

Ezra Jack Keats Award

Tell Me Another Story: Diversity in Children's Literature Discussion Guide



Welcome! We hope you're excited about bringing *Tell Me Another Story* into your classroom, boardroom, discussion group or meeting hall. We created this guide to help you do just that!

Overview of the Film

Tell Me Another Story is a compelling documentary that tells the story of diversity in children's literature, from the 1920s to the present. In addition to illustrating the effects of negative stereotypes and lack of representation, the film focuses on some of the giants who initiated positive change, from W.E.B. Du Bois, Augusta Baker, Pura Belpré and Ezra Jack Keats, to Pat Cummings, Christopher Myers, Grace Lin and Andrea Davis Pinkney. Also identified are the contributions to progress made by the many children's book awards that focus on diversity, including the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré and Ezra Jack Keats Awards.

Now available to everyone, the film is being recognized as an illuminating portrait of the entire field and the ways in which diverse children's literature is critical to the health of our society.

Tell Me Another Story was created by a group of people dedicated to making the world of books a welcoming home for all of our children. You can learn more about the organizations, educators and filmmakers who made this movie a reality [here](#).

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Overview of the Guide



While the film is brief, its clear arc and informed focus can serve as springboards to discussions of developmental psychology, comparative literature, art history, social justice, authentic representations, cultural diversity and simply, what makes a good children’s book. This guide is designed to facilitate these conversations, and its contents can be readily adapted to fit your group and your goals in showing the film.

And because it’s only 30 minutes long, the movie can be watched in a meeting or class and leave more than enough time for a lively discussion afterwards. The message that children’s books have the power to shape our culture is a subject in dire need of more attention. Your effort to start the discussion with the students, colleagues and friends in your world is exactly the work that needs to be done.

This guide is divided into five sections:

- ▶ Contemporary People Featured in the Film
- ▶ Early and Mid-Twentieth Century Activists Featured in the Film
- ▶ Discussion Questions
- ▶ Extension Activities
- ▶ Resources

The questions, activities and suggestions in this guide are starting points. As you use the film to start conversations, you’ll certainly encounter new questions and resources you’d like to share with us. We’d love to hear from you. Please send your ideas to Jocelyn McCarthy at jmccarthy@ezra-jack-keats.org.

In the meantime, thank you for your work to increase diversity in children’s literature.

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Contemporary People Featured in the Film



[Jessixa Bagley](#) is a writer and illustrator and a 2018 Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award honoree for *Laundry Day*. Some of her other books are *Boats for Papa* and *Henry and Bea*, both of which were Junior Library Guild Selections.



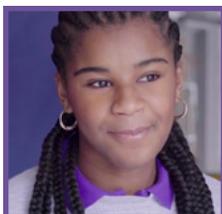
[Shirin Yim Bridges](#) is a writer and the 2003 Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award winner for *Ruby's Wish*. Some of her other books include *Get Up, Elizabeth!* and *The Umbrella Queen*. She is also an editor and writing coach.



[Pat Cummings](#) is a writer and illustrator. She received the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award for *My Mama Needs Me*, as well as two Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honors and a Boston Globe - Horn Book Nonfiction Award for *Talking with Artists*.



[Dr. Janice Johnson Dias](#) is a writer, activist, and sociologist who published *Parent Like It Matters: How to Raise Joyful, Change-Making Girls*. She is the president of the GrassROOTS Community Organization, which focuses on educating girls to be change-makers.



[Marley Dias](#) is a writer and activist who launched the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, which she chronicled as part of her book, *Marley Dias Gets It Done: And So Can You!*. She is an executive producer and host of Netflix's *Bookmarks: Celebrating Black Voices* series.



[Grace Lin](#) is a writer, illustrator, and the host of the podcasts, *Book Friends Forever* and *Kids Ask Authors*. She received a Caldecott Honor for *A Big Mooncake for Little Star* and a Newbery Honor for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*.



[Meg Medina](#) is a writer and the 2012 Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award winner for *Tía Isa Wants a Car*. She received the Pura Belpré Award for *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* and the Newbery Award for *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*.

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Contemporary People Featured in the Film



[Christopher Myers](#) is a writer, illustrator, and fine artist, as well as the creative director of Make Me a World, an imprint of Random House Children's Books. He received the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award for *Firebird*, as well as four Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honors and a Caldecott Honor.



[Andrea Davis Pinkney](#) is a writer and a Vice President & Executive Editor at Scholastic Books. She received the Coretta Scott King Author Award for *Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America*, as well as a Sydney Taylor Honor Award for *A Poem for Peter: The Story of Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of The Snowy Day*.



[Deborah Pope](#) is the Executive Director of the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation, where she has expanded the national recognition of the Ezra Jack Keats Award, as well as the Mini-Grant and Bookmaking programs. She initiated the creation of *The Snowy Day* USPS postage stamps and the Amazon holiday special based on the beloved classic.



[Martin Pope](#) was Ezra's lifelong best friend, co-founder and President of the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation, a world renowned scientist and father of the field of energy transfer in organic semiconductors. His discoveries are the foundation for the development of photocopying, LED television screens and more efficient solar panels.



[Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie](#) is a writer and a 2020 Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award honoree for *Layla's Happiness*, which was also celebrated by Bank Street College of Education. She has published volumes of poetry for adults.



[Deborah Taylor](#) is a librarian and youth literacy advocate who retired from the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland. She is the recipient of the 2015 Coretta Scott King - Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement.



[Chieri Uegaki](#) is a writer and the 2015 Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award winner for *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*, which also won the Asian/Pacific American Award in the picture book category. Her other works include *Suki's Kimono* and *Ojiichan's Gift*.

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Early and Mid-Twentieth Century Activists Featured in the Film



Augusta Baker (1911-1998) was a children's librarian, scholar, and storyteller at the New York Public Library and a storyteller-in-residence at the University of South Carolina. She published lists of books that positively depicted African Americans, such as *The Black Experience in Children's Books*, and collections of global folk tales.



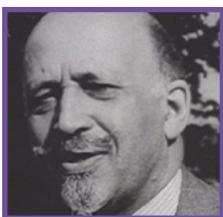
Pura Belpré (1899-1982) was a writer, children's librarian, and storyteller at the New York Public Library, where she initiated outreach programs for the Spanish-speaking community. Many of her stories were retellings of Puerto Rican folktales, including her picture book, *Pérez and Martina*, which she also performed as a puppet show.



Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) was an educator who started a school for African American girls that would become Bethune-Cookman College. She was a leader in the National Youth Administration, a co-founder of the United Negro College Fund, and a leading advocate for education, civil rights, and opportunities for African American women.



Arna Bontemps (1902-1973) was a writer and librarian at Fisk University. He captured the spirit and events of the Harlem Renaissance in poems, plays, and children's books. He collaborated on several children's books with Langston Hughes, and his illustrated history, *Story of the Negro*, received a Newbery Honor.



Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was an author and editor who played a significant role in the Harlem Renaissance, from which his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is a literary touchstone. He launched and edited *The Brownies' Book* magazine for African American children, and he co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

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Early and Mid-Twentieth Century Activists Featured in the Film



Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was a writer who depicted moments of African American life during and after the Harlem Renaissance. He collaborated on several children's books with Arna Bontemps, including *Popo and Fifina*, and he produced poems, picture books, and nonfiction for young readers. *The Brownies' Book* published some of his earliest poems.



Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was a writer and scholar whose work detailed African American life in the rural southern United States. Best known for her novels, especially *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she also trained in anthropology and preserved African American folklore. Some of her folk tales have been adapted for young readers.



Ezra Jack Keats (1916-1983) was a writer and illustrator best known for the picture book, *The Snowy Day*, which received the Caldecott Medal. Peter from *The Snowy Day* appeared in six other picture books. Keats was one of the first children's book creators to feature urban, multiethnic neighborhoods in his stories and collage illustrations.



Coretta Scott King (1927-2006) was a writer and leader within the American civil rights movement. She was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, and wrote about her lifelong efforts to advocate for peace and human rights.

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Discussion Questions



The following questions can be adapted for a variety of audiences and are designed to help viewers delve deeper into the documentary, their reactions to it, and their experiences with children's books and media.

Seeing Yourself and Others

At the beginning of the documentary, Grace Lin asks, "What happens if you never see a reflection of yourself in a book?"

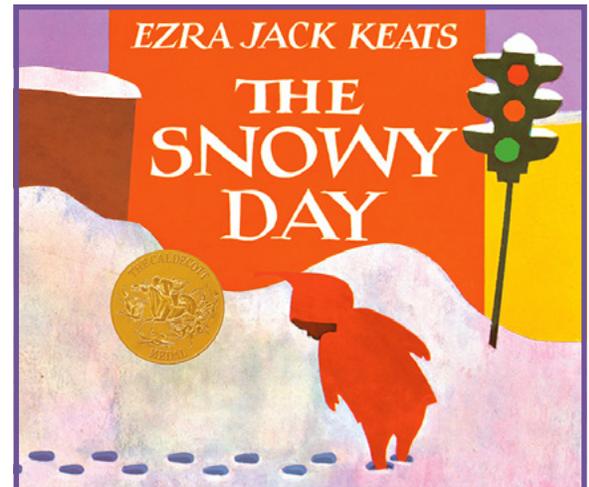
- ▶ How do authors and illustrators in the documentary describe this experience of not seeing themselves?
- ▶ In what other ways can the absence of reflections impact children and adults?
- ▶ Conversely, what can happen if you only see reflections of yourself in books?



Authenticity and Action

How to assess a book's authenticity or sense of being real and genuine is a longstanding consideration within children's literature. Ezra Jack Keats was white, and his picture book, *The Snowy Day*, with the African American character, Peter, on the cover, was a milestone in mainstream children's literature.

- ▶ What considerations influence how you view *The Snowy Day*'s authenticity?
- ▶ Why does Andrea Davis Pinkney consider the book "a wake-up call for the publishing community?"



Racist Imagery

The documentary features over a minute-long montage of racist images from older works of children's literature and popular media.

- ▶ How did you respond to this sequence of racist, stereotypical images?
- ▶ What's different about the effect/experience of seeing so many racist images in quick succession compared to seeing these images individually over a longer span of time?



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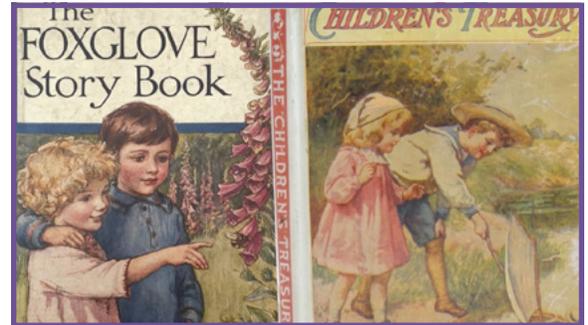
Discussion Questions



A "Romance of Childhood"

Deborah Taylor mentions "a romance of childhood" that informs the creation, content, and response to children's literature.

- ▶ What does Taylor mean by "romance?"
- ▶ What's unrealistic about this idea of childhood?
- ▶ Who's left out of this understanding of childhood? Why?



Personal Responses to Books

Grace Lin discusses her reaction to the experience of having *The Five Chinese Brothers* read in her elementary school classroom, while Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie and Chieri Uegaki describe their responses to *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Tikki Tikki Tembo*.

- ▶ What books and reading experiences do you remember vividly from your childhood?
- ▶ Why do these books and reading experiences stand out?
- ▶ Have you reread a children's book as an adult and had a very different response to it from the response you remember having as a child?

Audience Considerations

As Jessixa Bagley observes, "It's a big responsibility to make books for kids."

- ▶ What are some of the considerations in creating books, art, and media for young audiences and in selecting these works?



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Discussion Questions



Points of View

In talking about librarians of color, such as Augusta Baker and Pura Belpré, Deborah Taylor insists, “You have to have a point of view.” Taylor was referring specifically to the refusal of librarians of color to remain neutral in the face of the status quo. However, everyone’s point of view is shaped by their identities and experiences.



- ▶ How do you become more aware of your point of view and the ways in which it influences your work and interactions with others?
- ▶ How do the points of view of individual librarians influence the books that are available to children?
- ▶ How do the points of view of authors, illustrators, publishers, teachers, school boards, and concerned members of the public influence the books that are available to children?

A “Library of the Future”

Deborah Pope describes the Ezra Jack Keats Award book collection as a “library of the future.”

- ▶ What does your “library of the future” look like?
- ▶ How will you help to build it?

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Extension Activities for Students



The following activities are designed for students who have watched the documentary and want to explore some of its core concepts in more detail. While many of these activities are aimed at high school and college students, they can be adapted to fit other audiences, as well as a variety of learning outcomes.

Personal Interviews

Multiple people in the film described the profound effect that a particular children's book had on them when they were growing up. Whether they found the book to be inspirational or problematic, it influenced them significantly, and they still remember it years later. Interview at least one important person in your life to see which children's books and/or media they remember and why these stories have stayed with them. Share some of your favorite books and the memories connected with them, too.

Historical Figures

Consult the list of historical figures who were included in this documentary and select a person to research and learn more about. You can also look for children's books by and/or about this person to see how they are presented to a young audience. Consider which aspects of their life and work are included in the book(s) and which aspects are not and why the authors, illustrators, and editors may have made these decisions.

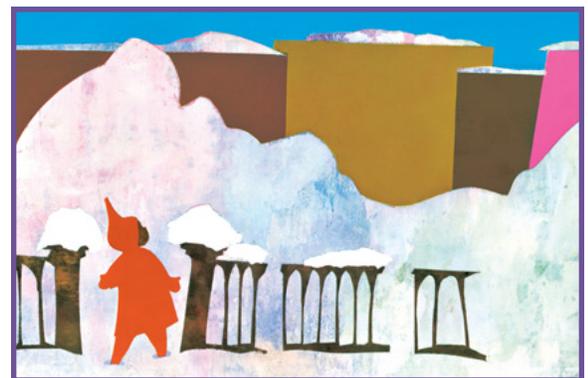


Contemporary Figures

Consult the list of authors and illustrators appearing in the film and select a person whose work you're interested in exploring. Read at least one book written and/or illustrated by this person and reflect on your reaction and thoughts about the book. Consider how the book could be contributing toward a "library of the future."

The Snowy Day

Since references to Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day* are made throughout the documentary, (re)read the picture book or watch this [animated read-aloud](#) of the story. Analyze the picture book in light of Andrea Davis Pinkney's discussion of its historical context and place in publishing history. Consider other ways in which the book is discussed or alluded to throughout the film, both in commentary and cinematography. Pinkney's picture book, *A Poem for Peter: The Story of Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of The Snowy Day* could also provide some additional context and insights into the book and film.



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Extension Activities for Students



Putting *The Snowy Day* in Context

As Deborah Pope observed, *The Snowy Day* was “not the first” children’s book to challenge the whiteness of children’s literature. Research some of the earlier efforts to increase diversity in the field of children’s literature. An excellent starting place is *The Brownies’ Book*, edited by Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, which is available [online](#) through the Library of Congress. Read at least one of the stories in the magazine and consider how it accomplishes some of the goals that Deborah Taylor, Christopher Myers, Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie, and other people featured in the documentary ascribe to diverse children’s literature.

You can also look at efforts to expand diverse offerings for young audiences and combat racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination in children’s books from the 1960s onward by examining the *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* and the “Diversity in Children’s Literature” resources listed in the next section of this guide. The Cooperative Children’s Book Center has a [digitized and searchable database](#) of their issues of the *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, and a research team led by Dr. Nicole A. Cooke created a [bibliography](#) of the books and media discussed in the *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*.

Additionally, you can read picture books that have received the [Ezra Jack Keats \(EJK\) Award](#), which is presented to early career authors and illustrators for outstanding books that reflect our diverse population, the universal experience of childhood, and the strength of the family. Awarded since 1986, this collection offers myriad opportunities to explore the more recent evolution of diverse children’s literature. The EJK Award books have been sorted by [14 themes](#) that reflect universal experiences.



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Extension Activities for Students



Different Ways to Present Information

In the documentary, most of the participants discuss the lack of diversity in children’s literature and its effects through personal stories. Marley Dias shares her personal story of creating the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, but she also mentions publishing statistics for 2015, the year she created her campaign. The Cooperative Children’s Books Center (CCBC) began compiling yearly data about the diversity of children’s books in 1985. Look at the [CCBC’s publishing statistics](#). Compare the similarities and differences between how the documentary and the statistics present information about diversity in children’s literature. Reflect on how people might respond to both approaches.



Mock Ezra Jack Keats Award

Organize a Mock Ezra Jack Keats (EJK) Award program at your school or library, so that your community can share newly published picture books and decide which books you’d like to add to your “library of the future.” The Mock EJK Award is modeled on the mission and practices of the [Ezra Jack Keats \(EJK\) Award](#), which celebrates early career authors and illustrators who create outstanding picture books in the tradition of Keats. Resources for organizing a virtual or in-person Mock EJK Award program, including sample evaluation criteria and a book list, are [available](#). This program has been run successfully with students in kindergarten through college classrooms, as well as in public libraries.



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The following resources are intended to help you begin your exploration of these important topics. This list is by no means exhaustive; there are many excellent websites, essays, and books devoted to each of these topics.

Diversity in Children's Literature

[We Need Diverse Books](#), a nonprofit, grassroots organization dedicated to increasing representations and opportunities for diverse creators in children's literature and changing the publishing industry

[The Conscious Kid](#), an organization dedicated to promoting equity and anti-racism and helping children develop a positive sense of racial identity

[Research on Diversity in Youth Literature](#), an open-access, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to providing greater visibility to scholarship about diversity, equity, and inclusion in children's literature

[American Indians in Children's Literature](#), a blog dedicated to the analysis of representations of Indigenous peoples in children's and young adult literature

[The Brown Bookshelf](#), a website dedicated to promoting children's and young adult books by Black creators

[Latinxs in Kid Lit](#), a website dedicated to promoting works of children's and young adult literature by Latinx creators and providing resources for creators and educators

Book Awards that Celebrate Diversity

[Pura Belpré Award](#), presented to Latino/a authors and illustrators for outstanding portrayals of the Latino cultural experience and sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association (ALA) and REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking

[Coretta Scott King Award](#), presented to African American authors and illustrators for outstanding portrayals of African American culture and universal human values and sponsored by the Ethnic & Multicultural Information Exchange Roundtable (EMIERT) of the American Library Association (ALA)

[Ezra Jack Keats Award](#), presented to early career authors and illustrators for extraordinary books that reflect our diverse population, the universal experience of childhood, and the strength of the family and sponsored by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation

["Children's Book Awards from Other Organizations."](#) compiled by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA)

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History of Diversity in Children's Literature

["Picture the Dream: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Children's Books."](#) an exhibition about representations of the civil rights movement in picture books at The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, curated by Andrea Davis Pinkney, February 7-July 3, 2021

["Asians, Everyday."](#) an online exhibition featuring picture book art of Asian Americans going about their everyday lives, hosted by The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, curated by Grace Lin, May 2021

["Racism, Representation, and Resistance in Children's Literature, 1800-2015."](#) an exhibition about how children's books have contributed to understandings of race and racism over time, hosted by the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature and curated by Suzan Alteri, Stephanie Birch, and Dr. H  l  ne Huet, August 13-October 5, 2018

Multicultural and Ethnic Children's Literature in the United States, 2nd edition, by Donna L. Gilton (Rowman & Littlefield 2020), a history of the development of multicultural children's literature with emphasis on African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latinx children's books

Brown Gold: Milestones of African-American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002 by Michelle H. Martin (Taylor & Francis 2004), a history of African American picture books

The Stories I Read to the Children: The Life and Writing of Pura Belpr  , the Legendary Storyteller, Children's Author, and New York Public Librarian, selected, edited, and biographical introduction by Lisa S  nchez Gonz  lez (Center for Puerto Rican Studies 2013), a collection of previously published and unpublished stories and essays by Belpr  , the first Puerto Rican librarian at the New York Public Library

The discussion guide's contents were created by Ramona Caponegro, PhD. Ramona is a professor of children's literature at Eastern Michigan University and was the co-writer of Tell Me Another Story.