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PEAC 325

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Diversity Representation in Literature

Growing up, I was an avid reader. I spent my days in the library of my elementary school and was excited to get to pick out books from the library. I read almost all the Junie B. Jones books. Though, I related to her quirks as a kid. I didn't see girls who were like me. While Junie B. Jones was someone I could relate to, she was also someone extremely different from myself; someone who didn't share my culture or any issues I had growing up. Out of all the books my school offered there were never ones that showed a 9-year-old girl translating for her parents or assimilating into American culture. These were the issues I faced as a kid growing up, but I never saw them represented in the books offered to me.

Representation in literature is important because it allows kids to see the possibilities they have for themselves. Media often portrays the stereotypical representation of minorities. Movies and news outlets show the negative aspects of minorities but rarely what they have achieved. Having representation in literature for kids is important in developing their self-esteem. It gives them the power to believe that through education and arduous work they can achieve their dreams. It shows them their true potential and the power they possess.

Numerous studies have observed the negative impacts society can have on the self-esteem of minorities. Studies such as the doll test performed by Kenneth and Mamie Clark demonstrate the negative effects of the media. The study proved that by the age of ten children associated the word "bad" with the brown dolls. Although time has passed since these studies

and many legislative actions have been ratified since then, minorities still deal with self-esteem issues.

There are various campaigns which have been created to incorporate more diverse books into libraries across the nation; notably, the “1000 Black girl book” campaign. A young twelve-year-old black girl created this campaign because she wanted to have more representative literature at her disposal. The fact is there are many books which demonstrate girls of diverse backgrounds, but they are not as common in public schools. The previous campaigns have been able to locate and collect an ample number of books; the downfall is the fact that the books are not incorporated into the libraries of local schools, especially schools with a significantly larger minority population.

The campaign also does not address other minorities who are often not the main characters in children's books. Forming an identity is something everyone goes through and in a racialized society where children often hear their race being criminalized, it's salient for both young girls and boys have proper representation. There are other campaigns which include “We Need Diverse Books” which includes books for a more diverse audience.

My project is to collect various books through a book drive and donate the books to Maupin Elementary School. Although Maupin has various projects addressing the diverse needs of the students, having extra books would help them and their students. The goal of the project is for every student at Maupin to be able to grab a book from the school library and see themselves represented in its pages.

Expected outcomes:

- Make people aware of the lack of representation in children's books

- Make people aware of the importance of diversity in children's books
- Raise self-esteem of students

I would be working with the principal of Maupin elementary and faculty members who have initiated different projects to embolden the diverse student body of the school. Since the student body is primarily African American and mixed raced, they have addressed topics such as police brutality, healthy eating habits, and self-esteem. Being able to work with the principal and different faculty members is vital since they are the ones who know the students the best and see their hardship.

Having representation in literature is essential since this is the time in which children are forming their identity. Elementary and middle school are the years in which children are observing others and forming their self-value. That is why it is paramount for them to see themselves in a positive light. Books that portray children of color as unstoppable forces of wonder help shape the lives of those who read them.

Connectors and dividers

It is significant to have the resources available for students to go into libraries and see themselves in books, but a crucial connector is teachers. Teachers are essential since they are the ones that can show the children at the school that the resources are there. A divider could be the specify of the books required. Since the books are targeted to give more resources to a specific group, the parents of the white children in the school might feel as though it is unfair treatment.

I would like to initiate the project in January of 2018. This would allow me to have a month of fundraising before I take the books to Maupin Elementary. The school is hosting a celebratory event for the premiere of the Black Panther movie. The event is to honor black

representation in comic books and movies and it would be a magnificent event to bring the books to the school.

In January, I would set up different bins around the University for people to donate books. I would also contact different bookstores around Louisville and see if they would like to make any donations to the book drive. Collecting as many books as possible is going to be a challenge since there are not many bookstores which have a plethora of children's books. Obtaining the funds and the attention from others is also a challenge.

Timeline:

- Mid- December- start contacting local bookstores, create posters and hang them around campus and local areas around the community
- January- contact different professors and tell them about the book drive so they can tell their students and set up different book bins for collection
- Late January- go to local bookstores and collect and buy any books for the drive
- February 16- go to Maupin and deliver the books

I am worried that gathering interest and support from people would be hard. For the book drive to thrive people would either must purchase books to donate them or have them readily available. Since the books which I am hoping to collect are so specific I am sure it will be difficult to get the number of books I would hope. There are many online resources which do have children's books. If the number of books donated was not a large amount, I would order books from Amazon since the books are about eight dollars each. If people are not able to donate books because they do not know where to acquire them they could donate a monetary contribution.

The expenses would come from creating flyers to let everyone know about the book drive. There would also be expenses associated with the driving to each location, such as the different bookstores and Maupin. However, these are expenses which I would be able to absorb since they would be minor relative to the potential outcome of the project.

This project connects to peacebuilding through the definition given by the USIP of Peace Studies. One of the pillars of peacebuilding, according to the definition, is the support of broad-based education. Books are an essential part of learning. Through the book more children would be encouraged to read, and reading fosters the desire to learn. Peacebuilding also includes a transformation toward peaceful relationships the diversity in literature would allow unfamiliar cultures to learn about each other.

Empowering these young kids from the ages of 6-11 is important since they will be the ones to advocate for their communities in the future. It is easier for people who have high self-value to empower others. Emboldening these young minds by showing them what they could achieve, creates a generation of individuals that are more resilient, more powerful, and more accepting.