

A PARENT AND EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

# Check your children's books for racism and bias

**Stories of Color**

Follow ten simple steps to make sure that the books your children read avoid stereotypes and bias. Here's how.

## **Check the illustrations**

This includes looking for stereotypes, tokenism, as well as “active doers,” meaning characters engaged in action, not passive onlookers.

## **Consider the storyline**

These can be more subtle biases, such as “white behavior” being upheld or a person of color needing to excel to be seen as worthy. As you read, ask, “Are people of color seen as the problem?”

## **Observe the lifestyles**

Are people of color depicted exclusively in ghettos, barrios, or migrant camps? Is white suburbia held as the norm? Check for stereotyped “native costumes” syndrome.

## **Weigh the relationships between people**

Do white people in the story hold the “power” or position of leadership with people of color as supporting roles only? For example, stereotypes of mother-only Black families, Latin families experiencing poverty, etc.

## **Note the heroes**

Are heroes of color only represented by those who avoided serious conflict with the white establishment? Instead, is the hero defined by the people of color they represent?

## **Consider the effect on children’s self-esteem**

Does the book counteract or reinforce a positive association with the color white and negative association with black or brown? Or will children of color find positive characters to identify with?

## **Consider the author’s and illustrator’s background**

If a story deals with a specific minorities group, what qualifies the author or illustrator to deal with the subject? If the author or illustrator are not members of the group being written about, is there anything in their background that would recommend them as the creators of this book?

## **Check the author’s perspective**

No author can be wholly objective. All authors write out of a cultural and personal context. Check theirs.

## **Review the copyright date**

Only a few books with characters of color appeared prior to the mid-1960s, with most by BIPOC emerging in the 1970s—but this isn’t a rule.

## **Look for loaded words**

A word is loaded when it has insulting overtones. Examples of loaded adjectives—usually racist—are words like savage, lazy, conniving, superstitious, treacherous, wily, crafty, docile, and backward.

## TAKEAWAYS

### **1. Commit now**

You will mess up at some point or another. Don't worry. Commit to progress over perfection.

### **2. Stay watchful**

Bias isn't always blatant, it's subtle. Keep a watchful eye using these ten tips as a lens.

### **3. Find better books**

Leverage Stories of Color's diverse book catalog to support your family's reading choices.

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