

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging

Integrating DEIB Within Your Literacy Program

*Fostering Empathy, Understanding, and
Critical Thinking through Diverse Texts*

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I. Understanding DEIB in Literacy Strategies

In today's classrooms, creating an environment where every student feels valued, heard, and empowered is essential. One powerful way to achieve this is by integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) within literacy instruction. When we weave DEIB principles into our literacy programs, we not only enrich students' academic growth, but encourage the development of critical social and emotional skills that prepare them for a more empathetic and inclusive world.

■ What Does DEIB Mean in Literacy Strategies?

Literacy is more than just reading and writing – it is a way for students to understand themselves, others, and the world around them. Embedding DEIB in literacy means creating opportunities for all students to see their identities reflected in texts, while also engaging with diverse perspectives and experiences.

A DEIB-focused literacy approach ensures:

- **Representation:** Students see characters, authors, and stories that reflect a variety of races, cultures, abilities, languages, and identities.
- **Equity:** Instruction removes barriers and supports all learners in accessing and engaging with texts meaningfully.



- **Inclusion:** Classrooms become spaces where every voice is valued, and every student feels safe to participate.
- **Belonging:** Students feel seen, respected, and connected to their learning environment.

Through intentional text selection, inclusive practices, and meaningful dialogue, literacy becomes a powerful tool for building empathy, critical thinking, and social awareness.

II. Background and Research

Research consistently shows that diverse and inclusive curricula lead to better academic and social outcomes. According to the National Education Association, students who engage with texts that reflect their own experiences are more motivated and connected to their learning. Exposure to diverse voices also broadens students' worldviews and cultivates empathy.

As classrooms become increasingly diverse across local and global contexts, DEIB-focused literacy instruction plays a vital role in bridging opportunity gaps. This ensures that all learners - regardless of background, identity, or lived experience - engage with texts in ways that reflect and affirm who they are, and develop an understanding of those with diverse and different experiences. It also helps to bridge identity in context of what makes us unique, and our shared experiences as human beings. This work not only supports academic achievement, but also equips students with the empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness needed to thrive in a complex, interconnected world.

III. What Does DEIB Look Like in Literacy Strategies?

■ Embedding DEIB into Literacy Instruction

- Review the options for students to select their diverse texts asking:
 - Whose stories are being told?
 - Who are the authors?
 - Are multiple perspectives being told?
- Choose literature that represents diverse authors, cultures, languages, and lived experiences.
- Ensure books serve as mirrors and windows, reflecting students' identities and offering views into the lives of others.

■ Interweaving DEIB with Literacy Practices

- **Reading Comprehension:** Analyze characters' motivations, challenges, and growth in context.
- **Writing:** Encourage students to write personal stories and reflect on their values while considering the experiences of others.
- **Discussion:** Facilitate conversations exploring differences and shared experiences to build empathy and critical thinking.

"As classrooms grow more diverse, DEIB-focused literacy instruction helps bridge opportunity gaps, ensuring all students learn in ways that are meaningful to them."



IV. Examples of DEIB in Action

■ Example 1: Using a Diverse Text to Discuss Empathy

- **Book:**

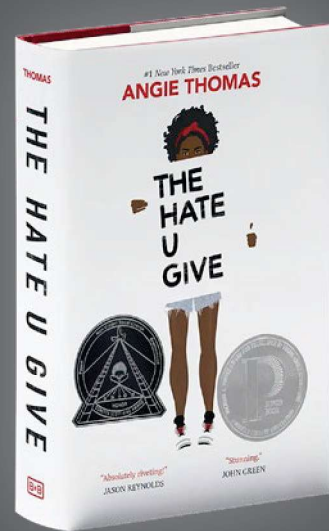
The Hate U Give
by Angie Thomas

- **Activity:**

Explore Starr's journey navigating race, class, and identity. Use discussions and reflective writing to deepen understanding.

- **Prompt:**

How does Starr's experience reflect the challenges of marginalized communities? How can we promote empathy in our community?



■ Example 2: Using Historical Literature to Explore Equity

- **Book:**

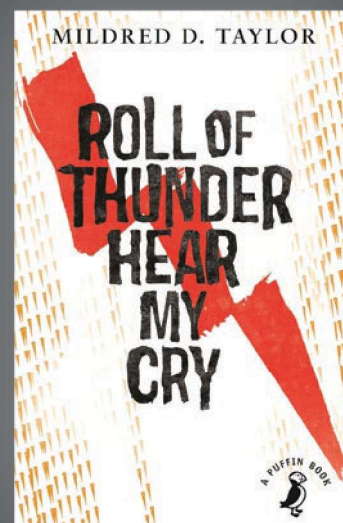
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
by Mildred D. Taylor

- **Activity:**

Analyze social and racial dynamics. Create a "Then and Now" chart comparing 1930s inequities with today. Respond with a letter, poem, comic strip, or journal entry.

- **Prompt:**

What does equity mean to you now? Why is it important to explore these issues through literature?



V. Application in the Classroom

■ Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment

- Establish respectful routines and discussion norms.
- Use visual schedules, key vocabulary, and first-language supports.
- Apply trauma-informed practices, recognizing lived experiences and supporting emotional processing.

■ Engaging Students Through Creative Expression

- **Poetry:** Write a poem exploring a book's theme (identity, empathy, social justice).
- **Letters:** Describe a book and its relevance in a personal letter.
- **Role-Playing:** Introduce characters by acting out roles.
- **Art:** Create paper characters or book art.
- **Music:** Find or write a song representing a character's personality.

VI. Promoting Critical Thinking and Emotional Growth

- **Ask Thoughtful Questions:** What would you do in this character's place? How does this book connect to your life?
- **Build Empathy:** Use role-play and discussions to explore diverse perspectives.

VII. Creating Safe Spaces for Critical Conversations

- Begin with grounding or soft start activities to build trust.
- Prioritize psychological safety where all voices are valued.
- Support emotional processing of sensitive content through reflection and support.

VIII. Developing Social and Emotional Skills through Literature

- **Self-Awareness:** Analyze characters' emotions and behaviors.
- **Self-Management:** Reflect on emotional regulation.
- **Social Awareness:** Understand and respond to others' needs.
- **Relationship Skills:** Explore communication and conflict resolution.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** Evaluate values behind characters' actions.

IX. Fostering an Inclusive Literacy Classroom

Integrating DEIB into literacy is about more than improving reading and writing skills – it is about shaping compassionate, socially-aware individuals who are prepared to engage with the world thoughtfully and empathetically. When we intentionally incorporate diverse texts, inclusive discussions, and opportunities for creative expression, we create a learning environment where all students feel seen, valued, and empowered.

Literacy becomes a tool not just for academic achievement, but for understanding complex social issues, building empathy, and developing a strong sense of identity and community. It invites students to question, to connect, and to grow. By embracing DEIB in our literacy programs, we are planting the seeds of equity and belonging that extend far beyond the classroom and nurturing the next generation of critical thinkers, advocates, and changemakers.

Ultimately, fostering inclusion through literacy is an ongoing journey, one that requires reflection, courage, and a commitment to elevating all voices.



Some Suggested DEIB Texts

The Poet X

by Elizabeth Acevedo

Identity, culture, family, feminism



The Hockey Sweater

by Roch Carrier

Identity and cultural expectations



Walking in Two Worlds

by Wab Kinew

Complexities of cultural identity, societal pressures, and the transformative power of self-acceptance and community support



The Paper Boat

by Thao Lam

A wordless picture book that tells a story of a young girl and her family's journey to Canada



Hu-Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are

by Patrick Makokoro

Community and building relationships

Long Way Down

by Jason Reynolds

Gun violence, grief, choices, masculinity

Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You

by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

Racism, history, social justice, activism



The Water Walker

by Joanne Robertson

The true story of an Anishinaabe woman who fought to protect the waters of her homeland.

Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe

by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

LGBTQ+ identity, friendship, self-discovery

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter

by Erika L. Sánchez

Cultural expectations, family, mental health, identity



When We Are Kind

by Monique Gray Smith

A picture book that explores the power of kindness and its impact on others

The Hate U Give

by Angie Thomas

Racial injustice, police brutality, activism



Pemmican Wars

by Katherena Vermette

Cultural identity, historical awareness, and personal growth