

WASHINGTON MODELS FOR THE EVALUATION OF BIAS CONTENT IN INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Guidelines for Identifying Bias

As schools work to increase success for all students, it is important to recognize the impact of bias in classrooms, instructional materials and teaching strategies. Bias in general may be identified by determining whose interest is being portrayed and whose interest is being excluded. Evaluating for bias requires us to learn about others and to respect and appreciate the differences and similarities.

A Bias Review should consider the following elements*:		
Gender	Race	Ethnicity
Sexual Orientation	Religion	Socio-economic Status
Gender Expression & Identity	Physical Disability	Age
Family Structure	Native Language	Occupation
Body Shape/Size	Culture	Geographic Setting

Instructional Materials Selection Committee

Washington State RCW 28A.320.230 requires school districts to establish an instructional materials committee to support the selection of instructional materials as well as to provide a system for receiving written complaints in regards to materials used by the school district (Appendix B).

As teachers select classroom materials they must first be aware of their own biases and experiences which may influence their choice of instructional materials and examples. District training should help staff and instructional materials committee members identify bias.

Instructional Materials include:

- Textbooks
- Books
- Articles
- Computer Software
- Video
- Music

Involving Parents

The process of evaluating instructional materials should be inclusive and involve parent participation. Districts must provide reasonable notice to parents of the opportunity to serve on the committee and should consider the major language other than English, spoken in the community.

Challenges to Selection of Instructional Materials

District policies and procedures should include how individuals may make a complaint and how the district will receive and respond to complaints about instructional materials. By adopting clear policies and procedures, school districts can assure they are following RCW 28A.320.230.

*This list is intended to serve as a starting point.

TEN QUICK WAYS TO ANALYZE CHILDREN’S BOOKS FOR RACISM AND SEXISM

Adapted from the Council on Interracial Books for Children

Both in school and out, young children are exposed to racist and sexist attitudes. These attitudes—expressed over and over in books and in other media—gradually distort their perceptions until stereotypes and myths about minorities and women are accepted as reality. It is difficult for a librarian or teacher to convince children to question society’s attitudes.



But if a child can be shown how to detect racism and sexism in a book or other multimedia materials, the child can proceed to transfer the perception to wider areas. The following ten guidelines are offered as a starting point in evaluating children’s books from this perspective.

1. Check the illustrations.	Look for stereotypes. A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a particular group, race or sex which usually carries derogatory implications. Some stereotypes can be overt – for example, depicting a male Latino teenager as a gang member. While stereotypes may not be this obvious, look for variations which may demean or ridicule characters because of their race or sex. Look for tokenism. If there are non-white characters in the illustrations, do they look like whites except for being tinted or colored in? Do all faces look stereotypically alike, or are they depicted as genuine individuals with distinctive features? Who’s doing what? Do the illustrations depict non-whites in subservient and passive roles or in leadership and action roles? Are males the active “doers” and females the inactive observers?
2. Check the story line.	Standard for success. Does it take “white” behavior standards for a minority person to “get ahead”? Is “making it” in the dominant white society projected as the only ideal? To gain acceptance and approval, do persons of color have to exhibit extraordinary qualities—excel in sports, get A’s, etc.? In friendships between white and children from developing countries, is it the child from the developing country who does most of the understanding and forgiving? Resolution of problems. How are problems presented, conceived and resolved in the story? Are minority people considered to be “the problem”? Are the oppressions faced by minorities and women represented as related to social injustice? Are the reasons for poverty and oppression explained, or are they accepted as inevitable? Does the story line encourage passive acceptance or active resistance? Is a particular problem that is faced by a racial minority person or a female resolved through the benevolent intervention of a white person or a male? Role of women. Are the achievements of girls and women based on their own initiative and intelligence, or are they due to their good looks or to their relationship with boys? Are sex roles incidental or critical to characterization and plot? Could the same story be told if the sex roles were reversed.

3. Look at the lifestyles.	Are persons from developing countries and their setting depicted in such a way that they contrast unfavorably with the unstated norm of white middle-class suburbia? If the minority group in question is depicted as “different,” are negative value judgments implied? Are minorities depicted exclusively in ghettos or migrant camps? Look for inaccuracy and inappropriateness in the depiction of other cultures. Watch for instances of the “quaint-natives-in costume” syndrome (most noticeable in areas like costume and custom, but extending to behavior and personality traits as well).
4. Weigh the relationships between people.	Do the whites in the story possess the power, take the leadership, and make the important decisions? Do racial minorities and females function in essentially supporting roles? How are family relationships depicted? In black families, is the mother always dominant? In Latino families, are there always lots of children? If the family is separated, are societal conditions—unemployment, poverty, for example—cited among the reasons for the separation?
5. Note the heroes.	For many years, books showed only “safe” minority heroes—those who avoided serious conflict with the white establishment of their time. Minority groups today are insisting on the right to define their own heroes (of both sexes) based on their own concepts and struggles for justice. When minority heroes do appear, are they admired for the same qualities that have made white heroes famous or because what they have done have benefited white people? Ask this question: “Whose interest is a particular hero really serving?”
6. Consider the effects on a child’s self-image.	Are norms established which limit the child’s aspirations and self-concepts? What effect can it have on black children to be continuously bombarded with images of the color white as the ultimate in beauty, cleanliness, virtue, etc., and the color black as evil, dirty, menacing, etc.? Does the book counteract or reinforce this positive association with the color white and negative association with black? What happens to a girl’s self-image when she reads that boys perform all of the brave and important deeds? What about a girl’s self-esteem if she is not “fair” of skin and slim of body? In a particular story, are there one or more persons with whom a minority child can readily identify to a positive and constructive end?
7. Consider the author’s or illustrator’s background.	Analyze the biographical material on the jacket flap or the back of the book. If a story deals with a minority theme, what qualifies the author or illustrator to deal with the subject? If the author and illustrator are not members of the minority being written about, is there anything in their background that would specifically recommend them as the creators of this book?
8. Check out the author’s perspective.	No author can be wholly objective. All authors write out of a cultural as well as a personal context. Children’s books in the past have traditionally come from authors who are white and who are members of the middle class, with one result being that a single ethnocentric perspective has dominated American children’s literature in the United States. With the book in question, read carefully to determine whether the direction of the author’s perspective substantially weakens or strengthens the value of his/her written work. Is the perspective patriarchal or feminist? Is it solely Eurocentric or do minority cultural perspectives also receive respect?

9. Watch for loaded words.	A word is loaded when it has insulting overtones. Examples of loaded adjectives (usually racist) are savage, primitive, conniving, lazy, superstitious, treacherous, wily, crafty, inscrutable, docile, and backward. Look for sexist language and adjectives that exclude or ridicule women. Look for use of the male pronoun to refer to both males and females. While the generic use of the word “man” was accepted in the past, its use today is outmoded. The following examples show how sexist language can be avoided: ancestors instead of forefathers; chairperson instead of chairman; community instead of brotherhood; firefighters instead of firemen; manufactured instead of manmade; the human family instead of the family of man.
10. Look at the copyright date.	Books on minority themes—usually hastily conceived—suddenly began appearing in the mid-1960s. There followed a growing number of “minority experience” books to meet the new market demand, but most of these were still written by white authors, edited by white editors and published by white publishers. They therefore reflected a white point of view. Not until the early 1970s did the children’s book world began to even remotely reflect the realities of a pluralistic society. The new direction resulted from emergence of third world authors writing about their own experiences in an oppressive society. This promising direction has been reversing in the late 1970s. Nonsexist books, with rare exceptions, were not published before 1972 to 1974. The copyright dates, therefore, can be a clue as to how likely the book is to be overtly racist or sexist, although a recent copyright date, of course, is no guarantee of a book’s relevance or sensitivity. The copyright date only means the year the book was published. It usually takes about two years—and often much more than that—from the time a manuscript is submitted to the publisher to the time it is actually printed and put on the market. This time lag meant very little in the past, but in a time of rapid change and changing consciousness, when children’s book publishing is attempting to be “relevant,” it is becoming increasingly significant.



STEREOTYPE EXAMPLES AND ALTERNATIVES

EXAMPLES	ALTERNATIVE
RACE/ETHNICITY/RELIGION	
African Americans are depicted as employed only as athletes, or as unemployed. Native Americans are depicted as people of the past. Japanese Americans are depicted only as participants in World War II. Latinos are depicted only in the context of migrant farm work. Non-Christian religions are depicted as extreme.	All ethnic groups are portrayed as equally independent/dependent, leaders/subordinates, peaceable/ militant, open/secretive, thoughtful/impulsive etc. Religions are not presented as either right or wrong.
SEX /GENDER	
Boys are depicted as doing; girls as watching. Women are depicted only in relationship to men (husbands, sons, and bosses); as timid, silly and interested in trivial things. Men and boys must be fearless, confident, competitive, and controlling their emotions.	Members of both sexes are depicted in nontraditional as well as traditional roles in the family, at work, and in leisure activities. Members of both sexes are depicted as independent/dependent, positive/fearful, active/passive, intelligent, emotional, gentle and caring for others.
OTHER AREAS	
Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are portrayed only as angry protestors; only in Mardi-Gras type parade costumes; or only in the context of HIV/AIDS.	All identity groups are portrayed in different settings and emotions – with different ranges of dress, activity and health.
Only <i>nuclear family</i> groups are portrayed, with young, able-bodied, heterosexual parents – the father works outside the home, the mother works inside the home, and there are two to four children.	In addition to the traditional <i>nuclear family</i> model, family groups are depicted in which there are single parents, adopted and foster children, stepparents, same-sex parents, and/or relatives living with the family, including relatives as surrogate parents. <i>Extended family</i> models are depicted, where emphasis is placed on roles and relationships rather than physical proximity.
All illustrations and photos are of young, able-bodied, thin, traditionally-attractive individuals.	Examples of all different ages and body types are visible, including people of size, people with wheel chairs and people with birth marks and other physical “differences”. All identity groups are portrayed in different settings and emotions – with different ranges of health - sometimes as able-bodied, sometimes as healthy, sometimes as ill and sometimes with disabilities.
OMISSION	
When non-majority and women’s contributions to humankind are included, they are segregated in special chapters, sections, units or bordered boxes, and do not appear in context.	Non-majority and women’s contributions are interwoven with the rest of the text, as they are in life.

Appendix A: SAMPLE Evaluation Form

GENERAL CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Recommended Instructional Material:

a. Type of material:

☐ Textbook

☐ Novel (Fiction)

☐ Video (DVD/Movie)

☐ Music (CD)

☐ Computer Software

☐ Novel (Non-Fiction)

☐ Script (Play)

b. Title: _____ Copyright Date: _____

c. Author: _____ Publisher: _____

d. Course or subject area: _____ Grade level (s): _____

e. Is this material part of a Series? ☐ Yes ☐ No Title of Series: _____

Gender/Sex				
	Standard is clearly articulated or inferred 3	Standard is present, but limited in presentation and/or explanation 2	Limited presentation of standard 1	Standard is not present N/A
Male and female characters reflect qualities such as leadership, intelligence, imagination and courage.				
Male and females are represented as central characters in story and illustrations.				
Male and females are shown performing similar work in related fields				
People are referred to by their names and roles as often as they are referred to as someone's spouse, parent or sibling.				
Stereotyping language as "women chatting/men discussing" is avoided.				
Biographical or historical materials include a variety of male and female contributions to society.				
Groups which include male and females are referred to in neutral languages such as people, mail carriers, firefighters, or legislators.				
TOTAL SCORE:				
Comments/Suggestions to address scores of 2 or 1:				

Multicultural				
	Standard is clearly articulated or inferred 3	Standard is present, but limited in presentation and/or explanation 2	Limited presentation of standard 1	Standard is not present N/A
Materials contain racial/ethnic balance in main characters and in illustrations.				
Minorities are represented as central characters in story and illustrations.				
Minority characters are shown in a variety of lifestyles in active, decision-making and leadership roles.				
Materials provide an opportunity for a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural perspectives.				
The vocabulary of racism is avoided.				
Stereotyping language is avoided.				
Biographical or historical materials include minority characters and their discoveries and contributions to society.				
One religion is not perceived as superior to others.				
Oversimplified generalizations about different religions are avoided in text and illustrations.				
TOTAL SCORE:				
Comments/Suggestions to address scores of 2 or 1:				

Persons with Disabilities				
	Standard is clearly articulated or inferred 3	Standard is present, but limited in presentation and/or explanation 2	Limited presentation of standard 1	Standard is not present N/A
People are sometimes portrayed as able-bodied, healthy, ill, and having disabilities.				
Qualities of character such as leadership, imagination, courage, and integrity are distributed among non-handicapped persons and persons with disabilities.				
Non-handicapped persons and persons with disabilities are represented as central characters in story and illustrative materials				

Non-handicapped persons and persons with disabilities are shown performing similar work in related fields.				
Non-handicapped persons and persons with disabilities are shown working and playing together as colleagues				
Persons with disabilities are referred to by their names and roles rather than their disability				
Biographical and historical materials include contributions to society by persons with disabilities				
TOTAL SCORE:				
Comments/Suggestions to address scores of 2 or 1:				

Socio-Economic Status				
	Standard is clearly articulated or inferred 3	Standard is present, but limited in presentation and/or explanation 2	Limited presentation of standard 1	Standard is not present N/A
Social class groupings portray all individuals in a variety of roles (positive and negative) and situations displaying positive and negative characteristics of integrity, humility, valor, and intelligence.				
Oversimplified generalizations about social classes and groups are avoided in text and illustrations.				
All individuals are judged by their strength of character rather than their socio-economic status.				
Characters are described by their behaviors, beliefs, and values rather than unnecessary socio-economic descriptors.				
Contributions of individuals are valued for their benefit to all peoples of society.				
Materials provide an opportunity for dialogue which considers a variety of socioeconomic perspectives.				
TOTAL SCORE:				
Comments/Suggestions to address scores of 2 or 1:				

Family				
	Standard is clearly articulated or inferred 3	Standard is present, but limited in presentation and/or explanation 2	Limited presentation of standard 1	Standard is not present N/A
In addition to the traditional nuclear family model, family groups are depicted in which there are single parents, adopted and foster children, step-parents, same-sex parents, and/or relatives living with the family.				
A variety of life's experiences are depicted.				
People of all groups are depicted in a variety of clothing and with a variety of eating habits and activities.				
Males and females are depicted in non-traditional as well as traditional roles in the family, at work, in leisure activities, and in attitude.				
TOTAL SCORE:				
Comments/Suggestions to address scores of 2 or 1:				

Do you recommend the use of this instructional material within the classroom? ____yes ____no

Comments:

Name of Evaluator: _____

Signature of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

WASHINGTON STATE LAW

RCW 28A.320.230 Instructional Materials – Instructional Materials Committee

Every board of directors, unless otherwise specifically provided by law, shall:

(1) Prepare, negotiate, set forth in writing and adopt, policy relative to the selection or deletion of instructional materials. Such policy shall:

- (a) State the school district's goals and principles relative to instructional materials;
- (b) Delegate responsibility for the preparation and recommendation of teachers' reading lists and specify the procedures to be followed in the selection of all instructional materials including text books;
- (c) Establish an instructional materials committee to be appointed, with the approval of the school board, by the school district's chief administrative officer. This committee shall consist of representative members of the district's professional staff, including representation from the district's curriculum development committees, and, in the case of districts which operate elementary school(s) only, the educational service district superintendent, one of whose responsibilities shall be to assure the correlation of those elementary district adoptions with those of the high school district(s) which serve their children. The committee may include parents at the school board's discretion: PROVIDED, That parent members shall make up less than one-half of the total membership of the committee;
- (d) Provide for reasonable notice to parents of the opportunity to serve on the committee and for terms of office for members of the instructional materials committee;
- (e) Provide a system for receiving, considering and acting upon written complaints regarding instructional materials used by the school district;
- (f) Provide free text books, supplies and other instructional materials to be loaned to the pupils of the school, when, in its judgment, the best interests of the district will be sub served thereby and prescribe rules and regulations to preserve such books, supplies and other instructional materials from unnecessary damage.

Recommendation of instructional materials shall be by the district's instructional materials committee in accordance with district policy. Approval or disapproval shall be by the local school district's board of directors.

Districts may pay the necessary travel and subsistence expenses for expert counsel from outside the district. In addition, the committee's expenses incidental to visits to observe other districts' selection procedures may be reimbursed by the school district.

Districts may, within limitations stated in board policy, use and experiment with instructional materials for a period of time before general adoption is formalized.

Within the limitations of board policy, a school district's chief administrator may purchase instructional materials to meet deviant needs or rapidly changing circumstances.

RCW 28A.640.020 Regulations, guidelines to eliminate discrimination--Scope. (1) The superintendent of public instruction shall develop regulations and guidelines to eliminate sex discrimination as it applies to public school employment, counseling and guidance services to students, recreational and athletic activities for students, access to course offerings, and in textbooks and instructional materials used by students.

- (e) Specifically with respect to textbooks and instructional materials, which shall also include, but not be limited to, reference books and audio-visual materials, they shall be required to adhere to the guidelines developed by the superintendent of public instruction to implement the intent of this chapter: PROVIDED, That this subsection shall not be construed to prohibit the introduction of material deemed appropriate by the instructor for educational purposes.

WAC 392-190-055 Textbooks and instructional materials—Scope—Elimination of sex bias—Compliance timetable.

(1) It is the intent of this section to eliminate sex bias in connection with any form of instruction provided by a school district.

(2) The instructional materials policy of each school district required by RCW 28A.320.230 shall incorporate therein, as part of the selection criteria, a specific statement requiring the elimination of sex bias in all textbooks and instructional materials including reference materials and audio-visual materials.

(3) The instructional materials committee of each school district shall establish and maintain appropriate screening criteria designed to identify and eliminate sex bias in all textbooks and instructional materials including reference materials and audio-visual materials: *Provided*, That such selection criteria shall be consistent with the selection criteria endorsed by the state board of education dated December 6, 1974, WAC 180-48-010, as now or hereafter amended, and WAC 180-46-005 through WAC 180-46-060, as now or hereafter amended. One of the aids to identification of sex bias in instructional materials consists of the *Washington Models for the Evaluation of Bias Content in Instructional Materials* published by the superintendent of public instruction.

(4) In recognition of the fact that current instructional materials which contain sex bias may not be replaced immediately, each school district should acquire supplemental instructional materials or aids to be used concurrent with existing materials for the purpose of countering the sex bias content thereof.

(5) Nothing in this section is intended to prohibit the use of assignment of supplemental instructional materials such as classic and contemporary literary works, periodicals and technical journals which, although they contain sex bias, are educationally necessary or advisable.