



Exploring other cultures: Using literature to teach tolerance

Teaching multiculturalism, or diversity, is an idea that often gets honored in the breach more than in practice. While many educators recognize its value, some still don't see the need. Plus, it's hard for busy teachers to come up with diversity lessons in an already-crowded curriculum.

There are ways to address both issues. First, why teach diversity? Why emphasize the value of multiculturalism to K-12 students?

One reason is obvious: we live in an increasingly diverse country, in an increasingly global world where boundaries and national distinctions are less and less important. Even in small rural towns, people live and work side-by-side with people from different cultures than their own. In that context, students need to learn how to respect other perspectives and accept other ways of life. Doing so makes for a healthier society; plus, it's increasingly necessary just to survive in a 21st-century society and work force.

So, how can you teach this sometimes-tricky subject? One way is to have students study literature that opens windows into other ways of life. Even better, pair fiction and nonfiction on the same topic to reinforce critical lessons and provide overlap with other subjects. Doing so can give students valuable lessons in history and social policy, while helping them develop empathy and understanding for other people's experiences and viewpoints. One place to get started: This month's featured sets which celebrate **indigenous cultures**.

Links/References:

- kidworldcitizen.org/2013/03/23/why-teach-with-multicultural-books/
- chelseymccowan.weebly.com/benefits-of-multicultural-literature.html
- www-personal.umich.edu/~pgurin/benefits.html

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