

At the beginning of my project the end goal was to create a resource for Albion College Education students to be able to easily and effectively find multicultural literature for young people. That goal shifted, for the better as the summer progressed, and I realized the importance in sharing this problem with everyone. No matter the color of your skin.

My name is Kali Johnson and as a white person living in America, I only started to see the inequities and their overlapping occurrences after becoming an English Secondary Education student with a minor in Teaching English as a Second Language at Albion College. I noticed how difficult it is to find multicultural literature that is not only appropriate for schools but also relates to the everyday lives of students. Over the course of my eight weeks, I've read fifteen banned young adult/middle grade books and five that were not banned, all of which were written by and about people of color. After reading each of these books I created summaries, and I chose 5 books to create engaging lesson plans for. With my summaries and lesson plans, I uploaded them to the website I created: [www.empoweringyouththroughdiversevoices.com](http://www.empoweringyouththroughdiversevoices.com).

I used the analogy that books are either windows or mirrors, and it's crucial that students have access to both. Books that are mirrors reflect the experiences that the reader could face in their everyday lives, and books that are windows give them the opportunity to look into the lives of others and step into their shoes. Typically in schools white students almost always read books that are mirrors, leaving historically marginalized students books that are windows. I've experienced this personally as a white person who went to a majority minority public school district, and I can only account one time I was offered a book that wasn't a reflection of my life but rather a window into the lives of another culture. I also continue to repeatedly see this in my clinical experiences for education classes. I believe every student should be given the opportunity to have and read literature that reflects themselves and the world around them, which is the key motivator behind my project.

Through my research, I found out there are multiple reasons that students don't have equitable access to books that are mirrors and windows. The first reason I found was because books written by and about people of color simply weren't being published as much as books written by and about white people. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center from the University of Madison-Wisconsin, from 2013-2022 they received about 33,936 books from publishers. Of those 33,936 books only about 21% of them were by and/or about people of color. Simply put, if those books aren't being published, how could they be accessible to students?

Looking at the publishing of books from 2013-2022, each year there is an uprising in publishing of books by and/or about people of color, but that doesn't necessarily mean students have equitable access to these books because of book bans. In 2022 the American Library Association said they have never seen such a demand for banning books, with 2,571 books in the process of getting banned. The primary content of books being banned is LGBTQIA+ themes or characters (which I didn't focus this project on, even though some of my books were banned for these reasons) and at a very close second, books that had primary or secondary characters of color. Along with that, 89% of the intended readers of banned books are children. In the 2022-2023 school year, 5,049 public schools had banned at least one book, leaving about four-million students without access to certain books. Children typically read in schools and may not have the opportunity to access books outside of the classroom, and if the books that represent everyone are taken away it presents an unrealistic view of the world around them. I realized my work this summer was not just important, but imperative. The disadvantage of students viewing the world from just one lens is not something I want to promote in my future classroom, and it's my hope that with my resource Albion College education students will combat this issue as well.

It was incredibly rewarding to have my advisor Jessica Roberts by my side through my project, as a mentor and a guide through my work with this disheartening issue in public schools. She was the one to encourage me and help put my ideas into words and actions throughout my project. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Palmer and Renee Kreger for fostering such a positive and collaborative FURSCA environment every week. To Robert M. Teeter Research Fellowship Endowment, thank you for allowing me to be a part of Albion's FURSCA Program. This summer provided me with the stepping stone to start the work I hope to continue; to bring awareness and combat this issue at the Elkin Isaac Symposium, and bring an equitable education space to any and every public school student I have the ability to. I can't say thank you enough!

Below is the link to the presentation I created on my project this summer, enjoy!

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1YQ3mOrmhhZoAVvovfNSknsOxgBql8lOtisi1pGEL4qQ/edit?usp=sharing>