her mother's skin colour is "…white people really aren't white—not in the way that snow is white", and "she's like stirred peach yogurt." Her father is "like warm banana bread". In terms of her grandmother' skin colour, Phoebe says, "you're like maple syrup, poured over…"

Without including the imagery on the front and back covers, there are six that show food stuffs and the characters together. Some of the food occupies a large proportion of the pages, for example, when Phoebe refers to her father's skin colour as resembling warm banana bread, the corresponding image shows a giant loaves of banana bread placed next to smaller silhouettes of Phoebe, the grandmother, and the cat. These delectable illustrations intend to engage readers' imaginations—reinforcing the connection between skin colour and food.

Most of the images, drawn in naturalistic style, depict the skin colours, hairstyle, and clothing of Phoebe, grandmother, mother, and father. Other characters are presented in black silhouette, except for a girl from school who is the one other CoC in the book. Phoebe says "her

skin is like chocolate hazelnut spread". The girl initiates a play interaction with Phoebe, as well as calling her by name instead of "French Toast". In the illustration, she is shown as a dark-skinned girl who throws a Frisbee towards Phoebe, who tosses it back. "'Thanks, Phoebe!' She calls, waving." Phoebe is surprised: "she knows my name?" While Phoebe is pleased with this act of recognition—being called by name, she does not reciprocate and seems not to know the name of the girl.

The most important colour of the book is clearly brown; it is the dominant colour of the front and back covers, endpapers, as well as almost every spread (except the fifth one). The other colors seem to complement the beauty of the brown. Illustrator Thisdale seems to magnify the beauty of Phoebe's skin colour through delectable, mouth-watering and different shades of brown foods. In one of the double spreads, a close up of Phoebe and her grandmother shows them holding hands, with clouds in the distant sky hollowed out into the shape of a heart: "I love how our hands look together–like French Toast and maple syrup." With the image and text, readers may perceive the brown as a colour full of love. Visually and linguistically, the book connects brown skin variations with French Toast, milk tea, banana bread, maple syrup, and chocolate hazelnut spread. This seems to send a message to readers that associating Brown children with food is desirable, and White readers can make this association as well.

Despite the positive association between skin color and food created in the narrative and illustrations, it is questionable to metaphorically refer to Black/Brown children as food. Linking Black characters to food may provoke a series of disempowering connections between them (Papazian, 2018). Papazian also stresses that making the connection between colour and "race" is tricky because of how mutable it can be and how deeply embedded it is visually and verbally, as well as in stories and art. Tompkins (2007) argues that using food to describe the Black/Brown skin is nothing more than an invitation to reader to "consume those bodies" in a glorified way

that perpetuates the historic violence against Black/Brown persons and children (p. 201). From this perspective, the skin colour–food–child connections in this book "have upheld the structures of colorism, racism, and the systemic oppressions associated with them" (Papazian, 2018, p. 184).

Given that the grandmother has no sight ability and is explained as never having seen skin, it seems unreasonable that she would be able to "see" skin colour by association with the colour of food. The text begins by stating that the grandmother "sees things others do not", and yet the following text does not specify what these "things" refer to. The grandmother is assigned a "superpower" to deliver to the readers her resilient perspective on the main character's nickname. The grandmother does not initiate the association between food and skin colour. After Phoebe makes the connection between skin colour and food, she comments: "warm and good", "sweet, but also good", "mmm, reminds me of home". It could be an attempt to draw the readers' interest and empathy towards her, as her sightlessness might otherwise have her considered unlikeable and therefore she herself as not worthy of being cared about as a character in the story. Also, the sightlessness of the grandmother is linked to being freakish in appearance by the description given of her eyes—"I look into her foggy, blind eyes". It may be that her superpower is the ability to "see" the colour of food and associate it with skin colour.

Although Phoebe is aware of the name calling that will occur, this is never explicitly identified as a racist act. "I [Phoebe] wonder about that. I don't feel good. I don't feel good when strangers at the mall comment on my ringlets or ask me about my accent." Winters' text does not discuss race/racism, but Phoebe's feelings clearly indicate that she notices that racism occurs because she does not always feel comfortable when people comment on her skin color, accent, and ringlets. Without directly stating that these behaviors are racist, it is tacitly assumed that any discussions/comments of another person's skin colour, accent, or hair style, are acceptable. By

not explicitly naming these racist acts, the book is problematic in terms of its anti-racist values for white readers. Even more, it can make it difficult for children of colour to name it as well and ultimately believing that being named in terms of skin colour is something considered positive, and they should not make a fuss about it.

My Cat Looks Like My Dad

My Cat Looks Like My Dad, written and illustrated by Thao Lam, was published by Owlkids Books in 2019 (Lam, 2019). Lam was a toddler when her family brought her to Canada after fleeing Vietnam and now lives in Toronto (Toronto Metropolitan University Libraries, n.d.). The book describes the experience of living in a biracial family aiming to "speak to families of all varieties about how family really is what you make it" (Owlkids Store, n.d., para. 1). The race/ethnicity of the characters is indicated through images, not explicitly stated. The story's characters are two humans (man and woman) living together as husband and wife, and two animals: a cat with orange-gold hair who is compared to the father, and a bird with dark blue and orange-gold plumage who is compared to the mother. The humans are of two different races/ethnicities, as indicated by their hair colour, hairstyle and the clothing. It is impossible to identify their race and ethnicity by skin colour alone, because the difference is almost invisible. "Dad" is White as shown by pale skin and blond/orange-gold hair. "Mom" has dark/black hair and light skin tone—as pale as the dad/White person. However, her clothing suggests that she is of the same Vietnamese ethnicity as the author.

The narrative of the story is a presentation of how the cat has significant similarities with the dad, while the bird (who the reader learns at the end of the story, is the narrator) resembles the mom. The cat and dad both have blond/orange-gold hair, both love milk, enjoy sardines, like belly rubs, and "always start their mornings with stretches…and their afternoons with naps." They are also similar in their leaving a mess behind for the mom to pick up, and "neither of them ever

replaces the toilet paper roll". Given they are shown simultaneously performing similar behaviours or actions, it can be assumed that there is an equality/partnership between them.

A comparative relationship between the mom and the bird is also set out through illustrations, but in far less detail. The text indicates a physical similarity: "yup, my cat looks like my dad. And me? I look like my mom. We both have wild hair. Our eyes are the same color"; and one joint activity: "we both love to dance" (Lam, 2019). Even though the bird and mom are said to love to dance, this is only indicated by image of both their feet, but not dancing together. Otherwise, the bird lives and acts like a bird.

Despite the differences between the dad and the mom, at the end of the story the text emphasizes that "Mom and dad always say, "Family" is what you make it." The illustration depicts a family portrait, where the dad is holding a cat similar in appearance to him, and the mom is standing by his side, while the bird is standing on her shoulder. This didactic final statement is likely an attempt to convey that "the love that makes a family a unit, no matter how unusual it may look from the outside" (Toronto Metropolitan University Libraries, n.d.).

However, the book's presentation of racial/ethnic diversity is problematic in several ways. We have the first hint of the narrator being the bird at the point of the story where mom and bird are compared with each other. In that image, where the bird's hair, eyes, feet are shown as comparative to the mom's, they are both fragmented. The illustration is disturbing, and seems to indicate that the mom and bird's bodies are split into three parts. This contrasting illustration is also applied to the one in which the dad and cat are doing their morning stretch together, yet neither the dad nor the cat is disembodied. It could be possible for readers to mistakenly gain the awful belief that the bodies of the mom and bird are divisible at will.

In another image, the bird is shown in a cage looking down at the cat and dad sleeping together, while another image shows the mom is entwined in toilet paper by the cat. This sends

the message that it is funny when East Asian women are deprived of freedom, reinforcing a belief that they are in favour of submission. The sole role of the mom as a household labourer deepens the stereotype of Asian women. While the dad dines, exercises, naps, sings, and plays with the cat, the mom "is always picking up after my dad. And my cat." She is shown picking up dad's socks and a dead mouse in an illustration. Picking up a dead mouse with bare hands may be a nauseating act to some readers. Yet, the mom takes on these duties under the supervision of a cat, indicating that Asian women are inferior and responsible for dirty work, whereas White men own supervision over them. Taking out garbage and bringing in the mail/packages are also chores, but it is the dad who undertakes these outdoor tasks, which may accelerate the gender divide by reinforcing readers' belief that men tend to select boisterous outdoor adventures. While taking out the garbage might also be thought of as "dirty" work, the garbage is contained in a trashcan/trash bag and dad is not shown touching it; readers may assume it is not as dirty as picking up soiled laundry and dead mice. It is likely that the role of the mom is positioned to undertake the chores within the family, while the dad takes the chores outside the house as "they [the dad and the cat] are both brave". However, neither of them is brave, because they both run away from the skunk and are afraid of heights.

Young readers may be taught the racial/ethnic and gender stereotypical messages that "Asian women as [are] submissive, domestics…" (Chu, 2021, para, 4). Asian women bear the stereotype of being viewed as submissive and with an innate understanding of how to please and serve (Kim, 1984, as cited in Cheung, 1990). This stereotype has given rise, Kim points out to "the emphasis on bondage in pornographic materials about Asian women" and "the popular image of alluring and exotic 'dream girls of the mysterious East' has created a demand for 'Oriental' bath house workers in American cities as well as a booming business in mail order marriages." In the illustration of the cat playing with the tissue paper roll, both the mom and dad

are tied up, but the mom is bound all over, whereas the dad seemingly could break out easily. Marriage by mail-order/International matchmaking with Asian women is one of the most popular options for American White men, and possible reasons for this include on of Asian mail-ordered wives is that they "seem to know everything about managing the household, raising children, and keeping the spark alive in the relationships" (Outlook India, 2022).

Throughout the book, there are 22 images of the dad and the cat presented simultaneously, while there are only 9 of the mom and bird. Even if some of the images are not positive, the reader can perceive the humor in the scenes they are in, such as the night scene in which they are scared by the skunk next to the garbage cans and run home in a panic. However, only one image of the mom positively interacting with the bird is found, and it is in the penultimate double spread, and no humorous scenes of them are included. "Family is what you make it" is the main message the book attempts to convey to the readers. Yet, the overall story does not present a positive relationship between dad and mom. The family composition has the dad and cat more like a couple, while the mom and bird seem to be the marginal ones. The presence of mom is important merely because she is cleaning up after dad and cat.

The Walking Bathroom

The Walking Bathroom, published by Nimbus Publishing in 2017, is written by Shauntay Grant and illustrated by Erin Bennett Banks (Grant, 2017). Grant is a Black Nova Scotian Associate Professor at Dalhousie University, in the Department of English where she teaches creative writing (Grant, n.d.). Her research includes studying Black vernacular language in children's literature (Dalhousie University, n.d.). Banks is a White woman with Canadian roots living in Charleston, South Carolina, U.S. (Banks, n.d.). *Canadian Materials Magazine* comments (2017, as cited in Amazon.ca, n.d.b) that "*The Walking Bathroom* is an enjoyable look at one girl's decision to make her Halloween costume as individual as she is. Good for those who

always strive to find the perfect costume, and for those that appreciate a unique sense of style." "Amayah is a creative, strong protagonist and a great example of how kids should not be afraid to deviate from the mainstream…" (Malespin, 2017, as cited in Amazon.ca, n.d.a).

The book tells the story of a Black girl, Amayah, who has "something the other students don't have", which is a creative idea for a Halloween costume. However, she encounters bullying at school for not dressing up in a typical Halloween costume, such as witch, ghost, fairy, or princess. Amayah's mother and sister appear at the beginning and end of the story; meanwhile, the pet dog of Amayah family, Rufus, comes along with them. Other than Amayah and Rufus, no other characters are named in the story. The races/ethnicities of the characters are not identified. It is possible to know that Amayah and her family are Black persons by their hairstyle and skin colour, while the other characters (e.g., peers, teacher, and judges) are racially/ethnically diverse—the teacher, judges, bus driver, and most of her peers could be identified as White or Black.

At the school, Amayah is considered the odd one as her peers costume as fairies, princesses, witches and ghosts. As shown in illustrations, Amayah wears a shower cap, wraps a towel around her pajamas, and then uses the shower curtain as a cloak; a toothbrush, a bath brush and two rubber ducks are hung around her waist, and toilet paper rolls are on both wrists. When Amayah appears in front of her mother and peers, she is teased because of her costume. Amayah introduces herself as "the only walking bathroom in the whole world…in the whole entire history of Halloween"; the witches then reply: "thank goodness for that!" and the ghosts "howled as they tore away pieces of Amayah's costume". It seems her peers are racist in their words and actions towards her. However, Grant does not explicitly indicate this in text, and it may cause readers to believe that such words and behaviors do not cause harm to others. After being granted the brilliant blue ribbon—a classroom prize for the most original costume—by the teacher, her peers

hold the opposite attitude towards her and actively ask questions about her costume. The last image in the book shows Amayah in her walking bathroom costume and her sister in a walking kitchen costume heading to their trick-or-treat.

Amayah is trapped by "hand-me-down costumes" at the start and has been dressing as a ghost for the past three years, indicating that her family's financial status cannot afford her to purchase new costumes every year. She then encounters ridicule for her original costume, which may reveal the dilemma Black persons may face when trying to change the status quo and not follow the dominant culture (i.e. White supremacy). Amayah's costume might be inspired by the real-life experience of being Black girls, as they have to spend a lot of time in the bathroom readying their hair and appearance in the mornings so as to be considered "decent" by others (Bria Symonds, personal communication, August 25, 2022).

Moreover, the story demonstrates that Amayah's costume eventually gains the admiration of her peers after winning a prize. The act of giving a prize to the bullied protagonist may reflect one of the common tactics used by dominant groups to conceal the racism experienced by the oppressed. Paulo Freire in his 1968 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* explains the view of charity in terms of true generosity and false generosity. Freire (2000) also claims that "true generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life," to extend their trembling hands" (p. 45). Donating to homeless shelters or creating malaria eradication foundations are examples of charity that targets the symptoms of an unjust society, that is, false generosity (Lee, 2020). Lee further argues that "false generosity maintains oppression; it maintains the reliance of the oppressed on the oppressor [through some tactics of false charity], it is dehumanizing…" (para. 7). Amayah is granted a prize and seems to "feel good" about herself and others. However, the bullying/racist issue is not addressed at all. The teacher does not point out the bullying behaviour of others, nor

do the peers realize that their words and actions racially discriminate against Amayah, and instead the story leads to a "peaceful" ending. Thus, the experience of Amayah may still occur in reality; false charitable acts may be carried out to conceal its oppressive nature, and the Amayah might also "feel good" about it.

By the end of the story, the shift in attitude shown by some peers may not imply that they appreciate Amayah's costume, but that they show obedience to adult authority because of the teacher and judges' approval of the costume. Although Amayah wins for her original walking bathroom costume, the choice of costume may imply a problematic connection between Black persons and dirt. It is worth questioning why the author, herself a Black woman, selected to have Amayah wearing a bathroom costume rather than an original costume that is aesthetically beautiful and even relevant to Black culture. The function of the bathroom is to allow humans to clean their bodies of dirt. In fact, by presenting an image of a Black character wearing bathroom supplies, the message of the book may reinforce the stigmatized image of Black persons as being "dirty" and "unclean" (Howarth, 2006, p. 445; National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). Wearing such an original costume that serves to tarnish the image of Black persons and reinforce their stereotypes may become a way to consume Black bodies.

Up! How Families Around the World Carry Their Little Ones

Published by Owlkids Books in 2017, *Up!* is written by Susan Hughes and illustrated by Ashley Barron's (Hughes, 2017). Both Hughes and Barron are White and live in Toronto (Barron, n.d.; Hughes, n.d.). *School Library Journal* (2017) comments:

> In this picture book ode to familial love, Barron's cut-paper collage illustrations depict a diverse array of family members caring for babies throughout the day…Hughes's buoyant text works well for reading aloud…The vibrant background settings are not identified specifically but are clearly international and

present day…

Kirkus's (2017) review states that "diverse caregivers and babies populate this picture-book depiction of caring and carrying…[D]epictions of families…use detailed, striking cut-paper collages to consciously highlight and value diversity." The book presents how various persons of different racial/ethnic groups, including PoC, carry their young children with its focus being on diversity. In the West African example, the baby is gently cradled in the mother's arms; the baby, in the instance of Peru, is wrapped up in a shawl by the elder sister; two Chinese babies are basketed and lifted from their uncle's shoulder pole.

The book does not take the form of a narrative story, but rather provides individual images of how each person carries young child/children. A central role is played by the persons depicted in the case of each family, but none of them are mentioned by a name. The text on the verso of the first double spread reads, "From West Africa to Peru, from Egypt to Canada's Far North, from Korea to India, from Poland to China and Afghanistan and the place you call home…." Each of the following double spreads is arranged in sequence with that text. Through the text we learn that the "families" of the book's title refers to persons living in 10 different places around the world as noted above. It implies that their racial/ethnic identity is assigned by the region they represent.

Race/ethnicity, gender, and social-economic class are the most prevalent representations of the persons in the book. As noted above, the text indicates on the first page the race/ethnicity of the persons, who come from the 10 regions of the world. As well as indicating the relationships between the babies and the persons who carry them, the text reveals the gender/relationship of the person holding the baby by terms such as "Mother", "Granny", "Brother", and "Auntie". Moreover, in the images skin colour, clothing, hairstyle, and setting indicate the race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status of characters. In the Korean case,

the images depict a dark-haired and light-skinned man seated in a wheelchair as he holds a young child. They are in an apartment, with a night view of the city high-rises outside the window. These details allow us to identify the father as a middle-class Asian man with mobility challenges. The average price of a Seoul's apartment is climbing year by year, with the average price of 607 million won (US$488,000) in 2017, rising to 1.2 billion won (US$944,000) by 2022 (Kim, 2022). Being able to reside in an urban high-rise apartment reflects that the man has at least a middle-class status. In the Chinese case, the "Uncle" is near a field being plowed, suggesting that he is of the farmer/working class.

The persons in this book, with the exception of those appearing on the last double spread—the sole biracial family included—are assigned specific racial/ethnic identities and play a central role in their respective cases. Although these identities are explicitly stated at the beginning of the book, the persons included are not specified as to their race/ethnicity. It is possible to assume that the sequence of the scenes corresponds with the order in which the places are mentioned in the text on the first double spread because of background images in some cases, and in others because of how the persons are illustrated in terms of race/ethnicity and surrounding materials. The racial/ethnic identity of the persons in one case could be identified and confirmed through the images only if the reader is familiar with and/or understands some racial/ethnic information of the places stated at the beginning of the book. For those who lack that familiarity and/or knowledge, additional information would be needed to reveal the races/ethnicities of the persons. The publisher's synopsis indicates that the book is designed to introduce readers to the various ways that families worldwide carry their babies as a way of conveying their universal feeling – love for the little ones, regardless of the diversity of the families. It is apparent that the book is in line with an ideology that advocates diversity. The analytical questions asked, however, enabled me to identify the possible cultural deficit discourse in both the text and the images of

the book. "'Deficit discourse' refers to discourse that represents people or groups in terms of deficiency – absence, lack or failure" (Fogarty, et al., 2018, p. vii). Cultural deficit discourse in children's picture books can be defined as presenting CoC in a discourse of absence, lack or failure because their culture is deficient compared to that of Whites.

An example of cultural deficit is presented in the case of a Chinese peasant family living in a rural village. If speaking about current China, using a shoulder pole to carry children is rarely seen in daily, even in rural areas, and babies are more often in strollers/baby carriers, or in arms; some ethnic groups (e.g., Miao, Dong/Gam, and Tujia) living in southwest China may carry a child in Zhu Lou (i.e., bamboo back baskets). However, the text does not explain to the reader that this is not a common way for the Chinese to carry or hold a baby. Moreover, the use of the present tense in the text, "two basketed babies seeing the world from Uncle's shoulder pole," conveys the message that China is what you are seeing in the image. If a young reader had never been to China, they may assume the illustration depicts exactly how China looks. Chen (2017) points out that some contemporary Canadian children's picture books tend to portray non-Western cultures as implicitly different from the West [Whites], and ultimately subordinating the culture of the Other.

What Makes Us Unique? Our First Talk About Diversity

What Makes Us Unique? published by Orca Book Publishers in 2016, is written by Jillian Roberts and illustrated by Cindy Revell (Roberts, 2016). The author lives in Victoria and the illustrator in Edmonton; both are White (Orca Book Publishers, n.d.a; n.d.b). It is a non-fiction expository book that uses didactic statements to communicate ideas about diversity that are presented to children as beliefs that they should hold. The publisher summarizes the book as being, "a dynamic and approachable introduction to diversity" (Orca Book Publishers, 2016, back cover). A dynamic introduction to diversity may indicate that the concept of diversity in the

book goes beyond one-dimensional representation in recognizing the intersections of multiple aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity, gender, culture, ability, religion, family structure, and class. An approachable introduction to diversity indicates that the book presents diversity through scenarios of everyday life, such as waiting for the bus or visiting a park, that would be familiar to its intended readers. A review of *Canadian Materials Magazine*, as cited in Amazon.ca (n.d.c):

> The value of diversity is woven through the child-like drawing and reinforces the topic of variety and uniqueness. The illustrations sparkle with colour and warmth...The underlying powerful message is one of respecting the variety in our world, and readers are left with the optimistic spin of celebrating differences. It is never too early to teach even the youngest that we are all different and special in our own way.

Most of the images in the book show children of diverse races/ethnicities playing together or interacting with adults. To be specific, the book focuses on conveying the idea of respecting and celebrating the differences of people belonging to diverse groups through its identification of physical, cultural, family, sexual orientations, and religious practices.

There is one double spread showing individual children engaged in cultural celebrations. However, these celebrations focus not on White persons, but "Other"—Chinese, Latinx, and Indigenous. This may reinforce the perception of white readers that they are not racial/ethnic because they lack the rituals of their culture. In Sharma's (2016) study, discussions with students who identified themselves as White American revealed that they perceived themselves as without an ethnicity or culture. "Based on their descriptions…lack of overt ritualistic religious practice, and normative Western dress signified the absence of ethnicity, which was equated with Americanness" (Sharma, 2016, p. 100). This illustrates what leads many American university students to assume that White people have no racial/ethnic identity. The book therefore might

reinforce such a belief to White readers and cause othering to happen. Sharma (2016) further explains that when a singular and normative articulation of American identity is "translated into understandings of self and other", "imbalances of power [are created and maintained] among peoples in the form of discrimination, invisibility, misunderstanding, and dis-identification or alienation" (p. 104). Although the study focuses on American university students' reflections on race/ethnicity regarding American identity, its findings may also be applicable to Canadian context.

The book does not take a narrative form, but presents information about different cultures by answering four questions throughout ("what makes us different?" "what about different cultures?" "what about differences at home?" and "are there other kinds of differences?"), and in doing so presents multiple types of diversity. In explaining physical differences, the text reads: "people have different eye colors. They have different hair colors…skin colors. People come in many different shapes and sizes too. They can be tall or short. Big or small." The corresponding illustration shows persons of diverse physical appearance waiting in line for a bus. For ability differences, the text states: "people also move, learn and communicate in different ways. Some people use a wheelchair to get around. Some people need a guide dog to be their eyes and ears. Some people talk to each other using sign language." Mirroring the text are illustrations of a young boy on a wheelchair, two children communicating through sign language, and a person with a vision impairment walking with a guide dog. The text further notes other physical differences might not be explicit "because they are on the inside," giving examples: "some people feel more comfortable alone or in small groups, while others like to be in big crowds." A corresponding image shows children of diverse races/ethnicities playing alongside each other; while another image presents a young girl reading a book by herself under a tree.

The text answers the question "what makes us different?" and attempts to convey to the

readers that "we should always try to understand and respect people's different ways of being in the world." Through didactic statements, the subsequent text of the book responds to the remaining questions—"what about different cultures?" "what about differences at home?" and "are there other kinds of differences?" The text that answers the question "what do these differences mean?" presents ideas about diversity that children are expected to acquire. For instance:

- "Even though there are things that make each of us different, we are all equally important. We are all deserve love, respect and compassion, regardless of what we look like or how we live our lives" (left page of 11th double spread).
- "The truth is, we are much more alike than we are different. We all want to learn. We all want to laugh and grow and explore" (12th double spread).
- "We all want to spend time with our families, be loved and make friends. We all want to be treated nicely by the people around us" (13th double spread).

The book's discussion of diversity addresses differences in appearance, clothing, physical abilities, holidays, and lifestyles only in terms of commonalities in order to deliver an informational understanding about diversity to young readers. With the repeated phrase, "we all…" an attempt to create a reader's sense of having similarities with persons that differ in some way from themselves, including race/ethnicity. As Burke (2013) argues, "having children see differences, yet at the same time commonalities, builds a deeper respect and understanding of the identities of others" (p. 147).

Moreover, with their emphasis on the positive, these statements conceal the dilemmas that persons of marginalized diverse races/ethnicities encounter. While not all differences result in attacks and animosity, some of the comparisons made trivialize being a PoC. In actuality, the physical difference from White persons in the colour of a PoC's eyes, hair, and skin are often the

basis of negative assumptions about a PoC's behaviors, beliefs, or cultural practices, and thus made the target of racism and discrimination. For example, people who enjoy small groups do not, except when the difference is extreme, which is not pictured in the book, experience the same degree of intolerance as do PoC in North America.

Finally, the book might not be effective in teaching children to "celebrate differences" as indicated in the reviewer's comment mentioned at the start of the discussion of the book, because of its informational format. Burke (2013) explains that diversity literature can convey in-depth insights into "a particular group and create respect and understanding of how that group views the world" whereas "fact-based books are often ineffective in helping children to connect their own stories of identities to those pictured or discussed in the books" (p. 138).

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a description of six children's books that have themes of racial/ethnic diversity, and have analyzed each using the frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Critical Content Analysis. In general, the analyzed books make an attempt to convey the teaching goal of respecting the diversity of various fields and aspects of the world we live in and celebrating the differences and uniqueness of diverse racial and ethnic groups. Through the analysis, some problematic representations of CoC can be identified. Firstly, the race/ethnicity of a CoC is never mentioned in the text of most books. Five of the six analyzed books, other than *French Toast*, indicate the race/ethnicity of CoC through their skin colour, hairstyle, clothing, and setting in the illustrations, without explicitly stating it in the text. Secondly, stereotypical depictions and inauthentic representations of CoC can be found in the books. For example, a submissive and domestic stereotype of Asian women can be identified in *My Cat Looks Like My Dad*; Chinese people are introduced with a focus on cultural tradition/celebration rather than contemporary life in *Up!* and *What Makes Us Unique?* Some analyzed books downplay the

difficulty/struggle experienced by CoC/PoC, and do not even clearly point out racist acts against CoC. Lastly, associating Black/Brown characters with food/bathroom may reinforce oppression or marginalization of Black/Brown persons. In the next chapter, a summarized discussion of issues regarding representations of PoC is provided.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined if/how racism and oppression are presented in a selection of Canadian children's picture books published since 2016. The research centers on answering how the picture books included in the Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank of the Canadian Children's Book Centre represent CoC, and in what ways the books reflect authentic/stereotypical representations of PoC, or reproduce dominant ideologies that reinforce their marginalization. Specifically, after a review of 447 titles in the CCBC's Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank, six books were selected for in-depth discourse analysis. CCA and CRT were applied to interrogate both text and images of the selected books to uncover how CoC are depicted in Canadian children's picture books, thereby capturing how these books reflect authentic/stereotypical representations of PoC.

While the representations were mostly positive in terms of appearance, capability, and agency, and mostly without overt racism towards CoC, each of the stories was problematic in various ways, including lack of explicit statements of the race/ethnicity of CoC in text, lack of culturally authentic details in text and images, persistence of racial/ethnic stereotypes or cultural deficit discourses in text and images, and absence of overtly naming/addressing racism in text and counter-storytelling of CoC. As such, CCCB may not meet their claim that, "our programs, publications, and resources help teachers, librarians, booksellers and parents select the very best for young readers" (CCBC, n.d.).

Of the six books, *French Toast* is in fact the only one that explicitly states the races/ethnicities of CoCs in its narrative. The other five are mostly limited to illustrations indicating the race/ethnicity of a CoC. The authors and illustrators may have done this purposefully to minimize the cultural specificity of CoC and include few or no culturally authentic details in an attempt to broaden the applicability of the books and to resonate with

diverse readers. However, such a book may symbolically represent the universal experience of a certain group of PoC, rather than strive for an authentic representation of them. Indeed, racial/ethnic stereotypes or cultural deficit discourses can be identified in five of the six selected books, regardless of whether the authors and/or illustrators are White. Except for *Ara the Star Engineer,* the other five books contain racial/ethnic stereotypes, such as the submissive and domestic stereotype of Asian women, the stigmatized stereotype of Black persons as "dirty" and "unclean", and thirdly, the belief that Whites are not racial/ethnic, unlike the "Other". What is more, two of the five books include cultural deficit discourses that depicted CoC and/or their culture as deficient/inferior to perpetuate or deepen the marginalization of PoC. For instance, the skin colour of Black/Brown characters are linked with food in *French Toast*, and Chinese characters in *Up!* live in rural and follow unchanged cultural practices. Ironically, none of the reviews included on Amazon.ca or the publisher webpages mentioned the stereotype or deficit discourse issues of these books.

There is explicit racism of the nickname calling in *French Toast* and potential racism of the bullying children in *The Walking Bathroom.* It is unfortunate that such acts of racism against CoC are not taken up as part of the narrative by either author. It could be that the authors consider these actions are not racism and thus do not point it out. An alternative possibility is that the authors or publishers have no desire to dwell on the topic of racism, but rather present an enjoyable and peaceful story of CoC. Desmond Tutu, the recipient of The Nobel Peace Prize 1984, stresses that, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor…" (ca. before 1986, as cited in Ratcliffe, 2017, para. 1/first quotation). Not overtly pointing out racism in text is to be turn a blind eye to racism, which might mislead readers into thinking that racist words/behaviours against PoC are acceptable and do not cause harm to them. Although some reviewers on Amazon.ca or the publisher's webpage noticed the issue of racism,

they refer to the CoC's racism experience with expressions such as "negativity", "a sophisticated topic", and "not be afraid to deviate from the mainstream" rather than stating it directly.

The books I have analyzed narrate majority stories as opposed to the counter-storytelling reported in Howard's (2013) analysis of the books. In my research, the six selected books include the themes of racial/ethnic diversity and/or multiculturalism, provide insights into differences within and between racial/ethnic groups, as well as the intersectionality of many groups, such as ethnicity, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status. In these ways the books contribute, albeit to varying degrees, to maintaining the usual narrative of Canada as a generally tolerant and welcoming multicultural society. None of the books present counter-stories that directly mention CoC's experiences of racism. While *French Toast* and *The Walking Bathroom* can be considered as indirectly mentioning racism experiences of CoCs, both books might not be categorized as counter-storytelling because the racism experiences are only briefly described and are not a central plot of the story.

By examining how CoCs are depicted in the selected books and how stereotypical/ deficient representations of CoC are reflected in both text and images, I am able to reach some conclusions in terms of representations of PoC in contemporary Canadian Children's picture books. I had expected that racism and oppression would prevail in the form of stereotypical/deficient representations of PoC or reproducing dominant ideologies that reinforce their marginalization. Through a review of the literature, I have learned that Canadian children's picture books, whether or not they are labeled as racially/ethnically diverse or multicultural, might contain stereotypes, biases, and deficit discourses against PoC, in particular Black communities. Indeed, I have found that racial/ethnic stereotypes and cultural deficit discourses directed at PoC continue. For example, the submissive and domestic stereotypes of Asian women can be identified in *My Cat Looks Like My Dad*; specifically, the mom is shown cleaning up after

the dad and cat, even taking up "dirty" chores under the supervision of the cat, while the cat can be viewed as the White dad.

Explicitly identifying the race/ethnicity of the CoC and overtly naming racist incidents in the text are hardly seen in the six books, let alone counter-storytelling of CoC. Surprisingly, the continued stereotyping can be found even by authors/illustrators of colour. It is possible that White authors/illustrators are involved in this vicious cycle because of their potential lack of knowledge in the areas of racial/ethnic studies, and that authors/illustrators of colour incorporate an unconscious internalization of stereotypes about PoC/CoC that are presented in books and/or media.

Not explicitly stating the race/ethnicity of CoC in text, or even minimizing the racialized details of CoC in illustrations, may be a way of setting a character up as "culturally neutral" in order to have the book applicable to both White children and children of colour. However, this might not provide a relatable literary experience for children of colour or a particular marginalized racial/ethnic group. Moreover, reproducing and deepening the association between the skin colour of Black/Brown characters and in the case of *French Toast,* delicious food through the interplay of text and images may mislead readers into perceiving that linking PoC with food is desirable, while ignoring the racism and oppressive natures of the skin colour–food–child connections. Furthermore, books designed to provide readers with universal information on PoC tend to present racial/ethnic groups with few or no mention of the struggles they experience in their lives. There is no mention in *Ara the Star Engineer*, as an example, of the obstacles or issues of race and racism women of colour in engineering might encounter in their careers. Another example comes from *Up!* in which the illustrations show readers the various ways that families living in 10 different places around the world hold their babies, without mentioning throughout the book any struggles these families might have with parenting. Also, while some

brief descriptions of differences/struggles in appearance, physical ability, and lifestyle are provided in *What Makes Us Unique?* the focus remains on articulating the positive commonalities, which might result in downplaying the dilemmas encountered by PoC.

It is also noteworthy that Canadian children's books appear to be inclined to keep a peaceful atmosphere rather than directly dealing with social justice issues in stories about diversity. The absence of directly naming racism in text communicates that racist words/behaviours towards PoC are acceptable, which is not be conducive to developing anti-racist values among White children. As well, such an absence might result in children of colour believing that they should not make a fuss about racism, thereby perpetuating and promoting to the ongoing normalization of racism. To that end, I hope the Book Bank selections of CCBC will be more carefully reviewed to see if "social justice" is being illuminated and filling the above-mentioned holes, rather than simply assumed just because of including CoC. With the expectation and desire that the day will soon come when Canadian children of colour or not will see themselves authentically depicted and reflected and learn about the actual lives of others in Canadian children's picture books, thereby promoting social justice and diversity.

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Appendix A

List of Indigenous Stories

No.	Title	Grade	Year	Author(s)	Race/Ethnicity of Author(s)	Illustrator(s)	Race/Ethnicity of Illustrator(s)
1	Lila and the Crow	Grades K-3	2016	Gabrielle Grimard	Non-Indigenous /First Nations	Gabrielle Grimard	Non-Indigenous /First Nations
2	My Heart Fills with Happiness	Grades PreK-2	2016	Monique Gray Smith	Indigenous/First Nations	Julie Flett	Indigenous/Métis
3	Sockeye Silver, Saltchuck Blue	Grades PreK-1	2019	Roy Henry Vickers & Robert Budd	Indigenous/First Nations (Roy Henry Vickers)	Roy Henry Vickers	Indigenous/First Nations
4	The Gathering	Grades K-2	2018	Theresa Meuse	Indigenous/First Nations	Arthur Stevens	Indigenous/First Nations
5	What's My Superpower?	Grades 0-2	2017	Aviaq Johnston	Indigenous/Inuit	Tim Mack	Non-Indigenous /First Nations
6	When We Were Alone	Grades K-2	2016	David Alexander Robertson	Indigenous/First Nations	Julie Flett	Indigenous/Métis

Appendix B

List of Non-Indigenous Stories

No.	Title	Grade	Year	Author(s)	Race/Ethnicity of Author(s)	Illustrator(s)	Race/Ethnicity of Illustrator(s)
1	Ara the Star Engineer	Grades K-2	2018	Komal Singh	South Asian (Indian)	Ipek Konak	Unknown (may be West Asian)
2	French Toast	Grades K-2	2016	Kari-Lynn Winters	White	François Thisdale	White
3	Greetings, Leroy	Grades K-2	2017	Itah Sadu	Black	Alix Delinois	Black
4	Malaika's Costume	Grades Pre-K-2	2016	Nadia L.Hohn	Black	Irene Luxbacher	White
5	My Cat Looks Like My Dad	Grades Pre-K-2	2019	Thao Lam	Southeast Asian (Vietnamese)	Thao Lam	Southeast Asian (Vietnamese)
6	The Walking Bathroom	Grades Pre-K-2	2017	Shauntay Grant	Black	Erin Bennett Banks	White
7	Up! How Families Around the World Carry Their Little Ones	Grades Pre-K-2	2017	Susan Hughes	White	Ashley Barron	White
8	What Makes Us Unique? Our First Talk About Diversity	Grades K-2	2016	Jillian Roberts	White	Cindy Revell	White
9	Where Oliver Fits	Grades Pre-K-2	2017	Cale Atkinson	White	Cale Atkinson	White
10	Who Do I Want to Become?	Grades K-2	2018	Rumeet Billan	South Asian (Indian)	Michelle Clement	Unknown

Appendix C

Huber et al.'s (2020) Analytical question prompts of the *Critical Race Content Analysis*

- What identities or characteristics are assigned by race, class, gender, immigrations status, language, etc.? What roles do CoC play (i.e. central, tangential, hierarchical)? In what ways does the story become raced, or not?
- What are the dominant ideologies and how do they operate (e.g. white supremacy, patriarchy, cultural deficits, other forms of power)?
- How are the realities and/or experiences of PoC represented, or not (cultural authenticity vs. generalizations, simplifications)?
- Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (historical, political, social, geographic, temporal, etc.), or not?
- How is focalization of the story constructed?
- How does power operate within the narrative devices of the story (i.e., vantage point, story closure, assumptions)? Who has power? Who has agency?
- How are dominant ideologies/deficit perspectives challenged? How does resistance emerge?