Landt, S. M. (2006). “Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity”. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 49:8, 690-697.

Heather Barton

Kennesaw State University

Abstract

Literature, and the exploration of literature, is more than just words on a page. For many people, the exploration of literature can lead to a sense of belonging, a sense of understanding, and even a sense of connecting to others. Landt compares multicultural literature to the ever whirling colors of a kaleidoscope, that “morphs and changes at every move” (691). So should English teachers move and flow with the desire to grow appreciation and acceptance of other cultures within our classrooms.

The purpose of using multicultural literature in a classroom, according to Landt, is to allow students to witness other perspectives from the voices of characters to which they can relate. While students are eager to read literature with characters that they can relate to, teachers often are reluctant due to a lack of knowledge of the texts and the topics. However, by including voices from all parts of the world, students and teachers can begin to expand their understanding of more than their own neighborhoods.

In addition to increasing awareness of other cultures, the goals of including multicultural literature into a classroom include the building of awareness in those within our society who are often marginalized due to ethnicity, religion, and social station. Often, the average classroom student is not even aware of the problems that some of their peers face every day just based on these issues. By the inclusion of literature from the perspective of these underrepresented voices, those of privilege can begin to experience and understand the plights of others. The ultimate goal would be to lessen prejudice and misunderstandings of others within our own society.

Teaching teenagers is a daunting task. Adults are told that they could never understand what it means to be a teenager. By including teen voices through literature, a teacher can encourage students to see themselves as a reflection of the character. Making connections to literature is always the goal of any teacher, so by providing a piece of literature to the students, one in which the student can relate, the teacher is helping the student to find the connections within us all. While for many students this task can be completed through, the standard literature found in the textbook, this is not possible for those of all culture. An effort to include literature from all cultures will help to ensure that each unique voice and perspective is heard.

Application

Landt’s inclusion of examples of texts and their tales will help me to find new literature to add to those I already use within my classroom. I already strive to include voices from cultures that I feel students can relate to as well as voices that will expose the students to those cultures underrepresented within canonical literature.

While I agree with many of Landt’s positions, I am concerned that multiculturalism and human rights are too closely viewed as the same. Some of the selections offered by Landt show, in my experience, a very stereotypical view of a marginalized society. Often, teachers view a text that comes from another culture as multicultural when in fact the text evokes the need for discussions of human rights issues. If we only show a marginalized culture through the negative stereotypes already held by the majority, are notwe only doing more harm than good? Instead, I think it is important for us as teachers to make sure that when we are including a multicultural text into the classroom, that the text does a great job of not showing the marginalized culture in a stereotypical manner.

* How can I include literature within the classroom that resonates with voice and culture without further marginalizing a underrepresented literature culture?