

Diversity and Representation in Instructional Materials: A Quick Reference Guide

PCSD is a welcoming and accepting community that engages in authentic dialogue in a respectful, trusting, and collaborative environment. Our community celebrates diversity as a strength and fosters empathetic understanding of differences. One way that we live up to our commitment to equity and inclusivity is through the careful consideration of our instructional resources. Representation in instructional material should reflect the rich cultural diversity and lived experiences of all students. When selecting materials to use in your classroom with your students, **please consider the following.**

Variety of Roles and Character Traits (This section primarily applies to fictional materials as well as artwork.)

- Do the characters/figures central to the instructional materials show diverse groups in a variety of roles and occupations?
- When present in the instructional materials, are character traits such as courage, leadership, intelligence, integrity, etc., distributed among diverse groups or are they concentrated among majority status characters?
- Do the materials foster, or help to dismantle, existing stereotypes? Some stereotypes can be overt while other stereotypes may not be as obvious.
- Are characters demeaned, or excluded, because of their race, gender, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation in a way that implies such behavior/treatment of others is acceptable?

Multiple Perspectives and Contributions

- Are the perspectives and contributions of members of diverse groups substantially, accurately, and respectfully represented in biographical, contemporary, or historical materials used in the classroom?
- Do the materials avoid devaluing or trivializing traumatic lived experiences (e.g. slavery, genocide, abuse)? For example, students are not asked to “pretend they are...” someone who has lived through those experiences to develop empathy or perspective taking.
- Do the instructional materials used over time feature the stories, histories, and narratives of marginalized people (e.g. people of color, people with varying religious beliefs, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, females, others)?
- Are historical figures and “heroes” presented as complex, multi-dimensional people capable of making significantly positive contributions to society while also having human foibles and faults?

Multicultural Representation

- Do the instructional materials include literature, examples, visuals, or situations that accurately reflect the culture (languages, traditions, beliefs, values, and customs) of people from diverse backgrounds?
- Are diversities within ethnicities and nationalities portrayed? For example, not all Asian families are Chinese, and not all Latinx families are Mexican; not all people of Middle Eastern descent are Muslim, and not all people from India are Hindu.

Imagery and Language

- Do the instructional materials use imagery that promotes inclusion and belonging in real-life, contemporary contexts?
- Has care been taken to ensure that characters of diverse cultural backgrounds are not represented stereotypically or presented as foreign or exotic?
- Has time been taken to understand the visual message, symbolism and context in which the imagery was created?
- Do labels or captions of images present in the materials use inclusive and gender-neutral, person-first language and avoid stereotypical descriptions?

Family Representation

- When family depiction is present in instructional material, do families exhibit a range of configurations in addition to the traditional nuclear family model?
- Are a variety of family constellations portrayed in equally positive light?
- Are people of all backgrounds and experiences depicted as capable of loving and being loved?

A single instructional resource, on its own, may not be capable of meeting all of the criteria articulated above. It is important that teachers consider how resources work together, over time, to positively and accurately represent multiple perspectives and diverse lived experiences. **Extreme care should be taken to avoid using any instructional materials that reinforce negative stereotypes, demean the experiences of any social group, or present a false or inaccurate account of history.** When in doubt, teachers should consult with their grade level/department colleagues, the appropriate Standards Leader, and/or their Building Administrator.

For a more detailed explanation of considerations, please refer to the [PCSD Protocol for Review of Instructional Materials.](#)