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Article Abstracts

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

Landt’s article focuses on the inherent need of teens and young adults to find themselves within a story. A lack of diverse literature that accurately portrays minority characters who deal with real social issues has left many young readers feeling isolated in their own reality. Fortunately, Landt points out, the collection of multicultural literature has grown in recent years, allowing students to distinguish both similarities and differences between cultures. By accessing diverse literature, young readers will be exposed to a broader view of the world, which in turn can help to reduce prejudice and misunderstanding. Landt asserts that the challenge at this time is to make students aware of these quality pieces by incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom. This integration of varied pieces into a class curriculum benefits students in several ways. Multicultural literature both heightens the respect of the individual and acknowledges the contributions of minorities within society. Children are exposed to different cultures while developing pride of their own cultures. Finally, multicultural literature helps to make students aware of differences and aids in breaking down stereotypes that perpetuate inequality. Throughout the article Landt highlights numerous books that classroom teachers may want to incorporate into their lessons. She also provides guidelines for selecting appropriate material as well as websites that outline a host of outstanding multicultural novels. Landt proposes that teachers begin to offer students a broader view of the world that displays hope and possibility through the use of multicultural literature.

1. This article is applicable to my classroom in that I teach high school English and many of the multicultural pieces discussed could be woven into the courses I teach. As a co-teacher rather than a general education teacher, however, it is more difficult to incorporate my own literature choices into the curriculum as an anchor piece or other major piece of literature because these choices are primarily made by the general education teachers and not the special education teachers. Other than this obstacle, I see value in incorporating multicultural literature in the classroom. I have found that many students do feel disconnected to the literature we read in class at times, particularly in American Literature where the choices are more limited. One challenge I think most teachers face is in deciding what novel to choose. Many classrooms represent numerous cultures making it difficult to choose one particular viewpoint over another.
2. This article discusses multiculturalism through the review of the effect on multicultural literature on a young reader. It outlines the benefits that exposure to a variety of cultures has on teens and young adults. The author cites several sources all explaining the profound affect that reading about one’s own culture had on them as an individual.
3. In a classroom that is driven by standards, how do teachers incorporate multicultural literature into the curriculum in a manner that is inclusive to all students? Also, what steps should teachers take to prepare themselves in order to teach multicultural literature in an effective, profound manner?

Dong, Yu R. (2005). Taking a cultural-response approach to teaching multicultural literature. *English Journal*, *94*(3), 55-60.

This article outlines the process of a cultural response approach to teaching multicultural literature in the classroom. Dong notes that many teachers are concerned about how to effectively teach multicultural literature, often feeling unfamiliar with a particular culture and its defining characteristics. However, a typical approach of textual analysis may not be appropriate for the instruction of multicultural literature. Instead, a method that encourages readers to make their own personal associations and connections to their own experiences may be more suited to this type of material. This method is generally referred to as a reader-response or cultural-response approach and works to engage students in the text while challenging pre-existing ideas about other cultures.

In the article, Dong emphasizes the importance of teachers completing research on a culture and the societal issues within a culture before teaching a particular piece of literature. She also encourages teachers to learn from their students during discussion of a piece by listening to those students who are “cultural insiders” and using them as resources during the course of instruction.

In order to gain familiarity with a particular culture Dong highlights two methods: an ethnographic approach and an incident activity. Both of these methods assist current or pre-service teachers to better understand cultural values through a different lens. In an ethnographic approach a student observes, listens to, and experiences people’s behavior in context. This may be accomplished through interviews with cultural insiders, reading several works from a given culture, and reflecting on the information obtained in a written response. Through an ethnographic approach, the learner takes on the role of a cultural anthropologist. In an incident activity, students are asked to write a narrative that reflects a cultural conflict that occurs in a text. Then, students pose a question and possible answers that suggest preconceived notions a reader may have about the text, sparking a discussion about a particular cultural issue. This discussion encourages awareness of cultural and racial differences. An incident activity allows the student to actively participate in talking about cultural differences and encourages cross-cultural interactions. Overall, the ultimate goal of a cultural response approach is to develop more critical readers and writers who gain an increased sensitivity to other cultures.

1. A cultural response method could easily be implemented my classroom. It is a method that engages students and allows them to connect to personal experiences. Even in the literature we currently read in class (much of which is traditional literature), we encourage students to make personal connections whether it be through personal or family events, movies they have watched, or books they have read. This transition to connect to individual culture would probably be fairly smooth in my classroom. I think one activity that would be interesting to try in the classroom is the incident activity in which students present a cultural conflict and pose a question related to the conflict in order to spark discussion. I like the idea of students bringing their own experiences and values to a discussion which may help others see a situation in a different light. I think this concept might work well within a Socratic Seminar format in which students bring examples of cultural conflicts presented within a novel and discuss and debate the particular issue with their peers. In the Socratic Seminar they should also bring evidence from either the novel or an outside source to help support their ideas.
2. This article discusses multiculturalism in the context of teacher preparedness. Many teachers shy away from teaching multicultural literature in their classrooms because they are not confident or uncomfortable with the content. The article addresses this issue and cites several methods to help teachers familiarize themselves with a variety of cultures.
3. In what additional ways can teachers prepare themselves for the instruction of multicultural literature and what challenges might teachers face when presenting literature from a variety of cultures?