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**ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

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by

Virginia S. Loh

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
San Diego State University and the University of San Diego  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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Dissertation Committee:

Barbara Moss, Ph.D., San Diego State University  
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Alida Allison, Ph.D., San Diego State University

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May 2008

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by

Virginia S. Loh

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my dear friends and family. Without their support and nudging, this dissertation would never have been finished. I am very fortunate to be blessed with fantastic people in my life.

... we do it word by word.  
I change the language.  
I change people's mouths.  
I change the world.

-Maxine Hong Kingston  
Quoted from an interview

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Asian American Children's Literature: A Qualitative Study of  
Cultural Authenticity

by

Virginia S. Loh

Doctor of Education

San Diego State University and the University of San Diego, 2008

The purpose of this study was to systematically analyze Asian-American children's trade books in terms of their cultural authenticity and to examine the perceptions of producers (authors) and consumers (teachers) as related to the cultural authenticity of such books. I wanted to understand the role of Asian-American children's trade books in research and classroom practice and also to understand the perspectives and preconceptions of these producers and consumers.

By conducting this qualitative study on the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's trade books, I hoped to fill a gap in the current discourse knowledge which does not adequately include the Asian-American experience. The following research questions guided my study: (1) How are Asian-Americans currently represented in children's trade books and how culturally authentic are these representations?, (2) What are teachers' perceptions of these representations?, (3) What are authors' perceptions of these representations?, and (4) How do insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions?

In order to address these questions, my methodology consisted of content analyses of 15 Asian-American contemporary realistic fiction trade books and in-depth qualitative interviews of four producers and four consumers. I analyzed books written by both members and nonmembers. Furthermore, I interviewed both members and nonmembers. Using a theoretical framework of critical literacy as the main guiding principle, I examined the intersections of power and perspective in order to determine their influences on people's judgment of what is culturally authentic. Adding to the research literature, this study was built upon the work of R. S. Bishop from her study conducted in 1982, *Shadow and Substance*, but departed in critical ways: (1) the seeking of multiple perspectives, (2) the use of multiple data sources, (3) the focus on Asian-American children's trade books, and (4) the employment of critical literacy as a framework.

One of the major findings of this study was that despite increases in Asian-American children's literature, both in quantity and quality, the consumption or rather, use of these Asian-American trade books in classrooms remains minimal. In fact, the lack of consumption appeared to pose more of an issue than any lapses in quantity and quality, as I had originally thought. Teachers cited lack of time, lack of exposure and lack of knowledge as the main reasons for not purchasing and/or using Asian-American trade books. Another major finding of the study was that cultural authenticity relied heavily on insider perspectives and reader response. Thus, all participants were hesitant to pinpoint a definition for differing reasons; the members feared being pigeonholed and the nonmembers feared being offensive.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I walked into *Borders* bookstore to buy a birthday present for a friend of mine who is also a public school teacher. I wanted to purchase some Asian-American children's trade books for her classroom library. To my dismay, this huge bookseller was limited in its supply of books representing the Asian-American experience. Outside of the relatively recent Newbery-award winner, *Kira-Kira* (Kadohata, 2004), Asian-American children's literature was not visible or easily available. I scoured the shelves before soliciting help from a salesperson who pointed out a handful of folktales and a couple of books about the internment of Japanese-Americans. There were an even smaller number of books representing the contemporary experiences of Asian-Americans. Adding insult to injury, the salesperson shared with me how much she loved *The Five Chinese Brothers* (Bishop & Wiese, 1938), a book that scholars have considered to be an affront to Asian-Americans and which has been deemed by these scholars to be racist and inauthentic (Cai, 1994).

This incident clearly illustrates an important point about Asian-American trade books today. In spite of the fact that there are more than 12 million Asian-Americans in this country, only a small percentage of the children's trade books published represent this group. For example, Lee (n.d.) of Lee & Low Books stated that only 1.5% of all children's books published in 1997 were about Asians and/or Asian-Americans and Bucher and Manning (2006) reported that out of 5000 books published in the year 2002, only 91 were either by and/or about Asian-Americans (p. 39). What is of greater concern to me is the fact that consumers, such as *Borders* are not purchasing the little that is available in this genre. The minimal consumption of Asian-American children's literature presents particular disadvantages in the classroom setting. Because few titles are available, children gain little exposure to Asian-Americans from the books they read in their classrooms. In addition, teachers may lack awareness of whether or not Asian-Americans are portrayed accurately in the books they choose. As a result, students may be denied the opportunity to see into this culture through books; thus, they are denied windows into these cultures. Furthermore,

children who are themselves Asian-American are denied the opportunity to see themselves mirrored in books.

We know that students disengage from education when they see little congruence between home and school (Montecinos, 1994). We also know that teachers play a powerful role in shaping the learning environment, which includes the selection and employment of trade books. Bishop (1992) states:

the book choices teachers and others make have potential consequences for children. If literature is a mirror that reflects human life, then all children who read or are read to need to see themselves reflected as part of humanity. If they are not, or if their reflections are distorted and ridiculous, there is the danger that they will absorb negative messages about themselves and people like them.  
(p. 43)

In spite of such research supporting a multicultural approach--an approach that nurtures and favors the accurate representation of heritage languages and cultures, many classroom teachers continue to teach from a one dimensional perspective, inadvertently overlooking the voices of marginalized groups and/or people of color.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Research tells us that using multicultural children's literature is effective and beneficial (Banks, 2003; Bishop, 1992; Cai, 2002; Lindgren, 1991). Such literature can play an important role in classroom instruction. It provides reading materials and serves as springboards for critical thinking. These trade books supply students with images, ideas, models and multiple perspectives. In the absence of, or preferably in conjunction with real-life role models, books can be a powerful tool for promoting cultural understanding. Cai (2002) suggests that multicultural literature is a means of achieving the goals of "diversity and equity in education" (p. 13). He suggests that reading about diverse perspectives enhances multicultural awareness which enables us to recognize things like power and privilege, which may otherwise be invisible to some people. Bishop (1992) contends that multicultural literature is a "vehicle for socialization and change" (p. 43). Scholars and researchers advocate for multicultural children's trade books; but, questions remain about the extent to which teachers are actively selecting and using these books in their classroom practice.



There needs to be more research that bridges research and practice in regard to multicultural children's literature. By analyzing the quantity (number of trade books published and available for classroom use) and quality (literary merit and cultural authenticity) of multicultural children's literature, we gain a better understanding of how society, culture and politics influence the world of children's literature and also the role of Asian-American children's literature in school classrooms. Over time, emphases have shifted from issues of quantity to quality. However, both quantity and quality are equally important and interrelated. Only by increasing both will we be able to improve the representations and perceptions of people of color.

Larrick's 1965 landmark study (as cited in Sims, 1982) addressed the quantity issue. She contended that the world of children's literature was "all-white" (p. 2). Larrick pointed out that people of color were excluded and misrepresented in the literature. In response to Larrick and supported by the Civil Rights movement, multicultural trade books have increased (Bishop, 1992). But when compared to current demographics, the quantity of available multicultural texts is still not commensurate with the population (Nilsson, 2005). Furthermore, because the Civil Rights movement was primarily led by African-Americans, most of the available multicultural trade books focused on their experiences. In her seminal study, Bishop (Sims, 1982--Sims is Bishop and will be referred to in this study as Bishop) looked at the issue of quality as related to these early texts. She found that they were based on an Anglo-American frame of reference and primarily intended for Anglo-Americans. In other words, these trade books were written about African-Americans from an Anglo-American perspective. Thus, they were often criticized for being culturally inauthentic and not representative of the African-American experience as judged by African-Americans. In her study, Bishop sought to foster awareness about African-American trade books (Sims, 1982). She surveyed and analyzed 150 contemporary realistic African-American fiction books published from 1965 to 1979. She wanted to analyze the influence of perspective on the content and quality of African-American books. In analyzing data from her content analyses, she was able to provide practitioners with valuable information about what cultural authenticity means as perceived from an African-American perspective and how it is reflected in African-American trade books.

My study was built upon the work of Bishop (Sims, 1982) in that it examined the cultural authenticity of multicultural children's trade books. It differed from Bishop's work in that it focused on Asian-American children's trade books and it included multiple perspectives, examining cultural authenticity from the viewpoints of the researcher, teachers and authors. Two other significant differences were the use of critical literacy as a lens and the inclusion of multiple data sources. However, for both studies, the problem remained the same: The traditional canon of American literature has excluded and continues to exclude authors of color and positive images of people of color (Nilsson, 2005) which may impact students negatively. In addition, the purposes of my study were the same as Bishop's study: (1) to evaluate multicultural trade books and hence, provide much needed research about cultural authenticity and (2) to provide teachers and other school leaders with information so that they can make better and informed decisions about multicultural trade books.

### **The Issue of Quantity**

Data from the U.S. Census (2003) suggests that among the racial groups, Asian-Americans have the highest percentage of growth rate. Disturbingly, their representation in texts remains minimal. The number of available trade books is not commensurate with the number of Asian-Americans currently residing in the United States. There were 12.043 million Asian-American and Pacific Islanders recorded in the 2002 census (Bucher & Manning, 2006). Furthermore, multicultural children's literature currently represented in the core readings of school curricula include a minimal amount of literature written by Asian-Americans and/or representing the Asian-American experience. Aoki (1992) writes, "Asian Pacific American people have been separated from Asia and the Pacific by geography, culture, and history for more than seven generations. We have more than 150 years of history in America, yet where are we in the literature?" (pp. 112-113). The absence of the Asian-American perspective in school curricula, textbooks, and trade books may result in the unequal distribution of power, reproducing inequities and generating negative consequences for students, especially Asian-American students. Thus, there is a need for more books about the Asian-American experience.

When compared to other minority groups and especially when compared to the majority cultural group namely Anglo-Americans, the Asian-American experience continues

to be underrepresented in the world of children's literature (Bucher & Manning, 2006). In looking at multicultural children's literature as a whole, there are far more trade books representing the African-American and Hispanic-American cultures than the Asian-American culture, especially the Southeastern Asian experience. Of the small number that do exist, most Asian-American books relate to the Chinese-American or Japanese-American experience, which historically have made up the majority of the Asian-American population, but certainly not the entire Asian-American population (Cai, 1994). Obviously, there is a need to increase the quantity of books representing all Asian-Americans including various subgroups. That being stated, the need for high quality books is equally as important.

### **The Issue of Quality**

In the review of the literature, I found that there is a strong need for qualitative research in regard to multicultural literature. According to Wolf (1997), the following areas need more attention: (1) teacher selection of multicultural literature; (2) teachers' perspectives on the integration of such literature; (3) teachers' beliefs about using such literature; (4) teachers' and students' understandings of diversity through such literature; and (5) integration of such literature into school curricula. My study attempted to address these issues focusing specifically on Asian-American trade books and including the perspectives of authors, teachers and data derived from actual trade books. The review of the literature also informed me of the paucity of research addressing cultural authenticity germane to the Asian-American experience. My study met the need for in-depth examinations of the quality of multicultural trade books, specifically Asian-American books.

There is a need for high-quality books, books that authentically represent the Asian-American experience. According to Yeh et al. (2002), one of the greatest pedagogical challenges of teaching Asian-American students is the lack of culturally relevant materials. Cultural authenticity is a critical component of quality. It generally refers to the accurate depiction of a culture and its people (Short & Fox, 2003). Bishop (2003) suggests that cultural authenticity is a reflection of the author's success in writing about and from the cultural perspectives of the people about whom he or she is writing; it is about making members of that particular cultural group believe that the writer "knows what's going on"

(p. 29). In addition to perspective, cultural authenticity is about true representation: Does this book accurately reflect and represent the culture?

However, a definition of cultural authenticity is far from simple. It is influenced by insider and outsider perspectives and by both members and nonmembers of a particular culture. Scholars like Bishop (2003) agree that a definition of cultural authenticity is difficult because of its political nature since it encompasses “matters having to do with economics, cultural appropriation, ethnic pride, and the desire of ethnic/cultural groups to transmit to the young, through story, a sense of what it means to be a member of their group” (p. 25). The issue of cultural authenticity germane to the Asian-American experience is further complicated by the diversity of the Asian-American identity which includes various ethnicities, generational issues, and so on. For example, fourth generation Japanese-Americans have significantly different experiences from first generation Vietnamese-Americans or even from first generation Japanese-Americans. Given the complexities of the Asian-American identity, one can see why teachers may be hesitant to select and use Asian-American texts since they may or may not have sufficient knowledge of the Asian-American culture. Bishop (1992) suggests that teachers, lacking cultural knowledge, might not be confident in their abilities to select multicultural literature in general.

### **Consequences of Under-Representation**

Because Asian-Americans are not adequately and/or positively represented in the available textbooks, literature, and other media images, they may be marginalized. Because of this, children may be denied the opportunity to read and learn about their native heritages. Due to the paucity of Asian-American trade books especially in classroom use, children may also lack exposure to positive and realistic portrayals of Asian-Americans in life and in books; as a result, they may rely on gross stereotypes and superficial assumptions when making judgments about people and about themselves. There is evidence suggesting that Asian-Americans feel trapped by stereotypes and prevailing negative images and are, thus, often misunderstood and/or ignored (Lee, 2003). These conceptions may even affect the adult lives of Asian-Americans. For example, Liang, Lee, and Ting (2002), in their study of Asian-Americans and glass ceilings, claim that as a result of Asian-Americans being stereotyped as

passive, unassertive and docile, they are perceived to be lacking in leadership skills and thus, are denied positions of power.

Such positioning and mis-representation may result in other unfavorable consequences. The following have been associated with the young Asian-American community: high suicide attempt rates, low self-esteem, increase in drug and alcohol abuse, increase in promiscuity, high participation in gangs, etc. (Grunbaum, Lowry, Kann, & Pateman, 2000; Lee, 2003; Siu, 1996). This may or may not be due to a lack of role models and positive images. However, the research does suggest the importance of role models especially for students of color (Applied Research Center, 2002; Baldwin, 2003; Bell, 2002; Finders, 1997; Keith & Keith, 1993; Montecinos, 2004; Sheets, 2001). In order to give the Asian-American experience agency and power and to re-position Asian-Americans inside the common American narrative (Wills & Mehan, 1996), teachers and students need access to culturally authentic trade books and other such texts.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL LITERACY**

In this study, I used a critical literacy lens to see how power and perspective affect both the production (what and how trade books are written) and consumption (which trade books are selected and how they are used) of multicultural trade books, specifically related to Asian-American children's literature. Power and perspective, as identified by critical literacy theorists, are the tools that enable us to understand why certain groups, like Asian-Americans, are not represented in children's literature and classroom practice. The two problems I suggested were that authors are not producing and/or publishing authentic trade books and that teachers are not selecting and effectively using these trade books to the degree necessary; both of which relate to cultural authenticity in posing the following questions: What does it mean to produce a culturally authentic trade book and/or how does one know if a trade book is culturally authentic?

In looking at both the production and consumption of these trade books, authors and practitioners are in positions of power. What is written and what isn't written in addition to what is included and what is excluded in the curriculum are political acts. They are demonstrations of power and perspective, most likely influenced by the dominant middle-class, Anglo-American culture. Critical literacy gave me a lens from which to

understand the preconceptions, perceptions and motivations of authors and teachers. It also gave me a lens from which to understand cultural authenticity from the Asian-American perspective.

Furthermore, critical literacy allowed for the investigation of the content and quality of trade books by revealing inequities. Morgan (1997) writes, "Critical literacy critics and teachers focus on the cultural and ideological assumptions that underwrite texts, they investigate the politics of representation, and they interrogate the inequitable, cultural positioning of speakers and readers within discourses" (pp. 1-2). Critical literacy exposes issues of power and perspective illustrating how and why certain texts, including trade books, and certain contexts are privileged over others. Hence, critical literacy can be an effective tool for examining the current state of Asian-American children's literature and its use in the classroom.

### **PURPOSES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to systematically analyze Asian-American children's trade books in terms of their cultural authenticity. Quality and cultural authenticity was determined using a set of criteria which could be applied to Asian-American trade books (see Appendix A) and a brief evaluative summary was written for each book resulting in an annotated list of Asian-American children's trade books (see Appendix B). Although not an intended or direct outcome of this study, continuing such an annotated list may be a useful tool for teachers' when selecting Asian-American children's literature.

In addition, this study explored teachers' and authors' perceptions of the cultural authenticity of these books, including the perspectives of teachers and authors who are both cultural insiders and outsiders. A critical literacy lens was used to analyze issues related to cultural authenticity in these trade books.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions guided this research study: (1) How are Asian-Americans currently represented in children's trade books and how culturally authentic are these representations; (2) What are teachers' perceptions of these representations; (3) What are authors' perceptions of these representations; and (4) How do insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions?

## KEY CONSTRUCTS AND TERMINOLOGY

Because this study involved constructs and terminology that may be loosely defined and employed, it is sensible at this point to define the following terms (listed in alphabetical order and written in bold type):

1. **Asian-American:** Encompassing diverse groups of people differing in culture, language, and belief systems, an “Asian-American” is a U.S. citizen or resident with origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, Indian subcontinent or the Pacific Islands which may include (but is not limited to) those from the following ethnic heritages: Cambodian, Chinese, East Indian, Filipino, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Samoan, and Vietnamese (Pang, 1995; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).
2. **Children’s Literature:** This is a blanket term that often refers to board books, picture books, middle grade books and young adult books. These are books written for and about children and young adults (Galda & Callinan, 2002). They are categorized as narratives (fiction) and nonnarratives (nonfiction). They include (but are not limited to) the following genres: poetry and verse, folklore, fantasy, science fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, and biographies.
3. **Contemporary Realistic Fiction:** This is a genre, or category, of literature including but not limited to fiction stories and problem novels which use contemporary, or current, plots, themes, settings, and characters to depict the world as we know it. The storylines are familiar and realistic to contemporary audiences. They are essentially fictional stories that are “true to life” (Bucher & Manning, 2006, p. 87).
4. **Cultural Authenticity:** According to Short and Fox (2003), cultural authenticity generally refers to the degree which a book reflects the “values, facts, and attitudes” (p. 5) of a particular cultural group. Howard (1991) claims that an authentic book is one in which “readers from the culture will know that it is true” (p. 92) and “readers from another culture will feel that it is true” (p. 92). Both Howard (1991) and Karem (2004) also note the importance of reader response in defining authenticity as the reader must accept and believe what is being represented. It is prudent to note that scholars have a difficult time agreeing on an established definition of cultural authenticity (Short & Fox, 2003).
5. **Membership:** Membership is usually affiliated with racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds. A member of a culture actually belongs to the culture about which he/she writes and/or reads. Oftentimes, members are referred to as insiders and nonmembers are referred to as outsiders. In the research literature, there is generally more debate concerning nonmembers, who are criticized for not being able to represent the “nuances of day to day living” (Bishop, 1992, p. 43) of another culture; whereas, members are assumed to have access and knowledge of cultural codes that allow them not only to accurately represent themselves but interpret representations in literature.
6. **Multicultural children’s literature:** According to Bishop (1992), multicultural children’s literature consists of “literature by and about people who are members of

groups considered to be outside the socio-political mainstream of the United States” (p. 39). The category of multicultural literature crosses genres and age groups. It consists of both fiction and non-fiction texts. As it relates to children’s literature, it also includes the following categories: board books, picture books, middle-grade chapter books, and young adult books (Galda & Cullinan, 2003).

7. **Perspectives:** An ethnic, or insider, perspective is one in which the author and reader clearly know about the particular cultural group represented. In producing culturally authentic literature, Cai (2002) notes the importance of an insider perspective which is needed to truthfully reflect and evaluate “the reality of an ethnic culture” (p. 41). He does suggest that one does not necessarily have to be a member to have an insider perspective. On the other hand, an outsider perspective denotes someone who does not have a “special sense of reality” (Cai, 2002, p. 41) meaning he/she is obviously unknowledgeable about and unfamiliar with the lived experiences of that specific culture.
8. **Trade Books:** These texts are literature-based books that employ authentic and natural language instead of controlled vocabulary and syntax. They are in direct opposition to basal readers or textbooks (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory [NCREL], 2005) in that they do not necessarily focus on reading levels and/or high frequency vocabulary words. (When the term “texts” is used in this study, it includes trade books in addition to textbooks, basal readers, reading excerpts used for instruction, etc.)

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are several gaps in the present knowledge that make my study relevant. To date, there has not been a systematic, comprehensive analysis of the extent to which Asian-American children’s trade books are culturally authentic. Even though there has been an increase in research addressing the quality of multicultural trade books, especially African-American and Hispanic literature (Sims, 1982; Nilsson, 2005), there continues to be a paucity of research addressing Asian-American trade books.

Furthermore, some suggest that conversations in education about the Asian-American community are still stuck in dialogue about the model minority myth, which posits that Asian Americans perform better in academics than other minorities (Pang, 1995). This stereotype coupled with that of the perpetual foreigner are the two most powerful and persistent images associated with Asian-Americans (Lee, 2003). The school curriculum may inadvertently reinforce such images by excluding the Asian-American experience. All students, not just Asian-American students, will benefit from high-quality, culturally-authentic Asian-American children’s literature. Since students need many and varied exposures to authenticate portrayals and to make adequate generalizations, there needs to be a substantive



body of culturally authentic literature available to them. My study may contribute to teachers' understanding of culturally authentic Asian-American trade books which may increase the number of books selected and used in classroom practice.

One of the intended outcomes of this study was to arrive at a better understanding of what cultural authenticity means as related to Asian-American children's literature. The Asian-American experience is different from other ethnic groups in their historical, economical and social positioning; thus, this understanding needs to be reflective of generational and inter-ethnic perspectives. I considered arguments concerning insider and outsider perspectives as there is inconclusive data about whether or not one's ethnic background matters in issues of cultural authenticity (Cai, 2002; Fox & Short, 2003; Lindgren, 1991). If we are to use cultural authenticity as judgment criteria, then we need to understand what being culturally authentic means.

In conclusion, this study was significant because the findings may give support for increasing the quantity and quality of culturally-authentic Asian-American children's literature as well as increasing the use and availability of these trade books in the classrooms. The study may also help teachers become better evaluators of these books thereby improving the quality of what they select and use in classroom practice. It may also contribute to the growing body of scholarly research about multicultural children's literature specifically examining the Asian-American perspective.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

I interviewed eight subjects (four authors and four teachers) and analyzed 15 trade books. I qualitatively investigated the cultural authenticity of trade books as well as the perceptions of teachers and of authors. A qualitative study of this sort and size will not produce a complete explanation; but, according to Donmoyer (as cited in Davis-Harris, 2004), such a study can suggest possibilities. As such, the findings of this study may impact teacher practice in the evaluation, selection and consumption of Asian-American children's literature.

Some other limitations that I encountered included: access to interview subjects, especially authors; access to members and nonmembers specifically teachers who are members and authors who are nonmembers; and availability of Asian-American children's

trade books that fit my inclusion criteria. As aforementioned, there are only a limited amount of Asian-American contemporary realistic fiction books available for study. In regard to interview subjects, I depended on voluntary participation and I sought an equal representation of members and nonmembers. I only interviewed teachers in the San Diego area as I had the most access to them. For some of my author interviews, I had to conduct phone and email interviews to accommodate schedules and traveling logistics.

There may also be criticism of my role as a researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is considered to be an instrument (Creswell, 1998). As a second generation, American-born female of Chinese descent, I bring my own positionality to the research. I argue that my ethnic background allows me a certain familiarity and insider perspective with the trade books and this study, a perspective that allowed me to better analyze the cultural authenticity of Asian-American trade books as I have insights and access into this specific culture. Howard (1991) states, "It is difficult for reviewers who are [nonmembers] to evaluate authenticity unless and until they have been immersed in a large body of authentic works" (p. 92). My understanding of the Asian-American experience is derived from having lived the experience, having immersed myself into the culture and literature, and having conducted extensive research in this area.

My ethnic background was more beneficial to my study than not; but, it also presented some disadvantages. First, I had to continually check myself to maintain my objectivity as a researcher. Second, although I am familiar with the Asian Diaspora, I have a greater understanding of Chinese-American, Japanese-American, and Cambodian-American identities specifically of the first and second generations. I conducted research when necessary in order to broaden my own cultural understandings and not to make any assumptions about my own perceived knowledge base. In addition to being a cultural insider, I am also a producer (author of Asian-American children's literature) and a consumer (teacher practitioner and teacher educator). Again, having such insider perspectives proved to be more advantageous than not in that I understood and accounted for various nuances such as jargon, politics, etc. As I am aware of these subjectivities and limitations, which I cannot ignore or deny, I accounted for them by reporting, bracketing and acknowledging my biases.

## **SUMMARY: CHAPTER 1**

In Chapter 1, I made a case for a more systematic study of Asian-American children's literature as related to cultural authenticity and perceptions concerning production (the quantity and quality of these trade books) and consumption (the use of these trade books in classroom practice). My study's significance lies in its addressing a major gap in the current research knowledge which does not adequately include the scholarship of Asian-American children's literature. In addition, my study will hopefully influence instructional practices. If teachers are to provide students with a window and a mirror into the Asian-American experience, it is important that they develop awareness of trade books that accurately portray the Asian-American experience. This chapter also briefly outlines the purposes of my study including my research questions and key constructs. The research questions examined the: (1) current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books and the degree to which these representations are culturally authentic, (2) teachers' and authors' perceptions of these representations, and (3) impact of insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership on these perceptions. Most of the study's limitations were related to access to subjects and my position as an insider which I deemed to be more advantageous than not.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter examines the current literature, supporting the need for further research on Asian-American children's literature. The sources searched in this review of the literature were dissertation data banks, academic journals, book and article data banks, websites pertaining to Asian-American issues, critical literacy, multicultural literature as well as multicultural education. I begin by providing my underlying assumptions and explanations of major key constructs such as multicultural children's literature, Asian-American, and cultural authenticity. Then, I present a synthesis of the literature that was studied and analyzed in an effort to examine: (a) critical literacy as a theoretical framework specifically looking at issues of power and perspective, (b) a brief historical overview of multicultural and Asian-American children's literature, (c) the rationale for using Asian-American children's literature, (d) the representations of Asian Americans in trade books, (e) the issues and controversies surrounding cultural authenticity and cultural membership, and (f) the available models for assessing cultural authenticity. This review of the literature is intended to provide appropriate background for examining the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's literature.

### **UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS**

One of the main underlying assumptions of my study is that multicultural literature, in general, is an effective pedagogical tool for all students in that it enhances learning by embracing and representing cultural differences and it increases cross-cultural awareness and understanding. Levin, Smith and Strickland (2003) assert that reading, discussing and writing about multicultural literature will open teachers and students to learning about and developing an ethical respect toward other cultures. In addition to serving as a window into other cultures, Bishop (1992) notes the important role literature plays as a mirror; children need to see themselves reflected in the stories used in the classroom in order to feel valued as a member of society.

Furthermore, multicultural literature provides knowledge that may otherwise be absent in the classroom given that curriculums and teaching practices are often geared toward the values and mores of Anglo-American, middle-class students. This is perpetuated by the fact that the teaching force remains predominantly Anglo-American and monolingual (Sheets, 2001). Research (Montecinos, 1994, 2004) indicates that teachers of color are more likely to promote and encourage diversity in their classrooms as they share similar backgrounds and experiences. When used effectively, multicultural literature providing mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1992) can help bridge the disconnect between teachers and students (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003).

Another underlying assumption is that by using tenets of multicultural education, teachers are in a powerful position to effect change. Teachers, regardless of race, who are intrinsically motivated to do so, can effectively implement a multicultural curriculum once they are given knowledge and tools. Multicultural literature is an effective vehicle for such implementation. As minority students and second language learners are becoming more of a force in our classrooms, teachers need to create a culturally-responsive curriculum, one that employs multicultural literature.

### **DEFINITION OF MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

The term "multicultural" has only recently come into popular usage (Lindgren, 1991). It generally refers to people from a non-Anglo background and/or people from different cultures (Higgins, 2002). Multicultural literature focuses on the lived experiences of these people and on the realities of being a member of their respective cultures (Higgins, 2002). To complicate the matter, there are several definitions of multicultural literature, mainly differing in their inclusion and exclusion criteria (Klein 1998); for example, there is debate on whether or not sexuality and gender can be considered as criteria or if the definition solely encompasses race and culture. For the purposes of my study, I limited the definition of multicultural literature to refer to people of color.

Bishop's (1992) seminal study, which is described later in this chapter, delineates three categories of multicultural trade books. The first is *culturally specific*, which details the specific nuances of growing up in a particular minority cultural group. The second is *generic* or *universal*, as it features characters of color but does not focus on cultural details. The third

is *neutral*, which are generally picture books with people of color but in which the content is not related to culture or diversity.

For my study, I defined Asian-American children's literature as a subgenre of multicultural children's literature. Asian-American children's literature includes and/or features Asian-Americans and their experiences. It is important to note that there is a difference between Asians and Asian-Americans. For example, a Chinese person growing up in China will have a significantly different experience from a Chinese person growing up in America. Thus, my definition of this genre encompasses those of Asian ethnic backgrounds who were born and/or who are residing in the United States of America. This is inclusive of immigration and emigration experiences. Books which feature an Asian-American traveling and/or living abroad are included in this definition.

### **DEFINITION OF "ASIAN-AMERICAN"**

At this point, it is important to address the term "Asian-American," which is complex and diverse. Encompassing diverse groups of people differing in culture, language, and belief systems, the term "Asian-American" includes (but is not limited to) those from the following ethnic heritages: Cambodian, Chinese, East Indian, Filipino, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Samoan, and Vietnamese (Pang, 1995). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), an Asian-American is "a U.S. citizen or resident having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands" (para. 3).

This diversity and richness of the Asian-American experience may be a leading factor in its failure to be adequately represented in the publishing world as there is much confusion and inter-ethnic strife. When examining the inter-ethnic politics of these groups, one will find that there are prejudices and dissent among Asian-Americans. For example, historically, there is animosity between Koreans and Japanese because of the Japanese occupation of Korea. In addition, Far East Asians tend to have prejudices toward Southeast Asians as they consider Southeast Asians to be from a third world mentality. To further complicate the matter, there are also differences between American-born and immigrant Asians as well as differences between generations of Asian-Americans.

However, the Asian-American identity is more similar than different. In addition to sharing similar physical traits, Asian-Americans share the common experience of assimilating and acculturating into a dominant Anglo-American, middle-class culture. Aoki (1992) stresses the importance of not over-generalizing differences between cultural groups.

### **DEFINITION OF CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

Cultural authenticity looks at how accurately people of color are represented and/or portrayed in texts specific to their culture (Higgins, 2002; Mikkelsen, 1998). Because cultural authenticity is influenced by power and perspective, a concrete definition is hard to operationalize. Different cultural groups have different criteria for cultural authenticity (Higgins, 2002). Whether or not a book is culturally authentic is often the subject of analytical discussions; however, what exactly is cultural authenticity is not clearly defined. Karem (2004) contends, "Reviewers from different aesthetic and ideological extremes have argued about what was authentic about a text or culture in their historical moment, but few of them have eschewed authenticity as a category of critical judgment" (p. 6). The scarce use of cultural authenticity as judgment criteria may be a result of an ambiguous understanding of cultural authenticity. For the most part, an authentic work illustrates one's intimate familiarity with the nuances of a culture which may or may not be a result of one's ethnicity (Yokota, 1993).

Much of the controversy that surrounds cultural authenticity deals with authorship. Nonmembers, usually Anglo-Americans writing about cultures and people outside of their cultural background are subject to the most criticism (Bishop, 1992). The general assumption, which is not accepted by all scholars, is that nonmembers, also referred to as outsiders, are unable to represent the "nuances of day to day living" (p. 43) of another culture. Some scholars (Aoki, 1992; Mikkelsen, 1998; Slapin, Seale, & Gonzales, 1992) maintain that authentic books are only those written by members, also referred to as insiders, as they have access and knowledge of cultural codes that allow them to accurately represent themselves. However, other scholars (Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; Howard, 1991) acknowledge nonmembers who have researched and/or immersed themselves in another culture as being able to produce authentic books. In this sense, a culturally-authentic book is

one in which the details truthfully represent the culture as determined by a member of that culture. This interpretation closely aligns with how my study defined cultural authenticity.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL LITERACY**

Over the years, more attention has been paid to the representations of people of color in trade books as evidenced by the growing body of research in this area and the increasing number of guidelines addressing the selection and/or quality of trade books such as those set forth by the Council on Interracial Books for Children (n.d.), Asian-American Children's Book Project Committee (1976), Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1996) and Higgins (2002). As a result, the number of explicit negative and offensive portrayals of people of color especially in the illustrations of multicultural books has decreased; however, such stereotypes and representations have become less overt and more subtle, giving authority to critical literacy (Boutte, 2002) which requires readers to critically uncover the implicit messages.

Critical literacy allows for the investigation of the content and quality of texts and trade books by revealing more subtle inequities. Morgan (1997) writes, "Critical literary critics and teachers focus on the cultural and ideological assumptions that underwrite texts, they investigate the politics of representation, and they interrogate the inequitable, cultural positioning of speakers and readers within discourses" (pp. 1-2). Critical literacy exposes issues of power and perspective illustrating how and why certain voices and perspectives are valued over others as evidenced by what is and is not represented in texts. Critical literacy enables us to understand why groups like Asian-Americans are not adequately represented in the world of children's literature and classroom practice.

Critical literacy allows for a close examination of politics, power, and perspective, which more often than not are faintly introduced in the language and content of texts. In a critical examination of multicultural children's books, Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) revealed that the presence of white privilege in texts objectifies and trivializes the experiences of people of color. According to McIntosh (1989), white privilege is "an invisible package of unearned assets which [Anglo-Americans] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [Anglo-Americans were] meant to remain oblivious" (p. 10). In adapting Mulvey's "white gaze" (as cited by Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002), Willis-Rivera



and Meeker illustrated how the power of the dominant middle-class, patriarchal Anglo-American culture influenced representation and perspective. Critical literacy led them to such a conclusion, which is further supported by other scholars. Boutte (2002) asserts that the norms and values presented in most books reflect those of the dominant social classes. As such, issues of power and perspective may be uncovered by assuming a critical perspective; “Reading between the lines,” to quote an adage.

Critical literacy considers several essential questions: (1) Who constructs the texts whose representations are dominant in a particular culture at a particular time? (2) How do readers become complicit with the persuasive ideologies of texts? (3) Whose interests are served by such representations and readings? and (4) How can readers reconstruct inequitable texts and readings? (Morgan, 1997). Critical literacy encourages readers and consumers to not passively accept the status quo, to examine the underlying dynamics at play and to assume a position. According to Apple (1992), there are three common stances: (1) the dominant stance in which one accepts the message, (2) the negotiated stance in which one disputes a particular claim but accepts the overall message, and (3) the oppositional stance in which one rejects the message. The last two stances require readers to take a more active role, a role in which one must assume a critical lens. Having stated that, one can still employ a critical lens and still choose to accept a message. Such a lens, which is necessary for critical literacy, introduces people to multiple perspectives and encourages them to not passively rely on authoritative interpretations.

Practitioners of critical literacy seek to actively engage readers in the process of critically looking at a substantial body of texts since no one book can provide a complete picture. Boutte (2002) contends that even young children can be taught to be critical readers, to “learn to identify and clarify ideological perspectives in books” (p. 147). The idea is not to agree or disagree with the author’s ideology but to recognize it for what it is. She states, “The intent should not be to avoid books because of their ideological stances, but rather to become aware of the ideologies, be critical consumers of books, and teach children to think about what they are reading or hearing” (p. 151). By not assuming a critical perspective, we may inadvertently contribute to the legitimization and reproduction of inequities. There is a possibility that uncritical readings will form stereotypes and biased attitudes that may be carried into adulthood (Boutte, 2002).

Using critical literacy as a lens allows practitioners to see how power and perspective affect both the text production (what and how texts are written) and the consumption of texts (which texts are read and how they are used). In discussing critical literacy, it is important to examine the various processes that make up the act of reading. In the transactional socio-psycholinguistic theory and model of reading, Goodman (1994) recognizes three vantage points: (1) the process by which writers produce the texts, (2) the characteristics of the texts, and (3) the process by which readers make sense of the texts. All three components are essential when making meaning of text; we cannot ignore the roles of the writer, the reader and the text. Boutte (2002) contends that there is “an obvious power relationship between the author and the reader” (p. 147); thus, the author’s ideology is important in that it influences the writing, particularly the positioning of the characters and the nature of the plots. All this impacts the reader’s response and ultimately, the reader’s judgments. On the other hand, the response of the reader, or “contemporary response” influences what is produced and authenticated (Karem, 2004). Critical literacy forces us to examine all these areas.

Furthermore, teachers also influence reader response in that they may consciously and unconsciously project images and ideologies onto students via instruction and/or their selection and treatment of trade books. Unfortunately, teachers do not regularly examine the content of these trade books (Boutte, 2002), which is problematic because as aforementioned, inequities are often times presented subtly in these texts. Many of our biases may have been the result of the accumulation of both subtle and overt messages in books, media and instructional practices (Boutte, 2002); thus, learning how to recognize issues of power and perspective by assuming a critical perspective is necessary.

Multicultural education and its tenets, including the effective use of multicultural children’s literature, have significantly influenced educational practices and reform in the past decade; however, the value of diversity and multiculturalism may still not be recognized by all communities (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). For example, teachers and administrators may go through the motions of implementing multiculturalism; however, they may not be completely internalizing a culturally-responsive frame of mind. This internalization is necessary for true pluralism. Teachers are being asked to do a lot in a little amount of time; they are asked to critically examine their pedagogy and classroom environment and make

changes affirming diversity and help children resist bias (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Critical literacy gives them the tool to do such work. In adopting a framework of critical literacy, educators and students may be able to recognize inequities when reading and/or consuming texts and trade books, and in doing so, they can check and alter their biases (Boutte, 2002).

Successful implementation of critical literacy in the classroom has prompted critical conversations around diversity and promoted shifts toward a more pluralistic frame-of-mind; for example, Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison and Vasquez (1999) found that the use of critical literacy encouraged students to consider how society positions them, enabling conversations about issues of power and social justice. Foss (2002), in her work with students of privilege, found that a critical literacy framework gave her students the opportunity to problematize existing societal systems as well as their own positionings within those structures; in doing so, these students reached a deeper understanding of themselves and others, which is a desired outcome of multicultural education. In addition, Bean and Moni (2003) used critical literacy as a means of empowering their students; they state, “students develop an understanding that the worldview represented in a novel is not a ‘natural one,’ and it can be challenged and actively resisted” (p. 647). By placing students in a position of power in relation to texts and by having students critically examine positioning and perspective, critical literacy promotes a culturally-responsive pedagogical model which is necessary given today’s demographics.

### **A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF MULTICULTURAL AND ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE**

Children’s literature is playing a more important role in the educational and family trade books market as evidenced by its increasing numbers. In 1940, only 984 books were published for children (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Today, the children’s book market publishes over 5000 books a year (Sautter, 2005), which suggests that there is a growing awareness of the power of these books. The two main influences for this increase are its use as a vehicle for helping children understand and cope with complex decisions and the renewed educational focus on authentic stories for literacy and language development (Ayala, 1999). Because children’s literature is perceived to have an influential role in the socialization of children, representations or lack of representations of women and people of

color in these books have come under closer scrutiny (Boutte, 2002). Unfortunately, there still remains an imbalance in the types of books being published and consumed.

Compared to the number of children's books published each year, multicultural trade books, although increasing, still only make up a small percentage of the market. For instance, out of 5000 books published in the year 2002, only 91 were by and about Asian-Americans (Bucher & Manning, 2006). In addition, the number of multicultural books published is still not commensurate with current demographics (Higgins, 2002; Nilsson, 2005). For example, even though there are more than 12 million Asian-Americans in this country, only a small percentage of the children's trade books published focus on this group; Lee (n.d.) of Lee & Low Books stated that only 1.5% of all children's books published in 1997 were about Asians and/or Asian-Americans. According to the U.S. 2000 Census (2003), 4.3% of the Asian-American population was school-aged. Furthermore, of the few that are published, only a small percentage could be considered to be culturally authentic (Barrera et al., 1992; Higgins, 2002; Sims, 1982). Other studies conducted by scholars such as Cobb and Reimer (as cited by Klein, 1998) have produced the same results: (1) the number of multicultural children's trade books are not commensurate with the demographics and (2) children's trade books have evidence of stereotyping (Ayala, 1999; Nilsson, 2005). In addition, Pace's 1992 study (as cited by Boutte, 2002) noted that high school literature anthologies were not ethnically diverse. These studies support the notion that there are problems with representation, quantity and quality.

Nancy Larrick is often credited as having initiated the multicultural children's literature movement (Klein, 1998; Lenarz, 2002). In her seminal study entitled *The All-White World of Children's Books* (as cited in Mendoza & Reese, 2001), she noted a disparity between the numbers of African-American students in schools and children's books representing their likeness. She studied 5,206 children's trade books issued by 63 publishers in the years 1962-1964 and found that only 349 or 6.7% contained one or more African-Americans. And even those representations were wanting. Larrick published her findings in 1965 in the *Saturday Review* and hence, gained national attention, resulting in an increase in multicultural children's trade books. Prior to Larrick's study, people of color were not adequately represented. In addition, sociocultural changes spurred by the Civil Rights

movement nurtured the growth of multicultural literature (Lenarz, 2002), creating a viable market.

About 20 years after Larrick's study, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (as cited by Klein, 1998) continued documenting the number of children's trade books produced by African-Americans. They found that between 1985 and 1986, only 1.4% of about 2,500 books were written or illustrated by African-Americans. In the ensuing years, the numbers stayed at about 1%. In addition, Pescosolido, Grauerholz and Milkie (as cited by Higgins, 2002) found that the number of children's books featuring African-American characters has increased since 1937; however, the number of books focusing exclusively on African-American life has not. Thus, rich and authentic depictions of the lived experiences of people of color are absent in the children's book world. The numbers for other minority groups is even more discouraging as there are more books representing the African-American culture than any other culture (Hill, 1998). This might be a result of the Civil Rights movement which was primarily led by African-Americans; consequently, most of the available multicultural trade books focused on their experiences.

In her seminal study of African-American children's literature, Bishop (Sims, 1982) surveyed and analyzed 150 contemporary realistic African-American fiction books published between 1965 and 1979. She wanted to analyze the influence of perspective on the content and quality of these books. She found that African-American children's trade books were based on an Anglo-American frame of reference and primarily intended for Anglo-Americans. In other words, these trade books were written about African-Americans from an Anglo-American perspective. Thus, they were often criticized for being culturally inauthentic, not representative of the African-American experience as judged by African-Americans.

As Bishop's (Sims, 1982) study suggests, Anglo-Americans were the exclusive producers of images of people of color. According to Day (1994), books published in the mid and late 1960s were written by Anglo-American authors and reflected white, middle-class mainstream values. Beginning in the 1970s, books reflected a more pluralistic viewpoint. This trend was aided by the work of groups such as the Council on Interracial Books for Children. More and more books are being written from other frames of reference. Despite the increase in books written specifically for ethnic audiences and by ethnic writers,

Anglo-American perspectives still controlled and continue to control much of the publishing markets. As a result, people of color diverged from the mainstream and formed small presses and established writing contests and awards for ethnic writers and illustrators (Lindgren, 1991). For example, Asian-American children's literature began to emerge from such writing contests and publishing houses such as Lee & Low (Lindgren, 1991). The majority of multicultural children's books written from ethnic frames of reference continue to be from such small, independent presses (Mendoza & Reese, 2001).

Fortunately, more authors of color are writing their stories and getting published (Higgins, 2002); this may account for the increase in quality. In addition, Sherriff (2005) compared and contrasted the portrayals of Mexican-American females in realistic picture books between two time periods. Her content analyses revealed that books published more recently are more authentic and less stereotypical than in the past; however, she notes that the portrayals are still not reflective of contemporary realities. Also, works by and about Anglo-Americans continue to dominate the two oldest and most prestigious awards: Caldecott and Newbery Medals. Such awards illustrate the relationship between quantity and quality. Literary merit and authenticity are both essential criteria for winning awards, especially the coveted Newbery Award. The Newbery Award is the first and most-recognized children's book award in the world. Winning the award not only brings prestige and recognition, but it also increases sales, as every library and school purchases Newbery books. The result is that the winning books enjoy greater circulation and make a greater impact on the reading public (Lindgren, 1991). Interestingly, since its inception in 1922, only three Asian-American children's trade books have won the award (American Library Association, 2004).

Even though African-American children's trade books continue to dominate the genre of multicultural children's literature, other cultures are able to obtain representation as a result of this particular market trend. The world of Asian-American children's literature has experienced some changes over the years. Galda and Cullinan (2003) note that the number of high-quality Asian-American children's trade books have increased; however, this number is still disproportionately small. Furthermore, there have been several noteworthy trends in Asian-American children's books (Lenarz, 2002). First, most Asian-American children's trade books focus on the Chinese-American or Japanese-American experience; however, the

Korean-American and Vietnamese-American experiences are on the rise. But, other Asian ethnicities like Hmong, Laotian, etc. are still not well-represented. Second, to date, there are three popular story themes prevalent in this genre: (1) stories about the U.S. immigration experience as a result of oppression in native countries, (2) stories about the prejudices newcomers face, and (3) stories about coming to terms with one's cultural heritage while adjusting or assimilating to an American lifestyle. Third, there exists a significant number of Asian folk stories; as such, there is a need for more contemporary realistic fiction trade books.. Fourth, most of the historical fiction addresses the Japanese internment experience. Fifth, most nonfiction books are about the lives of recent immigrants. From these trends, we ascertain that there needs to be a more substantial and rich body of literature reflective of the diverse and contemporary experiences of being Asian-American.

Despite this, it is encouraging that Asian-American children's literature continues to grow. The research on Asian-American children's literature is also increasing albeit disproportionately. Such research is important in that it allows us to better assess the status of this genre and advocate for appropriate changes. For example, Louie (1993) examined eight young adult novels with Asian-American characters published between 1987 and 1992. She found that these books projected typical stereotypes with weak and indecisive characters such as the "Suzy Wong" and "model minority" caricatures. She also found that three characters rejected their Asian-American heritages and that only three stories contained mature and realistic characters. Louie felt that there weren't enough Asian-American stories and too few that contained male characters. Klein's (1998) study provides another example of the problem with representation. Over a period of 31 years, Klein (1998) studied the recommended reading lists for high school students put out by the National Council of Teachers of English. She found that Asian-Americans were the only ethnic group to decrease in percentage of annotations from 1964 to 1995. They were also the only ethnic group to still have the majority of the settings take place in another country and to not have their characters increase in importance. Although their roles were less stereotypical, they weren't necessarily more varied. The most common roles for Asian-Americans were "coming of age," "warrior," "civilian in war," and "professional." The roles that decreased were "leader," "culture," "romance," and "self-sufficient" (p. 27). The most common story lines were those of immigration and assimilation. As a result of studies such as these, authors, teachers and

publishing houses may be influenced to produce higher quality and more representative literature.

Even though representation remains problematic, the quality of Asian-American children's literature has improved over time. In Harada's (1995) study of the portrayal of Asian-Americans in picture books, she found that 90% of the books had positive and non-stereotypical portrayals and 80% of the books had proactive characters. Harada's main criticism was that only five main groups were represented in the literature: Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos and Vietnamese. Similarly, a study conducted by Pankratz (as cited by Klein, 1998) also showed how there have been positive changes over time. In 1980, Asian-Americans were mainly depicted as impoverished; whereas, in 1990, 25% of them were of average wealth and 75% were impoverished. She also found that in 1980, no Asian-Americans were depicted as main characters; in 1990, 66.6% played major roles and 33.3% held minor roles. Klein (1998) also cites another study examining the percentage of reference books with multicultural topics. Asian-Americans at first had no representation and then by volume 30, were listed 0.3%. This is good but it's not good enough; Asian-Americans are still mis-represented and underrepresented in trade books.

As evidenced by these studies, the 1990s saw an emergence of critical research and literature examining children's literature for bias, stereotyping, etc. (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). They used primary sources for historical and cultural information, raising issues of accuracy and authenticity, questioning the perspectives and even the motives of Anglo-American writers writing about people of color. However, these studies are mainly published in less widely-known and prestigious journals and non-mainstream presses. Given that recognition and availability are the main motives for buying and using books, awards and reviews are also significant factors in sales and dissemination. Mendoza and Reese (2001) contend that reviewers and award committees rarely consider issues of cultural and historical accuracy and/or cultural authenticity. For example, in regard to authenticity, the Newbery Award committee considers the accurate presentation of information (American Library Association, 2007). In other words, the coveted Newbery Award honors accuracy, which could encompass cultural authenticity, but it does not specifically address and/or define cultural authenticity. In addition, Dowd (1992) contends that the voices of Asian-American authors and artists are minimized by mainstream presses; thus, smaller



presses more often than not publish multicultural books. These smaller presses do not have the marketing capacities and recognition of the larger presses.

Multicultural children's books are increasing in numbers and increasing in diversity in that more cultures are being represented. Yet, quantity is still an issue. Hill (1998) identified three sources which may be responsible for the low numbers of authentic multicultural books: (1) publishers who do not actively seek out authors of color focusing only on profitability, (2) review journals that select certain books over others, and (3) librarians and bookstore buyers who use these review journals for purchasing decisions and who only purchase from large publishers. In addition, there is still an issue with quality and representation: these books do not fully reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity that is represented in our society (Ayala, 1999).

Over the past two decades, the use of children's books has led to greater understandings (Cai, 2002). Ayala (1999) writes, "Perhaps the greatest milestone that has been achieved over the past 20 years has been the discussion surrounding the need for children's books to be authentic representations of the characters they depict" (p. 112). In order to do this, producers and consumers need to understand the multifaceted dimensions of minorities as well as the changing perceptions of society; in doing so, the world of multicultural children's literature will continue to grow and improve. Teachers, authors, publishers and others need to take an active role in addressing representation, quantity and quality, which are big issues in regard to multicultural children's literature.

### **RATIONALE FOR USING ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

In general, research supports the use of children's literature in classrooms (Many, 2004); such trade books influence children's attitudes toward reading, increase their worldly knowledge and increase their identification and use of text patterns, literary elements and comprehension. In addition, writing, discussions and critical thinking are improved (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000). In DeKay's (1996) review of the literature, he found that using children's literature facilitates comprehension, critical thinking, problem solving, writing skills, development of a literate voice meaning the ability to generate connections between text and self, appreciation of literature/aesthetic development, development of familiarity with story grammar, cultural literacy, development of self-esteem, vocabulary enrichment,

critical reading skills, and motivation. He also found that children's literature served as good tools for reading and content-area instruction. Many (2004) states, "Literature is seen as events to be lived through, offering opportunities for self-knowledge and for understanding others" (p. 914); Bishop (2003) adds:

children's literature has long been considered a vehicle for transmitting moral and cultural values as well as entertaining. When a group has been marginalized and oppressed, the cultural functions of story can take on even greater significance because storytelling can be seen as a means to counter effects of that marginalization and oppression on children. (p. 25)

As such, children's literature is a great tool for teaching about multiculturalism and diversity. Unfortunately, people usually read books about others who are of the same class, race, gender, and so on (Apple, 1992).

There is rhetoric about how western tradition is threatened by the inclusion of women and people of color especially in regard to the canon (Boutte, 2002). The reality is that the curriculum is still largely Anglo-American and when other voices are represented, they are positioned within the Anglo-American frame of reference (Sims, 1982). Scholars agree that the traditional canon of American literature has excluded and continues to exclude authors of color and positive images of people of color (Nilsson, 2005). This is especially problematic given the changing demographics of our classrooms today. Students are becoming increasingly diverse, yet in many cases, our teaching force, curricula and instructional practices and materials remain the same, aligning with a white and middle class way of thinking. Olsen (1997), who spent two and a half years studying a prototypical public high school, reiterates that despite demographic shifts in student populations, not much has changed in how or what educators teach children. Olsen contends that U.S. high schools tend to Americanize immigrant and minority students by excluding and separating them academically, by pressuring them to surrender their heritage, and by making them assume designated roles in the racial hierarchy. The literature and texts used in classrooms illustrate this exclusion as the voices of minorities and/or people of color seem to be marginalized.

A multicultural perspective, on the other hand, treats various views equally (Boutte, 2002); thus, multicultural children's literature needs to play an integral role in the classroom. These books offer children many opportunities to gain information and to experience perspectives other than their own (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Such books allow children to develop their understanding of others while simultaneously affirming children of diverse

backgrounds. Research done by Jimenez (1994) also supported the use of multicultural literature especially for students of color. By making connections between their lived experience and textual information, students increased their sense of self, forming strong cultural identities. In doing so, they altered their relationships with literacy. Jimenez illustrated the importance of prior knowledge in promoting students' desire and ability to acquire higher levels of literacy as well as engage in literate behaviors. Rosenblatt's (2004) transactional theory illustrates the powerful relationship between readers and texts noting that one's knowledge base affects one's reading and vice versa. Interacting with texts goes beyond language and literacy development.

There appears to be a disconnect between what we know and what we practice in the classrooms in terms of multicultural children's literature. We know that pedagogy based on mainstream American values "will, of course, continue to privilege those who feel most at home in the classroom" (Finders, 1997, p.119). According to Heath (1983), common classroom practices support white, middle-class values; as a result, students who do not fit this mold often feel disconnected. In order to better serve our students, we need to bridge what we know with what we do in the classrooms. One solution could be to select and employ high-quality, authentic literature, especially multicultural children's literature. All students will benefit from learning about multiple perspectives. Practitioners have a great deal of power in regard to the selection and consumption of multicultural literature; as a result, it is imperative for teacher to learn how to evaluate and/or determine cultural authenticity.

The use or non-use of multicultural children's literature affects all children. Klein (1998) posits that children of color may not view their color and culture as significant if they only look out into a world of all-white faces; they need role models and positive representations which may increase their self-esteem and self-development. On the other hand, Anglo-American children may view themselves to be superior due to the lack of exposure. Without any opportunities to observe diverse cultures and heritages, these Anglo-American children may not be able to understand and respect differences and diversity. In the absence of culturally-authentic representations, children may be exposed to racist and sexist attitudes, which can then be perpetuated by books and other media (Leung, 2003). Over time, such pervasive images can distort their perceptions allowing stereotypes to

become reality. In the absence of culturally authentic texts, Asian American students may continue to be stereotyped and neglected. Wills and Mehan (1996) note:

Women and people of color must be visible in specific historical events to be visible in history. Furthermore, they must appear as active participants, that is, social actors who made sense of their circumstances and orient their actions to others around them. (p. 8)

In many cases, multicultural texts are more often than not additions to classroom libraries and not necessarily the foci of classroom practice. For example, the Asian-American experience is often relegated to Chinese New Year and/or lessons surrounding the California Gold Rush and transcontinental railroad; such practices may promote tokenism (Banks, 2003). Also, the current practice of using these books for holidays may promote exoticism (Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002) as Asian-Americans are placed outside the common historical narrative (Wills & Mehan, 1996). Thus, the effective use of multicultural children's literature, via employment of a critical lens, may better equip students to function in a pluralistic society (Leung, 2003).

Asian-Americans are becoming a force in today's classrooms in that their numbers are increasing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). However, they continue to be inadequately represented in and positioned outside of the mainstream curriculums and texts. The inadequate numerical representation of Asian-Americans is further evidenced by the minimal amount of research available. Research studies addressing the quality of the general state of multicultural children's literature have increased; however, they focus mainly on African-American and Hispanic-American children's literature (Bishop, 1992; Nilsson, 2005). Hence, Asian-American children's literature receives too little attention in both research and practice. However, the benefits of such literature have been noted in the literature. Yin (2000) claims that reading Asian-American texts "provides unique access to understanding the sensibilities of members of a frequently misunderstood minority group" (p. 3).

At the American Educational Research Association's 2004 Annual Conference in San Diego, several scholars presented their research on the current status of Asian-American student populations. As such, three recurring themes became visible in regards to research on Asian-American student populations. First, despite growing numbers, their existence continues to be nearly invisible. According to the U.S. Census (2002), there are an estimated

12 million Asian-Americans in the United States, or about 4% of the total population. In addition, Asian-Americans are one of the fastest growing groups in the nation. Over the last decade there was a 69% growth in that population, and their numbers are expected to reach 20 million by 2020. So, why aren't they better represented in our mainstream culture? If addressed at all, Asian-American issues tend to be brushed under the larger umbrellas of multiculturalism, diversity or even, urban education.

Second, conversations in education about Asian-Americans are still trapped in dialogue centered around academic achievement and stereotypes perpetuated by the model minority theory, which posits that Asian-Americans perform better in academics than other minorities (Pang, 1995). Many Asian-American students are constantly fighting the stresses of racism and the existence of conflicting cultural messages mainly imposed by this theory (Lee, 2003; Pang, 1995). According to Yau and Jimenez (2003), the needs of struggling Asian-American students are often neglected or passed over because of prevailing stereotypes. Asian-Americans, due to their cultural upbringing, tend to exhibit teacher-pleasing behaviors and are generally seen as agreeable and cooperative. Leung (2003) claims that these students do not speak up in class; as such, she states, "Teachers are often not aware of the multiplicity of ideas held by Asian-American students in their classrooms" (p. 5). As a result, teachers inadvertently ignore and further marginalize them.

Third, Asian-American students are in desperate need of positive role models and advocates, which includes teachers of color. Pang's (1995) research suggests that Asian-Americans have lower levels of self-esteem than their counterparts. For Asian-American youth, the consequences of not having role models and positive images to help counter pressures brought on prevailing stereotypes especially the model minority myth may include the following: high suicide attempt rates, low self-esteem, increase in drug and alcohol abuse, increase in promiscuity, etc. (Grunbaum et al., 2000; Lee, 2003; Siu, 1996). In reviewing 34 studies of juvenile delinquency among Asian-Pacific Islanders published since 1970, Le (2002) found that Asian/Pacific Islanders are increasing their presence in the juvenile justice system whereas black and white youths are decreasing in their numbers. Le (2002) also suggests that contributing factors for gang affiliation and juvenile delinquency among Asian-Pacific Islanders are stresses related to assimilation and post-traumatic war syndrome especially among Southeast Asian youth. In addition, Jenkins and Austin (as cited by Dowd,

1992) assert that trade books reflecting the diversity of the pan-Asian-American experience especially of Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants are lacking; so this particular ethnic group may be at more risk.

Thus, increasing the quantity and quality of Asian-American children's literature may help to increase their visibility, counter prevailing stereotypes and provide positive images and role models. According to Bishop (1992), multicultural literature is a "vehicle for socialization and change" (p. 43). In schools, texts which include literature, textbooks, etc. are used to disseminate knowledge and to produce and reproduce society (Mehan & Robert, 2001). Unfortunately, the literature suggests that there is a scarcity of culturally-relevant materials (Bishop, 1992; Lee, n.d.; Wills & Mehan, 1996; Yeh et al., 2002). Given this scarcity, students will continue to lack the necessary information to understand diverse voices and thus, they may fail to bring marginalized groups of people into the "common narrative" (Wills & Mehan, 1996, p. 317). Therefore, there is a real need to increase the quantity and quality of high-quality, culturally-authentic Asian-Americans trade books in classrooms. Lee (2003) writes, "students need a truly multicultural curriculum that challenges the idea that Asian-ness and American-ness are mutually exclusive categories" (p. 48).

### **REPRESENTATIONS OF ASIAN-AMERICANS: PROBLEMATIZING THE STATUS QUO**

As aforementioned, Klein (1998) found that the percentage of multicultural trade books on the recommended reading lists devised by the National Council of Teachers of English has increased over a period of 31 years; however, she noted that the percentage of Asian-American trade books did not increase during this period. In addition, for all groups except for Asian-Americans, multicultural characters have increased in importance meaning Asian-American characters have not played significant roles. A number of scholars observed that the Asian-American identity is often overlooked by dominant society as evidenced by its lack of representation in the mainstream literature (Cai, 2002). With the growing Asian-American student population, there is a real necessity for books that represent this culture. It is important for all students and especially, Asian-American students, to be exposed to positive, non-stereotypical images of Asian-Americans. Furthermore,

Asian-American students need to feel validated and feel proud of the contributions and achievements of other Asian-Americans.

Why do Asian-Americans continue to be lost in the literature and school curriculums? The Asian-American identity has experiences, people and histories that extend beyond Chinese New Year. The lack of adequate representations of Asian-Americans is detrimental to all of our students in that: (1) the proliferation of degrading stereotypes serves to dehumanize the history, lives and experiences of Asian-Americans which fosters racism and prejudice; and (2) the absence or silencing of insider perspectives marginalizes Asian-Americans which encourages cultural separatism (Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002). In this marginalization of Asian-Americans and other minorities from popular discourse, we may continue to replicate current systems of white, patriarchal hegemonic practices.

Similar to Bishop's (Sims, 1982) findings, Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) posit that multicultural children's literature is written for "white" audiences meaning that Anglo-Americans are more often than not the implicit intended audience of these books: "These stories (of the literature in general) can often only be read 'correctly' from a standpoint of whiteness" (p. 272). As a result, the white frame of reference is not only privileged but controls the position of the people of color in the text. As such, people of color are often acted upon instead of being able to control their own behaviors. This has implications for how diversity is addressed and should be taught to students. These authors argue against framing multicultural literature in a way that positions readers of color as "other" or "exotic." Such readings may give Anglo-American readers the appearance of diversity by allowing them to lessen their guilt; in other words, since they are reading these books about people of color, they can feel less guilty about white privilege. In order to counteract this, teachers need to explicitly discuss white privileging in these trade books.

Historically, Anglo-Americans have had greater access to mainstream audiences as evidenced by book sales and book quantities. The recruitment of authors of color is important because authors of color have experienced various degrees of institutionalized racism. They do not have as much access to the publishing world as Anglo-Americans. Bishop points out that the politics behind publishing deems what is accepted and what is not accepted (Sims, 1982). She notes the importance of the intended audience. Books about diversity told from an

Anglo-American perspective were more likely to get published. Thus, for whom books are intended matters in that reception determines production.

It is not surprising that popular images in the media and literature perpetuate stereotypes. In regard to Asian-Americans, there are two dominating images, both of which serve to denigrate the Asian-American identity. Lee's (2003) study contended that Asian-American students are impacted greatly by the stereotypes of the perpetual foreigner and the model minority, both of which are reinforced by schools and reflected in the literature. If school curriculums and libraries exclude the Asian-American experience, Asian-Americans may adopt and internalize prevailing notions which can negatively affect their academic performance and their social-affective development. Lee (2003) found that even American-born Asian-Americans consider Anglo-Americans to be the only authentic Americans thus, discounting their own identity affiliation. Believing themselves to be "foreign," they may be less likely to participate in class, downplay physical traits by getting colored contacts, dying their hair or rejecting their names, languages and even other Asian-American peers.

The model minority theory, according to Lee (2003), has far worse implications than that of the perpetual foreigner. Seemingly positive, it is often not considered to be racist, which is a false ideology. Lee (2003) claims that the model minority theory denies that Asian-Americans continue to struggle against institutionalized racism and other barriers. As a result, they are denied access to programs and policies that encourage and support minorities. The myth also suggests that other minorities are not "model," which is detrimental to other groups of color (Lee, 2003). Asian-Americans do not have strong political advocacy groups like African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans. Over the past decade, both of these groups have established a body of literature that allows for more complex and multi-faceted representations.

The Asian-American children's trade books that are currently being used in the classrooms consist mostly of folktales and those with a Chinese New Year theme (Cai, 1994). In any study of Asian-Americans, it is important to explore significant elements of the heritage culture. Since folktales are passed down orally, they still remain a vital part of the Asian-American experience. For example, Young's (1995) *Cat and Rat: The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac* tells the story of how the animals were chosen to be part of the zodiac, a



belief system to which many Asian-Americans still adhere. Interestingly, Reimer (1992) claims that children's literature did not exist in Asian countries until the 19th century. Therefore, having these stories in written form secures its preservation. However, when using folktales in multicultural lessons, there is a caveat. Cai (1994) asserts that using an overwhelming proportion of folktales can be misleading as students are distanced from the contemporary realities of the Asian-American experience; also, the folktales may unintentionally reinforce negative stereotypes. Thus, a substantive body of literature featuring the complexities of the contemporary Asian-American identity is necessary.

In the absence of such a body of high-quality and culturally-authentic Asian-American children's literature, Asian-Americans may be held against stereotypes that are not only grossly misinformed but also monolithic. Dowd (1992) notes some of the current mis-representations of Asian-Americans in children's literature. Asian men are often depicted in the following ways: smiling and polite, constantly bowing, proficient in the martial arts, celestial and all-knowing, and/or creepy or devious. They are sometimes drawn with squinty eyes and buck-teeth. Asian women, on the other hand, are depicted as submissive, overbearing, and/or old-fashioned grandmother-types. They are referred to as sexy "China dolls" or sinister "dragon ladies." Again, such stereotypes contribute to the misconception that Asian-Americans are outside of the common historical narrative (Wills & Mehan, 1996).

In reviewing the research literature (Cai, 1994; Heller, Cunningham, Lee, & Heller, 2000; Lowery, 2003; Tse, 1998), there are some obvious characteristics of the current body of Asian-American children's literature. They include, but are not limited to:

- Confucian ethical codes which include filial piety,
- Idea of harmony, spirits, traditions, luck, and horoscopes,
- Brotherhood among family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors leading toward mutual help, communal support, and collective wisdom,
- Importance of honesty, hard work, selflessness, and sacrifice,
- Importance of the arts and education,
- Adjustment and assimilation to a new life encountering feelings of isolation, loneliness, poverty, language barriers, and racial discrimination,
- Need to belong to a desired group and obtain acceptance leading to feelings of ethnic ambivalence and confusion,

- Quest for successes in the new world,
- Depictions of historical and class relations between Asian immigrants and mainstream society,
- Ancestral worship which includes loving, respecting, and honoring the dead,
- Reverence for the elderly,
- Conflicts between tradition and pop or contemporary culture which may result in rebellion against parental and/or cultural constraints.

As Asian-Americans do share certain cultural values and mores that are tied to an Asian culture, it is important for the literature to reflect these traditions and customs as the aforementioned characteristics demonstrate. Since many of these characteristics seem to align with what is believed about various Asian cultures, trade books depicting these themes are not necessarily negative but rather indicative of the political and historical climates. However, literature needs to depict contemporary experiences that speak to being both Asian and American. A new set of characteristics is necessary. Again, a substantive body of literature is needed.

### **CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY AND CULTURAL MEMBERSHIP**

Using Bishop's definition of a culturally-specific book, a culturally-authentic Asian-American trade book describes the realistic experiences of its members and/or outlines relevant historical episodes as seen through the eyes of an Asian-American (Sims, 1982). Bishop further claims that such books must detail "the specifics of daily living that will be recognizable to members of the group" (Sims, 1982, p. 44). In other words, the text must reflect an emic, or insider perspective. Bishop's research raises questions as to whether one can produce a "recognizable" text and not be a member (Sims, 1982).

The research literature addresses insider and outsider perspectives, with debates about whether a nonmember can authentically write outside of his/her culture (Bishop, 1992). Writing outside one's gender doesn't seem to be as controversial as race and ethnicity, which seems to suggest that issues of power and perspective, as exposed by critical literacy, play substantial roles in determining cultural authenticity. Critical theorists believe that members of minority groups tend to not have central control over the production of images of themselves (Morgan, 1997). The largest and most prestigious publishing houses are managed

by Anglo-Americans who dominate the decision-making process. According to Mendoza and Reese (2001),

bias and cultural misinformation are present in children's literature in part because people outside the mainstream are not the ones creating the images; members of the dominant culture are creating representations based on their own mistaken assumptions of what the 'others' are like. (p. 33)

Thus, insider perspectives are necessary in order to ensure and control cultural authenticity.

Yin (2000) presupposes that authentic Asian-American trade books written from an insider perspective are more sensitive to the Asian-American experience. Cai (2002) promotes the importance of an insider or ethnic perspective in that authors must "grasp the perspective of that culture in order to provide culturally authentic literature for the readers. . . this perspective is reflected in culturally specific ways of living, believing and behaving" (p. 41). There is also an issue of cultural theft; Thelma Seto, a Japanese-American writer and poet, writes (as cited by Klein, 1998) states, "it is morally wrong for Euro-American writers to 'steal' from other cultures in order to jump on the multicultural bandwagon, unless they have direct, personal experience in the country where that culture originates. . ." (p. 4). In addition, Phoebe Yeh, an Asian-American book editor and author (as cited by Klein, 1998), writes, "We expect all writers to approach their work with scholarship and authenticity. If they are writing in a culture that is not their own, they simply have to work harder to achieve an ethnic voice" (p. 4).

The relationship between cultural authenticity and membership of authors has been emphasized in studies of illustrations. As illustrations are cited often for their contribution to a work's acceptance or non-acceptance, Cai (1994) found that Asian-American illustrators are less guilty of cultural inaccuracies because of their connections to the Asian cultures. The nonmembers who were successful in accurately portraying Asian-Americans either had direct experience with various Asian cultures and/or participated in scholarly research. The same seems to apply to the writing, or rather, the content of a text. As such, it seems that if extensive and exhaustive research is conducted and the book conveys a powerful message, then the author's skin color, which is most often used to define membership, should not take precedence over cultural authenticity (Klein, 1998).

Some research suggests that the issue is less about the ethnic identity of the author and more about their research. For example, Linda Sue Park, a member, provides another

example of the importance of research in obtaining an insider perspective. Park, winner of the 2002 Newbery Medal, credits her research abilities and not her Korean roots for her authorship of *A Single Shard*, (Johnson & Giorgis, 2002/2003). Howard (1991) strongly asserts that one must be of a particular culture in order to write an authentic book reflecting that culture; however, in the same paragraph, she praises the authentic work of Jean Fritz, a non-member who has written extensively about China. Howard writes, “Jean Fritz is Chinese. If she isn’t, she’s pretty close. Jean Fritz grew up in China, knows Chinese people well, and she wrote about herself in China” (p. 93). Howard claims that Fritz’s immersion into the culture gave her access to an insider perspective as well as membership into that culture. Gates (as cited in Bishop, 1992) states, “No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world” (p. 41). Research and access appear to be the keys. Writers need access into cultures to produce cultural authenticity; teachers and students need access to literature in order to practice cultural appreciation and understanding.

In examining what is available, the fact is there are examples of high quality, culturally authentic Asian-American literature written by nonmembers and there are examples of inauthentic literature written by members. For publishers and for readers, the question is: What should take precedence, an author’s race/ethnicity or an author’s research and scrutiny? Lee (n.d), of Lee & Low Publishing House, states, “The ethnicity of the authors and artists is an important factor, but by no means do we feel it is a requirement” (p. 14). In this case, one’s racial identity does not automatically qualify work as authentic.

Reimer (1992) states that the majority of Asian-American literature is not written by Asian-Americans. Ford (as cited by Mosely, 1997) contends that nonmembers write books for other cultures because there aren’t enough minority writers. The question that begs to be answered at this point is: Why aren’t Asian-Americans writing about Asian-Americans? Allen Say (1991), a popular and well-respected Asian-American author and illustrator, initially did not contribute to the genre of Asian-American literature. He states, “I wanted to shine as a nondenominational artist and be recognized for my abilities and not for my cultural heritage” (p. 45). He goes on to state that he denied his heritage because of his fears of being stereotyped and/or pigeonholed. However, as he became more established, writing and

illustrating became a medium for connecting with his cultural roots. In today's diverse world, stereotypes can only be broken if we actively challenge and question them.

Reimer (1992) does note, however, that there has been an increase in Asian-American authors writing about their own assimilation experiences such as Yep's (1991) autobiography, *The Lost Garden*, and Lord's (1984) semi-autobiographical, fictional account, *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. Because of the positive influence trade books can have on the attitudes and self-images of our student populations, Asian-Americans have a social responsibility to share their own stories as well as the stories of other Asian-Americans. Regardless of whether or not an author chooses to write about Asian-Americans, authors have a responsibility to produce culturally authentic texts. Howard (1991) states, "the purpose of authentic multicultural literature is to help liberate us from all the preconceived stereotypical hang-ups that imprison us within narrow boundaries" (pp. 91-92). There is a social responsibility tied to cultural authenticity.

To further complicate the matter, cultural authenticity is "conceptually unstable" (Karem, 2004, p. 4) in that it is subject to change and interpretation and is constantly being mediated by power and perspective. Karem (2004) writes, "intense political and economic interests determined which aspects of [the work of ethnic writers] would be deemed authentic, not only constraining what they could publish but also shaping how their works were received and interpreted" (p. 3). Mosely (1997) further explicates this issue of reception by positing that readers tend to trust authors who belong to the same culture as they do. How members and nonmembers respond to text is important. To some extent, their responses are influenced by their ethnic identities. Copenhaver (1999) writes, "It makes sense to us that responses should be shaped by each reader's background, including her cultural background" (p. 3). Enciso (1994) showed how some readers might resist or reject a text that does not reflect their cultural expectations, which are based on their positions as insiders or outsiders. Members use their cultural expectations to detect violations and inaccuracies (Galda & Beach, 2001). Knowing about the readers' background is valuable since it influences their response to their reading.

Leung (2003) cites reader response research suggesting that readers prefer and become more involved with stories that are related to their personal experiences and with characters with which they can identify. Readers favor characters that resemble them. She

notes, "Not all members of an ethnic group will respond in the same way to the same text since membership in other social groups, including those based on gender, sexual preference, geographical location, or economic status, may differ" (p. 4). Leung also cites research suggesting that ethnicity influences response to literature. In a study by Altieri (as cited by Leung, 2003), students of minority cultures preferred texts about their own cultural groups; however, all students were able to respond aesthetically to these diverse stories. Leung (2003) found:

The differing responses of the four girls suggest that cultural knowledge is in part a personal construct. Each girl's idea of Chinese culture was based on personal experiences, from family life, from television shows and movies about China, from participation in activities in local Chinese American communities, from visits to Asian countries. . . cultural experiences influence literary response. (p. 15)

Teachers can help students achieve more global perspectives in regard to their reading preferences.

Production and consumption go hand-in-hand in that the consumption and reception of a text affects production and vice versa. Karem (2004) notes that "contemporary response" granted or denied ethnic writers "literary access, and, in some cases, drastically reshaped the form of their words" (p. 5). How a text is received directly affects whether or not it is produced as well as what is represented. And conversely, what is produced and represented in texts is indoctrinated and reproduced as teachers select and use books which are disseminated among children. Thus, a critical examination of trade books and their contents are important, especially given the goal of equity and social justice. Not only does a particular society at a particular time influence what is produced and represented in texts (Morgan, 1997), but in regard to multicultural texts, this "contemporary response" (Karem, 2004, p. 5) also influences how cultural authenticity is judged and/or perceived.

### **MODELS FOR ASSESSING CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

Bishop (1992) writes, "because of the limited quantity of multicultural literature available, there may be a tendency to accept poor literary quality just to have something in the classroom or library" (p. 48). As a result, classroom libraries may have an absence of culturally-authentic materials or worse, trade books consisting of negative representations. Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) contend that teachers do not include multicultural literature

in their classrooms for fear of giving the wrong message. Not being a member of the group, some teachers fear offending others and/or inadvertently selecting and sharing inappropriate books so they would rather not use multicultural literature at all. Bishop (1992) states, "Feeling a lack of knowledge about cultural groups other than their own, they worry whether they can detect authenticity or its lack" (p. 43). The problem is that teachers do not know how to assess cultural authenticity. Hence, examining the cultural authenticity of children's trade books is important since these trade books can serve as powerful tools for change.

Without heuristics, teachers may not have the available knowledge to detect cultural authenticity. Mendoza and Reese (2001) state, "Limited availability of criticism that addresses accuracy, authenticity, and related problems often leads to a major pitfall for teachers seeking multicultural books" (p. 11). They cite the following as pitfalls for teaching multicultural books: (1) the assumption that a book is multicultural and worthwhile if it has diverse people and/or is critically acclaimed, (2) the assumption that a single book about a group can adequately portray that group's experience, (3) the assumption that good quality books can be found in libraries and bookstores as such books are oftentimes not readily available or easily accessible, and (4) teachers may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of finding and evaluating books.

The process of selecting multicultural books can be overwhelming. Left to their own devices, consumers of multicultural children's literature may rely on a lens which has been influenced by their own biased schooling and which may be devoid of insight into their own racial identity development (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Mendoza and Reese (2001) state, "Reliable, in-depth background information about the diverse groups and cultures in the United States is essential to evaluating multicultural children's literature" (p. 27). Consumers need to have knowledge of cultural markers, indicators that the story is about a particular culture. The reality is that teachers and parents may not have the time needed to increase their cultural knowledge bases; thus, a reliable tool may be beneficial. Dowd (1992) contends, "The first consideration in critically evaluating a multicultural title is that it should meet the same requirements of any piece of high quality literature" (p. 221). Similarly, Rosenblatt (as cited by DeKay, 1996) also notes how linguistic elements contribute to the quality of literature. Examining cultural authenticity is included in the examining of literary merit.

As evidenced by the research literature, some of the currently available tools for evaluating cultural authenticity in multicultural children's trade books are problematic. They are particular to African-American or Hispanic texts (Bishop, 1992; Nilsson, 2005) or broadly address multicultural literature and thus, are not specific enough for the Asian-American experience. Other tools (Aoki, 1992; Pang, Colvin, Tran, & Barba, 1992) which do address Asian-American children's literature do not seem to be methodologically sound in that they are more or less suggestions or guidelines based on practical knowledge rather than qualitative data or content analyses.

In Nilsson's (2005) synthesis of research on Hispanic portrayals in children's literature, she found that language patterns and illustrations were used to determine the cultural authenticity of a trade book. Trade books which did not use appropriate language patterns and/or contained inaccurate illustrations were often cited as culturally-inauthentic. Similarly, the most critiqued aspects in Asian-American trade books were the presentations of "broken English" and Asian native language words and the illustrations (Lindgren, 1991). Illustrations were cited most often as contributing to the authenticity or inauthenticity of a trade book, specifically a picture book. In selecting Asian-American children's picture books, teachers must diligently scrutinize the illustrations as these make a huge impression upon children. Teachers should look for books that realistically represent persons with Asian features.

In 1948, the National Council of Teachers of English created "Criteria for Judging Books about Negroes for Young People" (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Then, in 1980, the Council on Interracial Children's Books published "Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks" which is most cited for assessing the cultural authenticity of multicultural trade books). They offer the following ten guidelines as a starting point in evaluating children's books for racism and sexism (Council, n.d):

1. Check the illustrations.
2. Check the story line.
3. Look at the lifestyles.
4. Weigh the relationships between people.
5. Note the heroes.
6. Consider the effect on a child's self-image.



7. Consider the author's or illustrator's background.
8. Check out the author's perspective.
9. Watch for loaded words.
10. Look at the copyright date.

Using these as frameworks, Temple, Martinez, Yokota and Naylor (1998) suggested the following questions be used to investigate multicultural literature:

1. Are characters "outside the mainstream culture" depicted as individuals or as caricatures?
2. Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes?
3. Who has the power in this story? What is the nature of their power, and how do they use it?
4. Who has wisdom? What is the nature of their wisdom, and how do they use it?
5. What are the consequences of certain behaviors? What behaviors or traits are rewarded, and how? What behaviors are punished, and how?
6. How is language used to create images of people of a particular group? How are artistic elements used to create those images?
7. Who has written the story? Who has illustrated it? Are they inside or outside the groups they are presenting? What are they in a position to know? What do they claim to know?
8. What voices are heard? Whose are missing?
9. What do this narrative and these pictures say about race? Class? Culture? Gender? Age? Resistance to the status quo?

Such questions are not designed to find the perfect multicultural book (Mendoza & Reese, 2001); rather, they are designed to explicate the bias, stereotypes and misinformation that may or may not be hidden in these trade books.

Sadker, Sadker and Long (1993) presented a list noting the types of biases to look for in trade books. They are as follows:

1. Linguistic bias: the use of culturally loaded terms and/or sexist language.
2. Stereotyping: examine the story lines and illustrations.
3. Invisibility: systematic exclusion of races, socio-economic status, etc.
4. Imbalance: presenting only one group of people.
5. Unreality: glossing over or unrealistically portraying controversial issues.
6. Fragmentation: presenting information as unique occurrences rather than integrating them within our text.

Similarly, Dowd (1992) developed the following questions:

1. Would the book help a child of another ethnicity/culture accept and appreciate the particular culture/ethnic group depicted? Would a child of the particular culture/culture depicted be proud of the book about his/her heritage?
2. Is accurate information conveyed or is the text misleading or erroneous? Are the people from the group represented portrayed only in the past or are contemporary lifestyles and dress also shown?
3. Is history distorted in such a way as to demean the culture and the achievements of the group represented?
4. Is there evidence of “tokenism”; that is, characters looking like “whites” except being tinted? Are people depicted as genuine individuals with distinctive features?
5. Does the book give insight into the diversity among the people represented or are the people stereotyped and generalized? Do they all look and dress alike and exhibit the same few emotions? Are they involved in the same activities and are they of the same socioeconomic level?
6. Does the vocabulary contain demeaning, offensive, condescending or loaded words? Is the language respectful?
7. Are the people in the group depicted in a positive, nonjudgmental manner? Is the author’s perspective overtly or indirectly prejudiced with paternalistic distinctions between “us” and “them” or with indications of superiority?
8. Does the content focus on similarities between various cultural/ethnic groups, as well as point out their unique characteristics and contributions to society?
9. Are peoples in the cultural or ethnic group represented depicted living their daily lives as well as (but not always) taking part in celebrations?
10. In regard to standards of success, is someone in the cultural or ethnic group represented portrayed as childlike and helpless and patronized by a “do-gooder” in the dominant group who possesses authority, intellect or problem-solving ability? Does it take “white” standards for all ethnic groups to “get ahead”? Are they any authority figures in the culturally diverse groups?
11. Is there evidence that the author and illustrator are knowledgeable about the group presented either because they are members of that particular group or because (as should be noted in the book) they have consulted with, interviewed or visited sites of that particular group?

Dowd (1992) also encourages consumers to contact publishers and/or reviewers if any questionable items are found.

In response to the needs of urban educators, Higgins (2002) created an evaluation tool for analyzing multicultural children’s literature. As such, these are the things that consumers should look for:

1. The writing is of high literary quality.

2. There are no distortions or omissions of history; there are multiple perspectives presented.
3. There is no evidence of stereotyping; there are no negative or inaccurate stereotypes.
4. Loaded words are used purposefully; there are no derogatory overtones to words.
5. Lifestyles are genuine and complex, not oversimplified or generalized.
6. Dialogue is reflective of oral tradition.
7. Standards of success are evident; characters are strong and independent and not in need of white assistance.
8. The roles of females, elders and families are reflective of culture.
9. Possible effects on a child's self-image is positive; there is nothing that would embarrass or offend a child whose culture is being portrayed.
10. Author's and/or illustrator's background is credible; the author and/or illustrator has the necessary qualifications and/or is a member.
11. Illustrations are accurate.
12. Relationships between characters from different cultures are multi-faceted; people of color are leaders and solve their own problems.
13. Heroines and heroes are accurately defined according to concepts of and struggles for justice appropriate to their cultural group.
14. Copyright date is contemporary; trade books published since 1970s reflect a more pluralistic viewpoint.

The Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1996) developed a model for evaluating bias content in instructional materials. They created a list of common stereotypes and alternatives. They indicated the following categories of bias found in text: ethnic, sexual, biased language, omission or exclusion, and perspective. Basically, they provided examples of bias and what should be done instead. The following is a modified table of the model presented by the Washington Office. I excluded examples of sexual bias and altered it in such a way that it would be specific to Asian-Americans and/or this study as seen in Table 1.

The main caveat seems to be attributing characteristics and traits to an entire group without considering individuals and the multiplicity of culture and ethnicity even though there are consistencies among cultural groups. No one image is enough to create stereotypes; but, pervasive images do, which are then reinforced by culture and/or society. literary genre, they suggest that teachers ask themselves the following questions:

- Does the book have a culturally pluralistic theme?

**Table 1. Washington Models for the Evaluation of Bias Content**

<b>Stereotypes:</b> <b>What to look for and avoid</b>	<b>Alternatives:</b> <b>What publishers and writers should do instead and what teachers should use and employ in the classroom</b>
<p>People of color only reside in certain areas. Ex. Chinese-Americans are depicted as living only in Chinatowns or doing laundry.</p> <p>People of color are only depicted as having certain jobs. Ex. Filipino-Americans are portrayed as gardeners or servants.</p> <p>People of color are only depicted as being tied to a historical event. Ex. Japanese and Japanese-Americans are depicted only as participants in World War II.</p>	<p>All ethnic groups are portrayed equally.</p>
<p>People in certain groups are depicted always eating the same food, dressing in the same clothing, etc. Ex. Asians eating rice with chopsticks.</p>	<p>People of all groups are depicted in a variety of clothing, with a variety of eating habits and activities, indicating that each group belongs to many groups and may take part in many different activities, eat many different foods, etc.</p>
<p>Certain groups are presumed to be better at some activities than others. Ex. Asian-Americans are presumed to be better at marital arts just because they are Asian.</p>	<p>Certain individuals are depicted as being good at certain activities without references to a group to which the individual may belong. No assumption is made about a group's abilities or lack of same.</p>
<p>Anglo-Americans have more than people of color and thus, help people of color who are referred to as less fortunate, needy, disadvantaged, etc. Ex. Heroic Anglo-Americans sponsoring poor Vietnamese refugees.</p>	<p>People of color need to be spoken of as having equal worth to Anglo-Americans. There is an emphasis on the right of people of color to decide what is best for themselves.</p>
<p>People of color are identified by first names or diminutives whereas Anglo-Americans are referred to by full name or title. Ex. "Little Chin served Mr. Landon his afternoon tea."</p>	<p>All people portrayed are spoken of in balanced ways.</p>
<p>References to people of color are either omitted or separated in ways that perpetuate the belief that Anglo-American men and women built this nation. Ex. "The transcontinental railroad was a grand feat. Many Irish men lent a helping hand."</p>	<p>The contributions of people of color are acknowledged and interwoven with the rest of the text.</p>

Table 1. continued

<b>Stereotypes:</b> <b>What to look for and avoid</b>	<b>Alternatives:</b> <b>What publishers and writers should do instead and what teachers should use and employ in the classroom</b>
Nonstandard English phrases appear quaint, uneducated and in some way less than majority English. In stories about Asian-Americans, this refers to "broken English." Ex. Broken English is more than just leaving out words and articles.	Non-English phrases are used accurately and, when appropriate, authority for them is cited.
Some non-English phrases are misused. Ex. "Gung Hay Fat Choy" is from the Cantonese dialect which is different from Mandarin; however, in stories about the Chinese, the two dialects are often intertwined when they are entirely different.	
Certain persons or groups are defined only in terms of their relationship to others. Ex. "Mr. Smith's wife, Suzie Wong. . ."	People are defined in terms of themselves.
People of color are portrayed as if they would prefer to be white. Ex. An entire picture book about Akira Yamada wanting to be blonde and blue-eyed.	People of color are shown as respecting and celebrating their native heritages
People of color are portrayed as followers or as menaces to society. Ex. An Asian-American gang member being saved by a white cop and/or wreaking havoc.	People of color are shown as making independent judgments and as problem-solvers.
People of color are to blame for their circumstances. Ex. Asian-Americans live in ghettos because they are lazy.	The causes of inequity are examined by looking at external and societal forces and factors.
People of color are locked out of viewpoints when authors use "third person omniscient." Ex. A story is only told from one viewpoint and there is no change.	Presentations point out alternative points of view.

- Does it portray characters in a positive manner?
- Is it set in the United States?
- Are the illustrations authentic?
- Does the book have a strong plot and strong characterization?
- Is the book historically accurate?

This list (Pang et al., 1992) is not detailed enough to ensure cultural authenticity as there is no evidence of specific cultural markers. The objective is to choose books that will foster the idea of Asian-Americans as an integral and vital part of our society. Although these questions generate some important thinking in the selecting of texts, it does little to address what it means to be a culturally authentic text.

Aoki (1992) offers a set of criteria established by the Asian American Children's Book Project Committee. It claims that culturally-authentic books:

- Should reflect the realities and ways of Asian-Americans.
- Should transcend stereotypes.
- Should seek to rectify historical distortions and omissions.
- Should avoid the "model minority" and "super" minority syndromes which uses the positive experiences of Asian-Americans to denigrate other racial and ethnic minorities.
- Should reflect an awareness of the changing status of women in society.
- Should contain art and photos which accurately reflect the racial diversity of Asian Pacific Americans.

Although this framework begins to delve into cultural authenticity, it generates more questions than answers. For example, if the teacher is asked to determine whether the text reflects the reality of Asian-Americans, how is the teacher to know unless he/she is an insider and/or is familiar with the Asian-American experience? It seems to me that an insider perspective is required to figure out some of these issues. For example, what are "the realities and ways of Asian-Americans"? When evaluating cultural authenticity, a tool needs to speak to both members and nonmembers.

These models or guidelines have been extremely helpful in limiting and even decreasing the offensive stereotypes present in trade books as evidenced in the representations in contemporary books. However, such models are only the starting points. DeKay (1996) writes, "judgments of esthetic quality or value are not subject to clearly discernible, objective criteria" (p. 8). Boutte (2002) notes that guidelines should be used as guidelines and not as a strict evaluation of books. Consumers must actively employ a critical lens when selecting and using multicultural trade books. Dowd (1992) states the importance of engaging in literature-related activities and in becoming knowledgeable.

Although these models push for critical investigations of multicultural trade books, they are too broad to address the Asian-American experience. There is a need for a reliable and research-based tool that is germane to Asian-American children's literature. Inauthentic books continue to be published and circulated because teachers and other consumers may not have the tools to assess cultural authenticity. If such books continue to be circulated, then the authentic books will continue to go unrecognized. To reiterate, one authentic book is not enough; we need a substantive collection in order to truly make a difference (Higgins, 2002; Washington Office, 1996).

### **SUMMARY: CHAPTER 2**

In Chapter 2, I provided a synthesis of the current scholarly research as it related to Asian-American children's literature. There seemed to be consensus regarding the positive value of these trade books, especially given today's increasingly diverse student demographics and specifically in regard to Asian-American students, who are the least represented minority group in available school reading materials including selected trade books. The use of Asian-American children's literature was determined to be beneficial for all students as they can provide the following: (1) windows into diverse cultures and multiple perspectives, and (2) mirrors for self-reflection and deeper cultural understanding. As such, consumers of Asian-American children's literature may contribute positively to increasing Asian-Americans' visibility in the mainstream, to countering prevailing stereotypes and to providing positive images and role models.

Over the decades, there has been an increase in both the quality and quantity of Asian-American children's literature in general; that being said, the number of high-quality, culturally authentic Asian-American contemporary realistic fiction trade books are still not commensurate with the population or with the current market as other cultures such as African-American and Hispanic-American trade books receive greater circulation and publication. Furthermore, the representation of Asian-Americans still needs to be critically examined. Because of the increased attention on the quality of multicultural children's trade books which has decreased overt racist representations in current trade books, a theoretical framework such as critical literacy is needed in order to uncover implicit and subtle inequities, which may be present in these trade books as well as in reader responses. By

reading and responding critically, consumers will be better equipped to not accept stereotypes and biased attitudes.

The trends in Asian-American children's literature are also changing, albeit at a slow rate. Themes of immigration and Japanese internment still pervade the market. Also, there continues to be more trade books retelling Asian folktales and representing the Chinese-American and Japanese-American experiences than stories about contemporary pan-Asian experiences. However, stories about other Asian-American ethnicities such as Laotian, Vietnamese and Hmong are on the rise. Overall, there needs to be a more substantive and rich body of literature that reflects the diverse and contemporary realities of Asian-Americans. Scholarly research about Asian-American children's literature, although mainly published in less circulated and less prestigious journals, is also continuing to grow. Such research needs to be more accessible to mainstream audiences. On a positive note, however, as a result of such research, the quality and quantity of this genre have improved. Overall, the body of Asian-American children's literature and the study of it needs to increase; furthermore, they need to play a bigger role in the mainstream, and have a greater circulation.

Cultural authenticity, which in its simplest form is the accurate representation of a culture, is dynamic, subject to time and place; the research literature suggests that members and/or cultural insiders may be the best determiners of a trade book's authenticity. Cultural insiders are slowly assuming more control of cultural authenticity, as more Asian-Americans are writing Asian-American children's trade books and as demand increases for an Asian-American frame of reference. Scholars are ambiguous about cultural authenticity at best, seeming to have the most dissension about whether or not nonmembers can accurately depict a culture that is not their own. There is agreement that writing outside of one's culture is more difficult but possible if an insider perspective is achieved via research, etc. As such, one's ethnicity offers more authority and credibility but it does not appear to be a prerequisite for cultural authenticity.

Not only are scholars ambiguous about cultural authenticity but so are practitioners. Research indicated that teachers are hesitant to use Asian-American children's trade books because they lack knowledge for detecting cultural authenticity or the lack of it. Several heuristics are available for teachers to use; however, these heuristics are problematic in that they do not specifically address Asian-American trade books and/or they are more or less



suggestions based on practical knowledge rather than sound methodology. Furthermore, these heuristics focus more on examples of bias and stereotypes that should be avoided. In general, these heuristics offer good thinking points but does little to deconstruct cultural authenticity, especially for outsiders and/or nonmembers. In addition, lacking time and exposure, teachers feel too overwhelmed to select trade books outside of their cultural knowledge.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this qualitative study, I explored issues of cultural authenticity as they related to the Asian-American experience as revealed in children's trade books. The purpose of this dissertation was to systematically analyze Asian-American children's trade books and examine teachers' and authors' perceptions of the cultural authenticity of these books. The selected trade books and study participants included representation from members of the Asian-American culture as well as nonmembers otherwise referred to as cultural insiders and outsiders. The following research questions guided my inquiry:

1. How are Asian-Americans currently represented in children's trade books and how culturally authentic are these representations?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of these representations?
3. What are authors' perceptions of these representations?
4. How do insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions?

In order to address these questions, I conducted content analyses of 15 trade books and interviewed four authors (producers) and four teachers (consumers). It is important to note that I analyzed books written by both members and nonmembers. Furthermore, I interviewed both members and nonmembers. Using a theoretical framework of critical literacy as the main guiding principle, I examined the intersections of power and perspective to determine their influences on people's judgment of what is culturally authentic. Because of a paucity of research addressing cultural authenticity germane to the Asian-American experience, this study was relevant.

My study was built upon the work of Bishop (Sims, 1982) and has many of the same desired outcomes: (1) to provide teachers and other school leaders with information so that they can make better and informed decisions about multicultural trade books and (2) to provide much needed research about the cultural authenticity of these multicultural books. The critical differences were my study's focus on contemporary Asian-American children's

trade books, its use of critical literacy as a lens, and its inclusion of the multiple perspectives provided by the researcher, teachers and authors as well as members and nonmembers.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

There was a strong need for qualitative research in regard to multicultural literature (Wolf, 1997). Since I wanted to accurately depict and understand the diverse voices of my study participants as well as the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books, I employed a qualitative research method, which appears to be the preferred method in studying people of color and multicultural literature. In qualitative research, Bogden and Biklen (1998) asserted that "meaning" is of essential concern; and, because I attempted to garner a definition of cultural authenticity relevant to the Asian-American experience, qualitative research allowed me to study multiple realities.

For the content analyses of the selected trade books, I used a recording form listing relevant information about each book. I also considered the guiding questions used in Bishop's study to develop an open-ended protocol (Sims, 1982). In addition, I employed a modified version of an evaluative instrument created by Sherriff (2005; see Appendix A) to develop a forced-choice protocol. In order to analyze the possible stereotypes and biases that may or may not be present in the selected trade books, I employed a critical lens which helped me to reveal underlying ideologies and politics. In addition, as I read, I made extensive notes regarding themes, literary merit, etc. Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) state, "Many people have researched multicultural literature, but few studies have been done on the actual 'multiculturalism' within the literature" (p. 270). My study attempted to do so.

I also employed a qualitative approach for the interviews. Knowlton (1992) states, "The research literature on women and minorities is very critical of purely quantitative, survey based studies because they do not adequately describe values and attitudes rooted in their consciousness" (p. 66-67). Thus, a qualitative approach allowed me to investigate the various factors that impact the production and consumption of Asian-American children's literature. It also allowed me to better access the perspectives of my participants as one of my goals was to examine the dynamic interaction between race/ethnicity and cultural authenticity.

## STUDY DESIGN

Through content analyses of 15 trade books and in-depth interviews with four teachers and four authors, this study investigated the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's chapter trade books using a qualitative approach. This section will outline the procedures I used for the content analyses and the interviews. It will also describe the inclusion criteria, study participants, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and verification procedures. Table 2 summarizes my research plan by listing the data collection procedures used to answer each research question.

## DATA COLLECTION

### Phase One: Content Analyses of Trade Books

#### SELECTION OF AND INCLUSION CRITERIA

Because Asian-American and non-Asian-American students need accurate and current representations of Asian-American images, I focused on books reflective of the contemporary realities of the Asian-American experience. Thus, I analyzed the content and quality of trade books that (1) feature an Asian-American as a main character, or protagonist, and (2) are considered to be contemporary realistic fiction set, which excludes nonfiction, fantasy, biographies, science fiction, and so on. In addition, the books must (3) be chapter books intended for upper elementary to high school students. I eliminated picture books and graphic novels from my study because illustrations warrant a separate category of evaluation.

I examined 15 trade books published and set between 1997 and 2007 (inclusive of those years). Originally, I was going to evaluate trade books published and set between 1987 and 2007. However, upon reading *Kim/Kimi* (Irwin, 1987), I decided to focus on the last ten years. Since the quality of trade books changes over time reflecting the socio-political climates of our society, I wanted to focus on contemporary representation. In addition, as a 30 year old Asian-American female, I grew up and was educated during this time frame, making me familiar with the experiences represented in these texts. I included trade books written by both members and nonmembers of the Asian-American culture.

I also focused mainly on Asian-American trade books about Chinese-Americans, Japanese-Americans and Korean-Americans (Far East Asian descent) since I am most familiar with those cultures. In addition, there are more books available representing those

**Table 2. Research Plan**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Purpose(s)</b>	<b>Assumption(s)</b>	<b>Data Collection Procedure(s)</b>
How are Asian-Americans currently represented in children's trade books and how culturally authentic are these representations?	To determine how Asian-Americans are represented and perceived in literature; To determine how authors and teachers perceive and address the issue of representation and cultural authenticity; To determine what knowledge authors employ when writing culturally authentic trade books.	The author's background and knowledge will play a role in the construction of culturally-authentic books; Authors and teachers will be familiar with multicultural children's literature and be able to articulate their perceptions.	Recording form; Forced choice protocol; Open-ended protocol; Author interviews.
What are teachers' perceptions of these representations?	To determine how and why teachers select Asian-American trade books for classroom use; To determine how and why some trade books are privileged over others; To determine their role in evaluating cultural authenticity; To determine their preconceptions of Asian-Americans; To determine their knowledge base about the Asian-American experience.	Teachers will be able to articulate their perceptions.	Teacher interviews.
What are authors' perceptions of these representations?	To determine their role in ensuring and evaluating cultural authenticity in their books; To determine their preconceptions of Asian-Americans; To determine their knowledge base about the Asian-American experience; To determine their thinking about the current state of Asian-American children's literature.	Authors will be able to articulate their perceptions; Authors will draw from various knowledge bases.	Author interviews.

Table 2. continued

Research Question	Purpose(s)	Assumption(s)	Data Collection Procedure(s)
How do insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions?	To determine the role of race/ethnicity as related to cultural authenticity; To determine the extent to which race/ethnicity influences cultural authenticity; To determine how one goes about getting an insider perspective; To determine how and why perspective influences the writing, selecting and/or use of Asian-American children's trade books.	Those with insider perspectives may feel more comfortable with writing, selecting and using Asian-American trade books as they feel more qualified to assess cultural authenticity; Immersion and research will be more influential than race/ethnicity.	Recording form; Forced choice protocol; Open-ended protocol; Teacher interviews; Author interviews.

cultures than the other Asian-American ethnicities. I made a clear distinction between Asian books and Asian-American books. Asian books are books about Asians living in Asia; whereas, the Asian-American books are about Americans of Asian descent. I did not eliminate books describing immigration and/or assimilation experiences such as a Chinese adolescent moving to America and adjusting to an American life; such stories reflect a popular theme in Asian-American trade books.

I also noted if the selected trade books received awards and/or recognition. This was not a criterion for selection; however, these books have been deemed to be of high quality, which may or may not be inclusive of cultural authenticity, by the particular awards committees. Award-winning trade books also receive more circulation than non-award-winning trade books.

### TRADE BOOKS SELECTED FOR STUDY

A critical methodological issue in this type of study was the selection criteria for the trade books. As stated above, trade books selected for investigation had an Asian-American

protagonist, was considered contemporary realistic fiction set, was written and set between 1997 and 2007, and was a chapter book. In order to identify a representative sample of books, it was important to obtain widely available books from major bookstores, public and classroom libraries, amazon.com, and so on. In order to ensure quality books, I also consulted reviews in sources such as *Horn Book* and *The Reading Teacher* as well as word-of-mouth recommendations. The following trade books, listed in alphabetical order, were selected for this study:

1. *Black Mirror* (Werlin, 2001)
2. *Honeysuckle House* (Cheng, 2004)
3. *Moon Runner* (Marsden, 2005)
4. *Name Me Nobody* (Yamanaka, 1999)
5. *Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo* (Smith, 2003)
6. *Project Mulberry* (Park, 2005)
7. *Ruby Lu, Brave and True* (Look, 2004)
8. *Seeing Emily* (Wong, 2005)
9. *Split Image* (Glenn, 2000)
10. *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* (Yee, 2005)
11. *Tae's Sonata* (Balgassi, 1997)
12. *The Amah* (Yep, 1999)
13. *The Homework Machine* (Gutman, 2006)
14. *Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs* (Namioka, 2000)
15. *Year of the Dog* (Lin, 2006)

Incidentally, all the books are published by major publishing houses such as Little, Brown & Company, Simon & Schuster, Aladdin Paperbacks, etc. As such, I focused on trade books that would be readily available for and accessible to general audiences.

## **CONTENT ANALYSIS DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

Content analyses of Asian-American trade books occurred through the use of three instruments: recording form, forced-choice protocol, and open-ended protocol.

After collecting the trade books, I first read each book individually and evaluated it according to the developed protocols and coding schemes (see Appendix A). I maintained

extensive notes indicating major themes, useful quotes, plot development, character development, dialogue, concerns regarding literary merit and cultural authenticity, etc. I then compiled the data in order to extract larger patterns about cultural authenticity related to Asian-American children's literature.

I created a recording form (see Appendix A) noting the book title and year of publication, the author and his/her membership, the Asian ethnicity represented, the intended grade level, awards (if any), and publisher. Specifically, I recorded information about the book to determine if the book was eligible for my study. I also recorded author membership, awards and recognition, and the publishing house.

I used Bishop's (Sims, 1982) study as a framework for another data point: the open-ended protocol (see Appendix A). In her study, she surveyed 150 African-American contemporary realistic fiction trade books. She identified patterns that reflected common themes among these books and organized the books into three categories: realistic fiction with a social conscience, melting pot fiction, and culturally-conscious fiction. Then, she analyzed the books in each category. I modified her guiding questions to accommodate the purposes of my study. Table 3 outlines the questions and provides a detailed explanation of each question (Sims, 1982). Answers to each question were recorded on a form for each book. These recording forms provided evidence from the actual trade books to support my assertions. These questions guided my thinking when reading the selected trade books. They are also embedded in the interview protocols (see Appendices C and D).

In developing an evaluation tool for use with Asian-American children's trade books, I borrowed from Sherriff's (2005) study in which she compared and contrasted the portrayals of Mexican-American females in realistic picture books between two time periods. I modified her evaluation tool to create the forced-choice protocol (see Appendix A). Each question in the protocol can only have two possible answers: (1) yes or (2) no/not determinable.

I did make some necessary modifications to Sherriff's (2005) instrument and they are as follows: (1) Questions in the instrument dealing with aspects unrelated to the portrayal of Asian-Americans were eliminated or modified; (2) Several questions were added in order to address cultural authenticity germane to the Asian-American experience; (3) Several questions pertaining to literary merit were included as this is a critical aspect in examining



**Table 3. Focus Questions Based on Bishop's Study**

<b>Main Focus Questions:</b>	<b>Questions to consider when addressing main focus question:</b>
To whom is this trade book primarily addressed?	Who is the primary intended audience? Is the book written specifically for Asian-Americans, for another ethnic group, for the dominant group, or for a general audience? Does the book talk to or talk about Asian-Americans?
How is the term Asian-American experience interpreted?	Is the Asian-American experience perceived to be "Asian-American" experience or a "human experience"? Are the definitions of what constitutes Asian-American experience narrow and limited? Is the Asian-American experience represented as monolithic? Are Asian-Americans portrayed like other Americans only with darker skins and slanted eyes? Does the book present a uniquely Asian-American frame of reference, a perspective on the world that is peculiarly Asian-American as determined by one who grew up Asian in America? Does the book present a sense of shared collective memories and frames of reference? Are Asian-Americans represented as simultaneously a part of the more general American culture or as a distinct cultural group? Does the book represent the universalities within the particulars of a distinct cultural group?
What cultural perspectives inform this trade book?	What is the intent of the author as best interpreted by the reader? How does the author's membership or nonmembership inform the book as perceived by the reader? Is there evidence of the subtleties of ethnic experience and nuances of daily living that reflect an insider perspective? Does the book only reflect what dominant society wants or knows about the Asian-American experience?

Source: Sims, 1982.

multicultural trade books (Dowd, 1992); and (4) Questions dealing with sexism were eliminated as exploring issues related to gender is not one of my main objectives.

Furthermore, in creating these protocols, I used data from various checklists and guidelines that evaluated books for stereotypes, negative images, biases and literary quality (Aoki, 1992; Council, n.d.; Dowd, 1992; Higgins, 2002; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Pang et al., 1992; Temple et al., 1998; Washington Office, 1996). These checklists and guidelines are described in detail in the literature review. I consulted these sources in order to gather data on perceived Asian-American culture, images and values. Then, this information was used to code each of the questions in the evaluative instrument with a particular letter designation: (G) indicated information about general understandings, protagonist and/or self-images; (S) indicated stereotypes and/or negative representations of Asian-Americans; (C) indicated culturally-authentic representations of Asian-Americans; and (L) addresses the literary merit

or quality of the trade book. These letter designations aided in the analyses of data in that I was able to better categorize the information. Table 4 illustrates how the letter designations were determined.

**Table 4. Letter Designations**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
(G)	The question provided information about the protagonist or contributed to a general understanding of the portrayal of Asian-American in the story. The question may have also addressed how the story contributed to children's self-images.
(S)	The characteristic mentioned in the question was considered to be a stereotype of Asian-Americans in general; Various sources have deemed this particular image to be negative and/or offensive.
(C)	The characteristic mentioned in the question was considered to be noted as a trait of Asian-Americans in general; Various sources have deemed this particular image to be culturally-authentic and/or representative and therefore, positive.
(L)	The question addressed the literary merit and/or quality of the trade book in general.

Basically, I analyzed, through application of the protocols, how these trade books met or did not meet the requirements for cultural authenticity. From this, I hoped to have a better understanding of cultural authenticity.

## **Phase Two: Qualitative Interviews**

### **INCLUSION CRITERIA AND SELECTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

I employed convenience sampling (Creswell, 1998) meaning that I had access to my study participants. I solicited teachers and authors who satisfied the inclusion criteria as described below and who were willing to participate in such a study. Because of access issues and the voluntary nature of my study participation, gender and age were not considered in the selection process but I did make note of them. I interviewed four teachers and four authors. My participants included four members of the culture (Asian-Americans) and four nonmembers (non-Asian-Americans). The definition of ethnicity was grounded in self-identification.

## **TEACHERS**

Of the four teachers, two considered themselves to be Asian-Americans and two considered themselves to be Anglo-American. All of the teachers taught the English/Language Arts and taught students ranging in age from upper elementary, middle school and high school levels. I chose teachers from these grade levels because the students they served are the target audience for the books I selected for this study; as a result, these teachers are more likely to select and use these trade books. I identified and recruited study participants who have or are pursuing an advanced degree in education and who are currently employed with a local school district. I sought nominations from Professor Barbara Moss who teaches a graduate level children's literature class. Another step I used to help determine eligibility was to conduct an informal preliminary interview in which I asked the potential participants the following open-ended question: Do you think teachers should use multicultural children's literature? I looked for participants who articulated well and who supported multicultural children's literature. All the teachers were female and ranged in age from 20 to 59.

## **AUTHORS**

Of the four authors, two considered themselves to be Asian-Americans and two considered themselves to be Anglo-Americans. All of the authors have written about and/or have published books about Asian-Americans. I utilized my own personal contacts in children's publishing and writing to identify and recruit study participants. Several authors declined participation due to scheduling and traveling conflicts. Three of the authors were female; one was male. They ranged in age from 40 to 69.

## **INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

Once participants agreed to participate, I provided them with a consent form (see Appendix E) and a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F) which was used to determine eligibility and to collect demographic data.

Semi-structured interview protocols for both the authors (see Appendix C) and the teachers (see Appendix D) were created and adapted from other interview protocols used to study cultural perspectives (Knowlton, 1994; Pacis, 2004). In order to fully understand how

my participants responded to the trade books, it was important for me to access their “linguistic-experiential reservoirs” (Rosenblatt, 2004, p. 1370) as several factors may influence their judgment: cultural, social and personal histories, past experiences with language and texts as well as present situations and interests. By interviewing authors and teachers, I gained more knowledge about their backgrounds and possibly, their beliefs. This is critical since I was interested in learning how they transacted with Asian-American children’s trade books.

In addition, I referred to a protocol that I created for a pilot study investigating nonmembers who write outside of their ethnic backgrounds (see Appendix G). The protocol elicits data concerning the perspectives of cultural authenticity, the motivations of these authors as well the authentication of their work with a focus on what factors contribute to their success. I amended this protocol as necessary to accommodate the goals of this particular study. Interview questions were designed to accomplish the following main purposes: (1) to identify the factors that inform their perspectives; (2) to determine the current preconceptions held by the participants about Asian-Americans; (3) to describe if and how the participants evaluate cultural authenticity in Asian-American children’s literature; and (4) to discover the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity as perceived by the participants.

For each interviewee, I explained the following terms and/or concepts: (1) cultural membership, (2) producers and (3) consumers. A protocol (see Appendices C and D) was utilized to ensure that the same topics and issues were covered in each interview; although the focus points were already predetermined, I retained the ability to explore, probe and ask spontaneous questions in order to extract further details to illuminate the overall study (Patton, 2002). The sessions were audio-taped and transcribed before being coded.

## **SETTING FOR INTERVIEWS**

Most of the logistics and planning for the interviews was done by email and/or phone. The actual interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for the participants. For two of the author interviews, I traveled to the Los Angeles area. Because of logistics and traveling distance, I conducted one of my author interviews over email, mail and phone. The teacher interviews all took place in San Diego.

## **DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

### **Phase One**

Content Analyses of Trade Books. Data collection analyses for the content analyses began with the actual reading of each trade book. Data was recorded for each book using the developed protocols (see Appendix A). In this phase, I coded and analyzed the responses from the open-ended protocol and tallied the results of the forced-choice protocol. The recording form was also considered in the analysis. I compiled the data into a concept-ordered matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which allowed for visual comparisons and contrasts of the available data. Patterns were discerned. The information searched for included: (1) the portrayal of Asian-American culture, (2) how cultural authenticity was measured, (3) the differences (if any) between members and nonmembers representing the Asian-American culture, and (4) the perspectives that informed the content. Additionally, I considered whether children would be positively or negatively affected by the representations in the selected trade books.

### **Phase Two**

Data Analyses of Teacher and Author Interviews. Data analyses began with the initial coding of the interview transcripts. Following Creswell (1998), I read all the descriptions in their entirety and extracted significant statements which I formulated into meanings and clustered into themes. I then integrated all these themes into a narrative description. In addition, I bracketed my preconceptions. This process was mainly inductive as codes, categories and patterns were allowed to emerge. Themes and assertions emerged from the descriptions. I underlined phrases and words that seemed significant noting patterns in the margins and identifying domains/categories. The next stage of analysis was a concept-ordered matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Quotes from the participants were used to support the final analysis of data.

## **VERIFICATION PROCEDURES**

To ensure validity, I employed the following techniques: (1) clarifying and documenting research bias, (2) triangulation, (3) member checking, (4) rich, thick descriptions and (5) inter-rater reliability.

In order to ensure the objectivity of the evaluative instrument (see Appendix A), I performed an inter-rater reliability test. I solicited the services of an independent coder, a person who writes and reads multicultural, specifically Asian-American, children's literature. We read an example of an Asian-American trade book, namely *Kira-Kira* (Kadohata, 2004), which won the Newbery Award. We coded the book using the forced-choice protocol. The results were analyzed and discussed. The protocol was reviewed and amended until 90% accuracy was achieved.

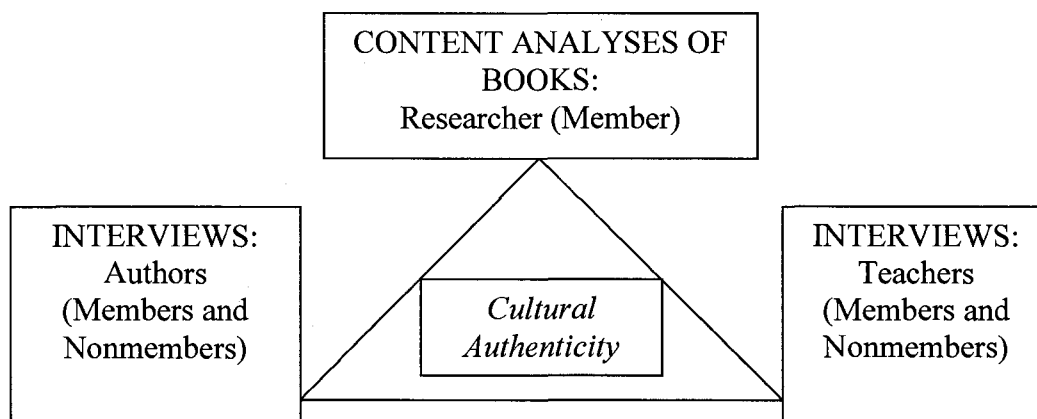
In addition, I had the interview notes transcribed and coded no later than a week after the interview to maximize immediate recollection.

### TRIANGULATION

Although the content analyses allowed me to see the role of power and perspective represented in the texts, solely depending on such analyses would produce limited results. Since cultural authenticity is subject to interpretation and depends heavily on perceptions, other data points are necessary. In order to define cultural authenticity, I borrowed from Fairclough's (2003) notion that there are three units of analysis in meaning-making: the production of the text, the text itself and the reception or consumption of the text; thus, I investigated texts (Asian-American children's trade books), producers (authors), and consumers (teachers). As aforementioned, I used the recording form, open-ended protocol, forced-choice protocol, and the teacher and author qualitative interviews to explicate these data points.

In order to understand the influences of power and perspective in assessing cultural authenticity, my study triangulated by "comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view" (Patton, 2002, p. 559). The content analyses critically examined the text mainly from my perspective. The protocols and coding schemes (see Appendix A) as well as the inter-rater reliability tool helped to establish objectivity. The qualitative interviews examined the perspectives of teachers and authors. Figure 1 offers an illustration of the described triangulation.

Not only did my study have multiple data sources in terms of interviews and content analyses, but I also had multiple data sources in terms of perspectives of different individuals, including my perspective and the perspective of teachers and authors as well as



**Figure 1. Triangulation of study.**

the perspectives of members and nonmembers, which is a big strength of this study. By triangulating the data, I was able to investigate cultural authenticity from various viewpoints and also substantiate any claims that I may make regarding cultural authenticity. Creswell (1998) writes, “In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (p. 202). Since I am dealing with abstract notions of power, culture, authenticity, and so on, triangulation was a valuable tool that enabled me to better concretize these concepts.

### **HUMAN SUBJECTS**

This study qualified for an expedited human subjects review based on the following criteria: (1) the main methods of data collection consisted of analyses of trade books, qualitative interviews and book talk sessions; (2) the confidentiality of the participants was maintained; and (3) the questions were considered to be non-sensitive. As a result, a signed consent is generally not required but I provided a consent letter to all subjects anyways (see Appendix E).

### **ROLE OF RESEARCHER**

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered to be an instrument. As an Asian-American, I brought my own positionality to the research. As a member with an Asian-American upbringing, I have insights and access into this specific culture. My understanding of Asian-American roles and identities are derived from having lived the

experience, having immersed myself into the culture and literature, and having conducted extensive research.

The content analyses of the texts were mainly guided by my perspective. As a second-generation Asian-American of ethnic Chinese heritage, I have a personal interest in contributing to the research on Asian-Americans. As a teacher and a published author of Asian-American children's literature, I have a professional interest in increasing the quality and quantity of Asian-American trade books.

It was important for me to present and bracket all biases. Although my being an Asian-American was more beneficial to my study than not, it also presented some disadvantages. First, I continually checked myself to maintain my objectivity as a researcher. Second, although I am familiar with the Asian Diaspora, I have a greater understanding of Chinese-American, Japanese-American, and Cambodian-American identities specifically of the first and second generations. I conducted research when necessary in order to broaden my own cultural understandings and not to make any assumptions about my own perceived knowledge base. In short, I am aware of these subjectivities and limitations, which I cannot ignore or deny; so, I accounted for them by reporting, bracketing and acknowledging my biases.

### **LIMITATIONS**

In addition to the aforementioned limitations, some other limitations included: access to interview subjects especially authors, access to members and nonmembers specifically teachers who are members and authors who are nonmembers, small number of participants and the availability of Asian-American children's trade books that fit my inclusion criteria.

Lastly, I recognized that in examining the responses of my participants, I described my observations or rather interpretations of the mediated exhibitions of their responses. I constantly referred to the transcripts and used direct quotes as much as possible to warrant any assertions.

### **SUMMARY: CHAPTER 3**

In Chapter 3, I outlined my methodology and study design for this qualitative study. Because I sought to accurately depict and understand diverse voices and perspectives, I assumed a qualitative approach, which is the preferred method in studying people of color



and multicultural literature. My data collection consisted of two phases: (1) content analyses and (2) qualitative interviews. First, I conducted content analyses of 15 Asian-American contemporary realistic fiction trade books, including middle grade chapter books and young adult books, that were set and published between 1997 and 2007 and that were readily available for and accessible to general audiences. I analyzed books written by both members and nonmembers. I employed three instruments in the content analyses (see Appendix A): recording form, forced-choice protocol, and open-ended protocol. I also took extensive notes while I read each trade book. Second, employing convenience sampling, I interviewed four authors (producers) and four teachers (consumers). The study participants consisted of both members and nonmembers. I provided them with consent forms (see Appendix E) and demographic questionnaires (see Appendix F). During the interview sessions, I employed semi-structured interview protocols (see Appendices C and D).

The data analysis consisted of two phases: (1) content analyses of trade books, and (2) interview analyses of teachers and authors. For the content analyses and the interviews, I transcribed, coded and analyzed the responses and developed a concept-ordered matrix, discerning patterns and categories. I wrote rich, thick descriptions and allowed themes and assertions to emerge. Throughout the data analysis, I employed a theoretical framework of critical literacy as the main guiding principle, examining the intersections of power and perspective to determine their influences on people's judgment of what is culturally authentic.

The triangulation of my study consisted of several main data points (see Figure 1 as seen on page 65). My study has multiple data sources in terms of interviews and content analyses in addition to multiple perspectives, including my perspective and the perspective of teacher and authors as well as the perspective of members and nonmembers.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to systematically analyze the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's trade books from multiple perspectives, specifically from the perspectives of the researcher, producers (children's trade book authors) and consumers (upper elementary and secondary school teachers). A critical literacy lens was used to explore issues related to cultural authenticity in these trade books. In addition, the study examined teachers' and authors' perceptions of cultural authenticity, including the perspectives of both cultural insiders and outsiders. The data collected from this study provided insights on the production and consumption of Asian-American children's trade books as related to cultural authenticity.

This chapter presents and analyzes the data gathered regarding the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's trade books. The findings are based on the content analyses of 15 selected trade books in addition to the responses of the eight study participants. The data analysis procedures consisted of two phases: (1) content analyses of trade books and (2) interview analyses of teachers and authors. Again, the following are the initial research questions:

1. How are Asian-Americans currently represented in children's trade books and how culturally authentic are these representations?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of these representations?
3. What are authors' perceptions of these representations?
4. How do insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions?

#### **PHASE ONE: CONTENT ANALYSES**

I conducted content analyses of 15 Asian-American children's trade books. The selected books featured an Asian-American protagonist, were contemporary realistic fiction chapter books, and were published and set between 1997 and 2007. The content analyses

required the use of the following instruments: recording form, open-ended protocol, and forced-choice protocol.

In analyzing the data, I searched for the following information: (1) the portrayal of Asian-American culture, (2) how cultural authenticity was measured, (3) the differences (if any) between members and nonmembers representing the Asian-American culture, and (4) the perspectives that informed the content. Additionally, I considered whether children would be positively or negatively affected by the representations in the selected trade books.

I found the content analyses to be helpful because they allowed me to discover patterns and trends in contemporary Asian-American children's trade books. An analysis of the content of these trade books was necessary to obtain a definition of cultural authenticity as I was able to draw upon evidence directly from the texts. Considering that my sample consisted only of 15 trade books, the data from the content analyses can only convey a limited picture of the current state of contemporary Asian-American children's trade books. Noting the small sample size, the findings are still valuable in that these represent examples of contemporary Asian-American children's trade books that are available and accessible to the general public. My perspectives as an insider and/or member, as an Asian-American children's book writer, as a teacher and as a critical reader informed my responses for the protocols.

### **Recording Form**

I completed a recording form on each of the selected trade books. Table 5 is a compilation of this data, illustrating the 15 trade books selected to be analyzed according to the inclusion criteria (listed in alphabetical order):

Of the 15 selected trade books, four were written by nonmembers and 11 were written by members. I chose trade books that fit the inclusion criteria and that were readily available. As such, I did not consider the gender of the author to be a data point. However, interestingly, I had four male authors in my sample, two nonmembers and two members; so, about 26% or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of my sample was male.

Using Table 5, I created another table (see Table 6) indicating the year in which the selected trade books were published. For these trade books, the year in which the books were published correlated to the time period in which the story was set. Since I was looking for

**Table 5. Data from Recording Forms for Trade Books Selected for Study**

<b>Title of Book/ Year of Publication</b>	<b>Author/ M=Member N=Nonmember</b>	<b>Setting of Book: Time Frame</b>	<b>Intended Grade Level(s)</b>	<b>Asian-American Ethnicity(ies) Represented</b>	<b>Number of Awards/ Recognition (To date)</b>
<i>Black Mirror</i> (2001)	Nancy Werlin (N)	Present time	9 and up	Half Japanese and Half Jewish	9
<i>Honeysuckle House</i> (2004)	Andrea Cheng (M)	Present time	4-7	Chinese-American; Chinese immigrant	
<i>Moon Runner</i> (2005)	Carolyn Marsden (N)	Present time	3-5	Chinese-American	1
<i>Name Me Nobody</i> (1999)	Lois-Ann Yamanaka (M)	Present time	8 and up	Japanese-American/ Hawaiian	
<i>Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo</i> (2003)	Greg Leitich Smith (M)	Present time	6-8	Japanese-American (adopted)	6
<i>Project Mulberry</i> (2005)	Linda Sue Park (M)	Present time	5-9	Korean-American	11
<i>Ruby Lu, Brave and True</i> (2004)	Lenore Look (M)	Present time	1-3	Chinese-American	1
<i>Seeing Emily</i> (2005)	Joyce Lee Wong (M)	Present time	6-9	Chinese-American	1
<i>Split Image</i> (2002)	Mel Glenn (N)	Present time	8 and up	Chinese-American	2
<i>Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time</i> (2005)	Lisa Yee (M)	Present time	4-7	Chinese-American	4
<i>Tae's Sonata</i> (1997)	Haemi Balgassi (M)	Circa 1997	5-8	Korean immigrant	4
<i>The Amah</i> (1999)	Laurence Yep (M)	Circa 1999	4-7	Chinese-American	
<i>The Homework Machine</i> (2006)	Dan Gutman (N)	Present time	4-6	Japanese-American	3
<i>Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs</i> (2000)	Lensey Namioka (M)	Circa 2000	3-6	Chinese immigrant	1
<i>Year of the Dog</i> (2006)	Grace Lin (M)	Present time, 2006	3-5	Taiwanese-American	11

contemporary images, this was ideal. I determined setting mainly from the actual text itself. In the absence of a definitive date mentioned in the trade books, I used context clues, or

**Table 6. Publish Dates of Selected Trade Books**

<b>Year</b>	<b>How many books were published in that year?</b>
1997	1
1998	
1999	2
2000	1
2001	1
2002	1
2003	1
2004	2
2005	4
2006	2
2007	

rather time markers such as technology, language patterns, clothing trends, etc. For example, in *The Homework Machine*, Gutman (2006) makes reference to the War in Iraq and to technology such as instant messaging; such indicators suggest that the story takes place in recent years. Hence, for contemporary realistic fiction, the publication date of the book is important in determining whether or not a trade book can be considered contemporary.

According to Table 6, about 26% of the trade books were published and set in 2005. (Incidentally, that is the year following Cynthia Kadohata's winning of the Newbery Award for *Kira-Kira*, which could suggest that the market was ready for more Asian-American trade books given the success of Kadohata.)

Based on the data sample, I found that five or 1/3 of the selected trade books were written for grades 4-7. For grades 6-8 or the middle school population, there were two books available from my sample and three trade books were available for both the grades 3-5 and the grade 8-12 student populations. Only one trade book out of my sample was intended for grades 1-3.

Table 7 indicates the Asian-American ethnicities represented in the selected trade books.

The Chinese-American experience has the most exposure in that those trade books represented 60% of my sample. Also, members wrote about their own ethnicity; for example, Joyce Lee Wong (2005) is Chinese-American and she wrote about a Chinese-American whereas Linda Sue Park (2005) is a Korean-American and she wrote about a

**Table 7. Asian-American Ethnicities Represented in Selected Trade Books**

Asian-American Ethnicity	How many books represented this particularly ethnic group?
Chinese-American	9
Japanese-American	3
Korean-American	2
Bicultural	1 (Half-Japanese)

Korean-American. Of the selected trade books, there was only one character who was bicultural, specifically half-Japanese and half-Jewish (Werlin, 2001) and one character who was adopted (Smith, 2003).

Of this sample, only three trade books featured the theme of immigration. Only two trade books were told entirely from an immigrant's perspective, *Tae's Sonata* (Balgassi, 1997) and *Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs* (Namioka, 2000); both of which were published on or before the year 2000. *Honeysuckle House* (Cheng, 2004) has two main protagonists, a Chinese immigrant and an American-born Chinese. Some of the other trade books like *Seeing Emily* (Wong, 2005), *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* (Yee, 2005), and *The Amah* (Yep, 1999) present the immigration experience through parents and/or grandparents; however, immigration and assimilation are not main themes.

In selecting the trade books, I did not consider awards and/or recognitions; however, it is worth exploring. *Project Mulberry* (Park, 2005) received 11 awards and/or recognitions, the top number in my sample. This is not surprising considering that Park won the Newbery Award in 2001. *Year of the Dog* (Lin, 2006) also received 11 awards and/or recognitions. Both Park and Lin are already known in the field; they have also received awards for their previous work. Similarly, the authors of *Black Mirror* (Werlin, 2001) which received nine awards and/or recognitions and *Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo* (Smith, 2003) which received six are well-known in the general children's literature field as they publish non-Asian-American trade books as well. Table 8 outlines the publishing houses.

As Table 8 indicates, all the selected trade books were published by major publishing houses, houses that do not focus only on multicultural children's literature. In addition, these houses have a larger circulation and distribution market. They are also not considered to be small presses such as Lee & Low, which is a small press known for publishing multicultural trade books. Given that publishing houses can only publish a certain number of books a year,

**Table 8. Publishing Houses of Selected Trade Books**

<b>Publishing House</b>	<b>How many books were published by that publishing house?</b>
Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers	1
Little, Brown & Company	3
Aladdin Paperbacks	1
Clarion Books	2
Amulet Books	1
Arthur A. Levine Books	1
Candlewick Press	1
Front Street	1
HarperCollins Publishers	1
Hyperion Paperbacks	1
Speak	1
Puffin Books	1

I would say my sample is fairly indicative of the representation of Asian-American children's literature. I excluded self-published books from my selection as these books are not edited or reviewed and do not have the circulation and distribution of even the small presses. They are also not eligible for the same awards and/or recognition.

### **Open-Ended Protocol**

In the open-ended protocol (see Appendix A), I focused on three main guiding points based on Bishop's study: (1) the targeted audience group addressed; (2) the interpretation of the term Asian-American; and (3) the cultural perspectives that informed the trade books (Sims, 1982). As I read each trade book, I recorded my initial responses and then I reviewed and revised as necessary as I analyzed the data. (Table 2 beginning on page 55 lists some examples of focus questions to consider for each main question.) In analyzing the data, I sought brevity in my answers as I was looking for big patterns. Table 9 is the compilation of the data.

When considering audiences, I compiled my rough notes and discovered that there were three common responses: (1) written for Asian-American audiences, (2) written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans, or (3) written for general audiences especially the mainstream. Table 10 presents the responses, the frequency in which they occurred among the selected trade books, and the trade books themselves:

**Table 9. Data from Open-Ended Protocol**

<b>Title of Book/ Year of Publication</b>	<b>To whom is this trade book primarily addressed:</b>	<b>How is the term Asian-American interpreted?</b>	<b>What cultural perspectives inform the book?*</b>
<i>Black Mirror</i> (2001)	Written for general audiences especially the mainstream.	Described as a human experience in that it presented themes of loss/mourning.	Informed by dominant perspective. (NM)
<i>Honeysuckle House</i> (2004)	Written for general audiences especially for Asian-Americans.	Described as an Asian-American assimilation experience; Presented themes of belonging and fitting in; Presented themes of grappling with two cultures especially languages; Presented theme of language loss.	Informed by Asian-American insider perspective including that of an immigrant. (M)
<i>Moon Runner</i> (2005)	Written for general audiences especially the mainstream.	Described as a human experience in that it presented themes of friendship, challenging oneself, etc.	Informed by dominant perspective. (NM)
<i>Name Me Nobody</i> (1999)	Written for Asian-American/Hawaiian audiences.	Described as an Asian-American experience; Presented as a distinct culture; Described as a human experience in that teen angst is universal; Presented themes of being insecure, losing a close friend, learning about sex, etc.; Presented as multi-faceted in that the characters are all so different.	Informed by Asian-American/Hawaiian insider perspective. (M)
<i>Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo</i> (2003)	Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans.	Described as an Asian-American experience; Described as a human experience in that themes of friendship, first love, etc. are presented.	Informed by an Asian-American perspective; Informed by an insider perspective of being Japanese adopted by white parents; Evidence of basic Japanese knowledge naturally woven into story. (M)



Table 9. continued

Title of Book/ Year of Publication	To whom is this trade book primarily addressed:	How is the term Asian-American interpreted?	What cultural perspectives inform the book?*
<i>Project Mulberry</i> (2005)	Written for general audiences especially for Asian-Americans.	Described as a human experience in that it presented themes related to teen identity, ethics etc.; Described as an Asian-American experience in that protagonist fights kimchee and the silkworm projects because they are "too Korean."	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective; Evidence of culture but it is not in-your-face. (M)
<i>Ruby Lu, Brave and True</i> (2004)	Written for general audiences especially for Asian-Americans.	Described more as a human experience in that protagonist grapples with friendships, a new brother, a new cousin, etc.; Characters seem multi-faceted; No evidence of stereotyping; Described as an Asian-American experience in that cultural markers are present.	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective. (M)
<i>Seeing Emily</i> (2005)	Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans.	Described as an Asian-American experience in that protagonist deals with being embarrassed by her culture, language loss, stereotypes, passive racism, etc.; Described as a human experience in that protagonist deals with a new crush, teen angst, overprotective parents, etc.	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective; Evidence of inter-ethnic politics (Ex. Chinese versus Japanese) (M)
<i>Split Image</i> (2002)	Written for general audiences especially the mainstream.	Described as a human experience in that it presents themes of teen angst, mother-daughter disconnects, suicide, expectations, etc.; Described as an Asian-American experience in that protagonist grapples with stereotypes and perceptions.	Informed by a dominant perspective; Evidence of very basic Asian-American knowledge. (NM)

Table 9. continued

<b>Title of Book/ Year of Publication</b>	<b>To whom is this trade book primarily addressed:</b>	<b>How is the term Asian-American interpreted?</b>	<b>What cultural perspectives inform the book?*</b>
<i>Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time</i> (2005)	Written for general audiences especially the mainstream.	Described as a human experience as normal teen issues are present such as school angst, girls, friendship, father-son issues, etc.	Informed by a dominant perspective; Asian-American insider perspective is present via the protagonist's grandmother, Yin-Yin. (M)
<i>Tae's Sonata</i> (1997)	Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans.	Described as an Asian-American experience especially of an immigrant as themes of fitting in, working hard, sacrifice, etc. were present; Described as a human experience as themes of friendship, cliques, etc. were present.	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective. (M)
<i>The Amah</i> (1999)	Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans.	Described as a human experience in that there is a jealousy and resentment theme; Described as an Asian-American experience in the idea of a Chinese Amah.	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective. (M)
<i>The Homework Machine</i> (2006)	Written for general audiences especially the mainstream.	Described as a human experience in that it presented themes of belonging and friendship.	Informed by a dominant perspective. (NM)
<i>Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs</i> (2000)	Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans.	Described as an Asian-American experience in that it presented immigration and assimilation themes, inter-ethnic politics, etc.	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective. (M)
<i>Year of the Dog</i> (2006)	Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans.	Described as an Asian-American experience as protagonist comes to terms with her Asian and American identities; Described as a human experience in that protagonist seeks to find her niche.	Informed by an Asian-American insider perspective. (M)

\*NM means the author is a nonmember; whereas, M means the author is a member.

**Table 10. Responses to Question Addressing Audience(s)**

Possible Answers	How many books indicated this response:	Which books indicated this response:
Written for Asian-American audiences	1	<i>Name Me Nobody</i>
Written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans	10	<i>Honeysuckle House; Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo; Project Mulberry; Ruby Lu, Brave and True; Seeing Emily; Split Image; The Amah; Tae's Sonata; Yang the Eldest and his Odd Jobs; Year of the Dog.</i>
Written for general audiences especially the mainstream	4	<i>Black Mirror; Moon Runner; Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time; The Homework Machine.</i>

Out of the 15 selected trade books, 14 of those books addressed general audiences. Three of the trade books, *Ruby Lu, Brave and True* (Look, 2004), *Tae's Sonata* (Balgassi, 1997), and *Year of the Dog* (Lin, 2006), all include glossaries and/or in-text definitions of Asian terms, traditions, etc. in order to provide cultural knowledge to a general audience that may or may not be familiar with the culture. The in-text definitions can appear to be didactic at times suggesting that the author had cultural outsiders in mind. This practice was especially distracting in *Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs* (Namioka, 2000), in which the author would stop the flow of the story to explain the Mandarin words, meal time procedures, etc.

I broke down general audiences into two other categories: (1) written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans, or (2) written for general audiences especially the mainstream. The main defining factor in determining which category each trade book belonged to was whether or not being Asian-American was central to the book. For example, in *Moon Runner* (Marsden, 2005), Mina, the main character, does not have to be Chinese in order for the story to work. She could be of any ethnicity. As such, this trade book is categorized as written for general audiences especially the mainstream; four out of the 15 selected trade books were designated in this category. Being Asian-American is not a main focus of these trade books. In addition, there is an absence of detailed cultural markers. There are a few instances in which ethnicity is mentioned; for example, the reader knows that Mina is a Chinese-American because Marsden gives her an ethnic name, refers to her legs as

“chopsticks,” and briefly notes the Moon Festival. All of these details can easily be attributed to another culture and the story will still be there.

Interestingly, three out of the four trade books in this category were written by nonmembers. The only trade book in this category written by a member is Yee’s (2005) *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*. The main character is Stanford Wong, who just happens to be Chinese-American. Stanford’s dilemmas and the main story line do not necessarily relate to his being Chinese-American. However, his ethnic background is characterized via Yin-Yin, his grandmother, who is an expert dim sum chef. She is the only character that represents the Chinese-American culture other than through name and skin color. Even Stanford’s mother cooks Hamburger Helper and lasagna. As cultural ethnicity was not a main focus of the story, I designated this trade book as written for general audiences, especially the mainstream.

Since it seems to make sense that Asian-Americans would be more likely to buy Asian-American children’s literature, ten out of the 15 trade books were written for general audiences, especially Asian-Americans. In these trade books, being Asian-American was central to the story. The authors of these trade books made a lot of cultural references. In fact, an important theme in all these trade books had to do with ethnic identity. For example, in Lin’s (2006) *Year of the Dog*, Grace, the main character, comes to terms with her Chinese and American identities; she makes new friends, tackles Chinese school, practices both Chinese and American traditions, etc. In *Project Mulberry* (Park, 2005), Julia, the main character, learns to appreciate and value her Korean-American ethnicity by participating in a science project about Korean silkworms with her Anglo-American best friend.

Interestingly, nine out of ten of these books were written by members. This makes sense since the authors could draw upon their own background knowledge; Glenn (2000) is the one nonmember in this category. His book, *Split Image*, has an Asian-American protagonist and is written in narrative free verse. This literary style is popular and marketable in young adult literature right now. *Seeing Emily* (Wong, 2005) is also written in narrative free verse. Wong (2005), a member, has many more cultural references in her book than Glenn (2000).

Only one out of the 15 trade books, *Name Me Nobody* (Yamanaka, 1999) was designated as written for Asian-American audiences. Essentially, this means that being

Asian-American is not only central to the story's main theme but it is exclusive. For example, Yamanaka (1999) employs Pidgin, a dialect used by ethnic Asians living in Hawaii. The language, in particular, makes this trade book exclusive. She does not explain the dialect or any other cultural references. She makes many references to foods, traditions, etc. that are assumed to be known. These details are a natural part of the story and are not explained or defined. Even though general audiences and/or cultural outsiders will understand and possibly enjoy the book, Yamanaka definitely immerses readers into a different subculture.

When considering the interpretation of the Asian-American experience in these trade books as presented in the second question of the open-ended protocol, I compiled my rough notes and discovered that there were three common responses: (1) described as a human experience, meaning that the experience is universal and not necessarily specific to being Asian-American; (2) described as an Asian-American experience, meaning that the experience is specific to being Asian-American; or (3) described as both. Table 11 illustrates this.

**Table 11. Responses to Question Addressing Interpretation of Asian-American Experience**

Possible Answers	How many books indicated this response:	Which books indicated this response:
Described as a human experience	4	<i>Black Mirror; Moon Runner; Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time; The Homework Machine.</i>
Described as an Asian-American-experience	2	<i>Honeysuckle House; Yang the Eldest and his Odd Jobs.</i>
Described as both	9	<i>Name Me Nobody; Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo; Project Mulberry; Ruby Lu, Brave and True; Seeing Emily; Split Image; Tae's Sonata; The Amah; Year of the Dog.</i>

There were four out of the 15 selected trade books that mainly described a human experience and nine out of 15 selected trade books that described both human and Asian-American experiences; as a result, there were 13 trade books total that described a human experience. Basically, these trade books concentrated on universal themes in children's literature such as friendship and identity, themes that speak to and about a general

audience not necessarily to and about Asian-Americans. For example, in *Black Mirror* (Werlin, 2001), besides a handful of references to the main character, Frances' Asian eyes and Buddhist aphorisms, the story is not about Frances being Asian-American but about her uncovering the mystery of her brother's death and dealing with her loss. Mourning is a universal experience that is not tied to being Asian-American. Other universal themes presented in this selection of trade books include, but are not limited to: belonging and fitting in, challenging oneself, teen angst, sexual identity, love, ethics and morals, new siblings, parental disconnects, suicide, jealousy, etc. Interestingly, these same four trade books were also categorized as being written for general audiences especially the mainstream (see Table 11) and 75% of these books were written by nonmembers. Being an Asian-American was not pertinent to the development of these stories.

Even though there were a total of 11 trade books which described an Asian-American experience, only two out of the 15 trade books focused mainly on the presentation of an Asian-American experience. Both these trade books, *Honeysuckle House* (Cheng, 2004) and *Yang the Eldest and his Odd Jobs* (Namioka, 2000) were written by members and describe experiences of immigrant Chinese-Americans; as such, the majority of the story line is devoted to assimilation experiences, not so much immigration in these contemporary trade books. For example, Namioka (2000) depicts a Chinese-American immigrant family's struggles to make money and fit in. She also shows how Eldest Brother grapples with his Asian and American identities by comparing and contrasting ideals of American capitalism and Chinese socialism. Cheng (2004) presents two main characters, an American-born Chinese named Sarah and a Chinese immigrant named Tina. Sarah is embarrassed by Tina but eventually befriends her. In addition to assimilating and coming to terms with two cultural identities, other themes presented as reflective of an Asian-American experience include but are not limited to: language loss, cultural embarrassment and resentment, parental and societal expectations, racism and prejudice, etc. In addition, these trade books have cultural markers related to food, language, traditions, etc.

These books, which represent an Asian-American experience, may also present inter-ethnic politics, which segues into the third main question of the open-ended protocol addressing cultural perspectives (see Table 12). Such a presentation may indicate an insider perspective as these issues are sensitive and politically charged; plus, they are not necessarily

**Table 12. Responses to Question Addressing Cultural Perspectives**

Possible Answers	How many books indicated this response:	Which books indicated this response:
Informed by dominant perspective	5	<i>Black Mirror; Moon Runner; Split Image; Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time; The Homework Machine.</i>
Informed by Asian-American insider perspective	10	<i>Honeysuckle House; Name Me Nobody; Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo; Project Mulberry; Ruby Lu, Brave and True; Seeing Emily; Tae's Sonata; The Amah; Yang the Eldest and his Odd Jobs; Year of the Dog</i>

general knowledge. An assumption that could be made by nonmembers is that minorities are clumped together; this is far from the truth. Namioka (2000) compares and contrasts Japanese and Chinese cultures depicting the Japanese culture in a lesser light. Park (2005) brings up complex issues such as Korean versus Chinese and Korean versus African-Americans. The two trade books in this sample that address inter-ethnic issues were written by members.

As illustrated in Table 11, the majority of the selected trade books, nine out of 15, interpreted, or rather, described the Asian-American experience as being both a human experience and an Asian-American experience. These trade books target a general reading population; however, they also present an Asian-American vantage point. For example, Grace, the protagonist in *Year of the Dog* (Lin, 2006) is Chinese-American and is constantly surrounded by other Chinese-Americans and lives in a Chinese-American community; however, she participates in science fairs, talent shows, etc. She searches for friendship and belonging, reflective of universal themes, as well as cultural identity, an Asian-American theme. Lin created multi-faceted characters so that the images of Chinese-Americans do not seem monolithic; they seem like the average American family.

As illustrated in Table 12, when considering the cultural perspectives that informed these trade books as presented in the third question of the open-ended protocol, I examined my notes and extracted patterns; as a result, I discovered that there were two common responses: (1) informed by dominant perspective; or (2) informed by Asian-American insider perspective. The majority of the trade books, ten out of 15 or about 66%, were informed by an Asian-American insider perspective, which essentially means that the author demonstrated

knowledge of the culture about which he/she is writing. All ten of these trade books were written by members. In addition to featuring Asian-American characters, these trade books had some commonalities in the writing and style. They provided evidence of cultural markers such as language, food, traditions, etc. These details were plentiful and presented themselves throughout the book. There were constant reminders of ethnicity. However, the mark of a high-quality, culturally-authentic trade book is one in which these details appear to be seamless. For example, Look (2004) describes the trials and tribulations of young Ruby Lu who happens to be Chinese-American. Her identity is part of who she is; it is not forced or contrived. It presents universal themes yet it is sprinkled with references to Chinese culture.

Five out of the ten trade books were informed by a dominant perspective, meaning that there was no or very little evidence of Asian-American culture especially beyond physical features and/or a handful of references. Essentially, the author presented a very basic knowledge of the culture of which he/she is writing. This is not necessarily a negative as the quality of any book depends on the story; if the plot does not make cultural markers necessary, then so be it. But, it does beg the question of whether or not these books, books that feature Asian-American protagonists but that do not address the culture can be considered as part of the genre of Asian-American children's literature. For example, *The Homework Machine* (Gutman, 2006) features Brenton Damagatchi, a genius who invents a homework machine. He is also a Japanese-American. In this story, membership is not an issue as there is no evidence of Brenton's cultural background beyond his name and his picture on the front cover of the book. In fact, one can question whether or not his character had to be Asian-American. In actuality, Brenton's character could be of another nationality. Brenton's being Japanese-American, however, gives Asian-Americans more representation in children's trade books.

To further explicate this idea of cultural perspectives, I further examined Gutman's (2006) book. Since this book along with *Black Mirror* (Werlin, 2001), *Moon Runner* (Marsden, 2005) and *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* (Yee, 2005) has been categorized as being written for general audiences especially the mainstream and as describing a human experience, it's no surprise that it is also categorized as being informed by a dominant perspective. Even though I stated that Brenton's character did not necessarily need to be Japanese-American, his being so fits according to the model minority theory, which makes



his characterization stereotypical. Perhaps his Asian ethnicity made his genius-ness seem more real, more authentic. This thinking follows along the mainstream, dominant perceptions of Asian-Americans being super-smart and nerdy, both of which describe Brenton. However, Gutman does present Brenton as a multi-faceted character toward the end of the book. He shows Brenton's inner growth as well as the changing perceptions of his classmates.

Out of the 15 selected trade books, there are other books that play to the model minority theory, which is a pervasive image for Asian-Americans, even in contemporary literature. For example, in *Yang the Eldest and his Odd Jobs* (Namioka, 2000), Fourth Brother is the only character without musical talent and this is a noticeable concern of his Chinese-American family. In general, the Yang family is presented as above average in skills and smarts; they seem different, special. As a result, I do think that this book plays to the dominant culture in that it fulfills stereotypes of being hard-working, musically-gifted, smart, etc. Again, this is not necessarily a negative if it pertains to the story line.

There is one other book that was deemed to be informed by a dominant perspective. *Split Image* (Glenn, 2000) was categorized as being written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans mainly because the protagonist, Laura Li's being Chinese-American was central to the story. This trade book was categorized as describing both a human and Asian-American experience because it presented universal themes such as teen angst, suicide, etc. but it also presented cultural markers and addressed stereotypes of Asian-American women. However, this is done from a dominant perspective. Laura Li must grapple with the expectations and pressures that are put on her by society, especially by Anglo-American men who perceive her to be sexy and exotic. In the narrative free verse style, the Asian-American experience, which is shown in limited details, seems to be presented as natural.

### **Forced-Choice Protocol**

In the forced-choice protocol, I read each selected trade book and answered a series of questions that addressed the following topics (I attributed a letter code to each set of data): (G) General information especially about the protagonist; (S) Stereotypes and/or negative representations of Asian-Americans; (C) Culturally-authentic representations of Asian-

Americans; and (L) Literary merit. There were a total of 27 questions and there were only two possible choices for each question: (1) Yes or (2) No/Not determinable. I tallied the answers and illustrated the results in Table 13.

The first six questions (1-6) addressed literary merit; they asked about reader engagement, grammar, language, plot and character development. Essentially, all but one of the books received positive responses suggesting that the quality of contemporary Asian-American children's trade books is good. In this sample, 93% of the trade books could be considered to be of high literary merit. This is important because even before cultural authenticity can be assessed, the trade book must be well-written in order to engage and sustain consumers. The one trade book that did not merit a positive response was written by a member and written several years ago. I contend that the genre has changed and the author's writing probably reflected his/her time period.

In addition to addressing literary merit, questions five and six also addressed the reception of, or rather, the effects on children, target readers. None of the selected trade books were found to be embarrassing or offensive to an Asian-American reader (Question 5); similarly, all of the selected trade books were found to be helpful tools to garner appreciation and acceptance from non-Asian-Americans (Question 6).

There were 12 questions (7-18) examining the cultural authenticity of the representations of Asian-Americans in the selected trade books. Overall, there were more positive responses than negative which suggests that the representations in today's Asian-American children's literature lean toward being culturally authentic. This is a good sign of the times and the market. It is important to note that the negative responses aren't necessarily negative as "Not Determinable" warranted a negative response and in truth, this doesn't mean that the trade book wasn't culturally accurate. For example, Questions 7, 8, 9, 12, and 18 specifically addressed subtleties and nuances of the Asian-American experience. For trade books such as *Moonrunner* (Marsden, 2004), being Asian-American was not central to the story despite having an Asian-American protagonist, so such details were absent from the text. Again, this does not indicate cultural inauthenticity. The tally score was 11 to four and the same four books were placed in the negative response; these four trade books did not focus on the Asian-American experience as it was not part of the story and/or plot lines.

**Table 13. Results of Forced-Choice Protocol**

Letter Code	Question:	Responses:	
		Yes	No/ND
L	1. Is this book well-written and of high quality? Is it engaging and interesting?	14	1
L	2. Is the book free from errors in grammar, syntax, word usage, etc. which makes the book easy and enjoyable to read?	15	0
L	3. Is the book free from vocabulary that is demeaning, offensive, or condescending? Is the language respectful?	14	1
L	4. Does the book have a strong plot and strong characterization?	14	1
L, G	5. Could the book embarrass or offend an Asian-American reader?	0	15
L, G	6. Does the book help a child from another ethnicity accept and appreciate the Asian-American culture?	15	
C	7. Does the author have the qualifications and the background needed to deal with the Asian-American experience accurately and respectfully as evidenced by the book?	11	4
C	8. Is the book written from the protagonist's or rather, from an Asian-American point of view? Does the book show evidence of the subtleties and nuances of the Asian-American experience? Does it reflect the realities and ways of Asian-Americans?	11	4
C	9. Are the Asian/Asian-American traditions or expressions of Asian/American culture represented in the book realistic and believable? Does the book include the idea of harmony, spirits, traditions, luck, and horoscopes in a natural and unexaggerated manner?	10	5
C	10. Are the Asian-American characters in the book depicted living their daily lives (working, being with family, solving problems, etc.) as well as but not always taking part in Asian-American traditions and/or celebrations?	14	1
C	11. Is the protagonist portrayed as an individual and not as a combination of culturally stereotypical characteristics such as smart, studious, nerdy, math and science-oriented, etc.? Is he/she portrayed as a genuine individual with distinctive features?	14	1
C	12. Is the dialogue, including "broken English," realistic? Do the characters use speech that accurately represents the oral traditions of the culture? Are non-English phrases used correctly?	11	4
C	13. Does the character assume leadership roles and/or solve his/her own problem in a realistic matter meaning he/she does not need assistance from a white authority figure and he/she does not have to exhibit extraordinary qualities to gain acceptance or approval?	14	1
C	14. Are the Asian-American characters portrayed in contemporary lifestyles, dress and customs with realistic names?	15	0

Table 13. continued

Letter Code	Question:	Responses:	
		Yes	No/ND
C	15. Are conflicts between traditional and contemporary cultures or between Asian and American identities which may result in rebellion against parental and/or cultural constraints portrayed realistically? Does the protagonist have options other than choosing one culture over another?	12	3
C	16. Does the book illustrate a community among family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors leading toward mutual help, communal support, and collective wisdom?	15	0
C	17. Does the book illustrate the importance of honesty, hard work, selflessness, sacrifice, filial piety, reverence for the elderly, ancestral worship, the arts and/or education without exaggerating the values and customs of Asian-American culture?	15	0
C	18. Does the book illustrate the adjustment and assimilation to a new or unfamiliar in a believable manner? Does the protagonist realistically encounter feelings of isolation, loneliness, poverty, language barriers, and racial discrimination? If the protagonist needs to belong to a desired group and obtain acceptance leading to feelings of ethnic ambivalence and confusion, is this presented authentically?	10	5
S	19. Does the Asian-American protagonist do exceptionally well in school especially in comparison to other minorities? Does the book perpetuate the model minority theory? Does the book give the impression that Asian-Americans have overcome the early oppression against them by hard work, turning the other cheek and passively accepting hardship?	6	9
S	20. Is the Asian-American protagonist viewed as a perpetual foreigner?	2	13
S	21. Are the Asian-American characters represented as one-dimensional and as caricatures? Are the Asian-American male characters portrayed as smiling, polite and bowing; squinty-eyed and bucktoothed; wise, inscrutable or mystical; sinister or sly; expert in martial arts? Are the Asian-American female characters portrayed as sweet, well-behaved; sexy "china dolls"; evil "dragon ladies"; overbearing, old-fashioned grandmothers?	1	14
S	22. Are the Asian-American characters depicted as only residing in a certain area (i.e. Chinese-Americans are depicted as living only in Chinatowns)?	1	14
S	23. Are the Asian-American characters depicted as only having a certain type of job (i.e. Filipino-Americans as nurses or servants.)?	1	14

Table 13. continued

Letter Code	Question:	Responses:	
		Yes	No/ND
S	24. Are the Asian-American characters only depicted as being tied to a historical event (i.e. Japanese-Americans are depicted only as participants in World War II)?	0	15
S	25. Are the Asian-American characters only defined in terms of their relationship to others (i.e. Mr. Smith's Suzie Wong)?	0	15
S	26. Does the Asian-American protagonist prefer to be white without any resolution? Does he/she show no appreciation for his/her culture? Are the Asian-American characters portrayed as imitation Anglo-Americans?	1	14
S	27. Are the Asian-American characters portrayed only as followers and/or menaces to society?	0	15

Considering Question 9, in which there were ten positive responses, I noticed that contemporary Asian-American children's trade books, those that described the Asian-American experience, still featured the idea of luck, spirits, traditions, horoscopes. Question 15, in which there were 12 positive responses, suggests that today's trade books still address cultural constraints and conflicts. Question 18, in which there were ten positive responses, looked at the depiction of adjustment and assimilation themes. There is a decrease in the number of contemporary trade books describing a cultural assimilation experience; most of the trade books focused on the teen angst of belonging and identity. In these books, ethnicity, specifically the Asian-American identity, does come into play but not to the same degree as it would in a trade book featuring a protagonist who was an immigrant. Another noteworthy trend as evidenced by 15 positive responses to Questions 16 and 17, is that contemporary Asian-American children's trade books still reflect a sense of community and the importance of honesty, hard work, education, filial piety, etc. These orientations are an integral part of the Asian-American mentality.

Question 10, to which there were 14 out of 15 positive responses, looked at how the Asian-American characters are depicted living their daily lives, meaning that they were portrayed as part of the mainstream and not just participating in Asian-American activities and celebrations. This is an important characteristic of contemporary Asian-American trade books; these trade books move beyond chopsticks and Chinese New Year. Similarly, Question 11 and 13, to which there were also 14 out of 15 positive responses, looked at how

the protagonist is portrayed. For example, the protagonist must be multi-faceted and not monolithic meaning that he/she is not the embodiment of stereotypes but rather a “normal” person who solves his/her own problems without being rescued by dominant society. For Question 14, which looked at the realistic depiction of the characters’ dress, names, customs, etc., there were 15 positive responses. All the questions discussed here speak to the importance of having Asian-Americans represented as a “regular” person.

Question 12 looked at how dialogue was presented, specifically “broken English.” There were 11 positive responses and four negative responses. Again, the four negative responses were “Not determinable” as the Asian-American experience was not a central theme and/or the Asian-American characters were of the third or fourth generations where there would be no evidence of “broken English.”

The last nine questions (19-27) specifically examined stereotypes. Given the wording of the questions in this last section, negative responses are actually positive responses as such indicating “no” means that the trade book does not stereotype, which is a good thing. On average, 91% of the selected trade books did not have stereotypical images of Asian-Americans; for example, Question 21 and 27 asked whether or not certain images such as dragon ladies, martial arts experts, china dolls, etc. were evident in the trade books. For Question 21, there was only one book out of 15 that conveyed such images. None of the trade books conveyed Asian-Americans as followers or menaces to society as asked by Question 27.

Question 20 asked if the Asian-American protagonist was viewed as a perpetual foreigner. There were only two responses that indicated so; these two trade books specifically dealt with immigrants who did not necessarily adopt mainstream culture and were perceived by others, including other Asian-Americans, to be different. However, as generations are establishing themselves, there is a decrease in immigration and assimilation stories which could account for the decreasing of this foreigner image.

For Questions 22 to 24, there were 14 out of 15 trade books that showed Asian-Americans living outside of Chinatowns and performing in jobs that are not stereotypical. Again, it is important to show Asian-Americans as a part of the American mainstream. As shown in Question 24 and 25 in which there were 15 positive responses, current representations of Asian-Americans are not tied to a historical event or in relation to another

person. Question 19 addressed the model minority theory. This is the most prevailing image of Asian-Americans. There were six out of the 15 trade books, or 40%, which conveyed Asian-Americans as exceptionally smart; as such this seems to be an established stereotype.

In the past, Asian-American children's literature conveyed the image that Asian-Americans preferred to be Anglo-American showing Asian-Americans as imitation Anglo-Americans. This was addressed in Question 26; only one of the selected trade books supported such an image. This is an important trend to note as it suggests that there is a growing appreciation and celebration of the Asian-American culture. Coupled with the practice of multicultural education and the increase of multicultural literature, attitudes are changing.

### **Summary: Content Analyses**

The content analyses consisted of three instruments: the recording form, the open-ended protocol and the forced-choice protocol. I also took anecdotal notes as I read. Overall, the content analyses suggests that the current state of Asian-American children's literature is positive, especially in that the portrayal of Asian-Americans and their experiences are increasingly more affirmative than in past years.

Based on the recording form, I determined that there is an increase of books being published that describe the contemporary realities of Asian-American; simultaneously, there is a decrease in the number of books being published that describe immigration and assimilation. Today's Asian-American teenagers are assimilating to teen culture rather than assimilating to American culture; this angst is reflected in the majority of the trade books selected in this study. (It is important to note that Asian-American books about immigration and assimilation are still more popular and readily available than the former; as such, more contemporary Asian-American books need to be published and marketed.) In my sample, there were more books about the Chinese-American experience than other Asian-American ethnicities, which makes sense since I also found that members tended to write from their own experiences and Chinese-American authors are more accessible and seemingly more prolific than other Asian-American authors; this may be a result of an established network of Chinese-American authors and works.

Based on the open-ended protocol, I determined that the degree to which Asian-Americans were central to the story determined the intended audience, meaning that if the story depended on the protagonist being Asian-American, the story seemed to be more intended for an Asian-American audience. The majority of the books in my sample were written for general audiences, especially Asian-Americans, which means that the story focused on universal experiences such as friendship with cultural markers being present throughout the story. As mentioned already, most of the books described a universal, or human, experience combined with an Asian-American experience, meaning that being Asian-American was important to the story but not as important as the theme. Being Asian-American did not drive the plot, rather it added to the character of the story. Asian-Americans are showing up more in the literature and the Asian-American experience is becoming more a part of the mainstream experience. I also found that the majority of the books were informed by an insider perspective, meaning that the authors demonstrated cultural knowledge and were able to convey the nuances and subtleties of the Asian-American experience. Most of the authors of the books considered to be informed by an insider perspective were members.

Based on the forced-choice protocol, I determined the images of Asian-Americans have positively changed in the past decade. The responses elicited from this protocol indicated that there are more positive and multi-faceted images of Asian-Americans. Stereotypes of Asian-Americans are diminishing, especially the perpetual foreigner image. The model minority image was still present in 40% of the trade books. I also found that 93% of the trade books in the sample could be considered to be of high literary merit; in addition, the cultural representations, as determined both by the author's use of his/her insider perspectives and in the details of the cultural markers, seem to be realistic and authentic. Lastly, it would appear that children would be positively affected by the representations in the selected trade books.

## **PHASE TWO: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS**

Assuming a qualitative approach, I interviewed four producers (authors) and four teachers (consumers). I solicited two members and two nonmembers for both the teacher and author groups. Each interview began with a review of the consent form (see Appendix E) and



a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F), followed by an in-depth interview in which I employed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendices C and D).

The qualitative interviews were designed to accomplish the following main purposes: (1) To identify the factors that inform their perspectives; (2) To determine the current preconceptions held by the participants about Asian-Americans; (3) To describe if and how the participants evaluate cultural authenticity in Asian-American children's literature; and (4) To discover the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity as perceived by the participants. The interview questions were framed by but not limited to these four main purposes. The participants were asked to respond to all of the questions. Then, I analyzed the responses and collated them under key themes, which are presented in this chapter.

I was able to gather data from different vantage points: authors as producers of these trade books and teachers as consumers of these trade books. Interacting with producers and consumers made the content analyses richer as I was able to find out more about the current preconceptions about Asian-American children's literature and further support my claims.

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F) was designed to elicit personal and professional information about each participant. It was sent to participants via electronic mail or completed at the site of the interview. All participants completed the questionnaire. The responses were then grouped into categories and presented in the following section.

### **ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS**

I purposefully selected both members and nonmembers for my study; as such, the ethnic background of the study participants was an important data point. Participants were asked to name the ethnic group they most closely identified with; Table 14 demonstrates their responses.

Of the members, there was an equal representation between Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans. (For the purposes of my study, I am counting the Half-Japanese-American as Japanese-American.) Interestingly and not intentionally, I had one Chinese-American and one Japanese-American in each of the teacher and author groups. For the

**Table 14. Ethnic Background of Participants**

<b>Ethnic Group: Members</b>	<b>Reponses: Authors</b>	<b>Reponses: Teachers</b>	<b>Total:</b>
Chinese-American	1	1	2
Japanese-American	1		1
Half-Japanese-American		1	1
<b>Ethnic Group: Nonmembers</b>			
Jewish-American	1		1
Anglo-American/White	1	2	3

nonmembers, all but one self-identified themselves as essentially Anglo-American, with “white” being the common term.

### **GENERATIONAL STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS**

For those participants who self-identified themselves of Asian descent, they were asked about their generational status. Participants were asked if they considered themselves to be first, second or third generation Asian Americans. There were two participants who identified with the second generation and two participants who identified with the third generation.

### **GENDER AND AGE OF PARTICIPANTS**

Gender and age were not used for selection. However, I made note of them. All the teacher participants were female. Of the author participants, three were female and one was male. Participants spanned in age from 20-69 with the majority of the participants ranging in age from 50-59. The average age of the participants was between 40-49. For the authors, the age ranged from 40-69. For the teachers, the age ranged from 20-59 with the majority of the teachers ranging from 20-39. This data is listed in Table 15.

**Table 15. Age of Participants**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Responses: Authors</b>	<b>Responses: Teachers</b>	<b>Total</b>
20-29		2	2
30-39		1	1
40-49	1		1
50-59	2	1	3
60-69	1		1

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS**

Participants were asked to self-identify their socio-economic status which is illustrated in Table 16. Most of the participants identified themselves as middle class. There was equal distribution among the teacher and author groups.

**Table 16. Socio-Economic Status of Participants**

<b>SES Level/Range</b>	<b>Responses: Authors</b>	<b>Responses: Teachers</b>
Low		
Middle	3	3
Upper Middle	1	1
High		

## **EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS**

Participants were asked to list their degrees and/or any additional credentials or certificates held. All participants have earned at least a bachelor's degree. Table 17 illustrates their experiences, especially in their knowledge of and/or training in pedagogy. (It is important to note that the participants may possess other credentials and degrees as they were not give a checklist and were asked an open-ended question.) Most of the participants have advanced degrees. All the teachers have teaching credentials in addition to their degrees.

## **PARTICIPANT PROFILE**

From the data presented above, a profile of the typical participant in this study has been developed. The typical member participant is a second or third generation Chinese-American female between the ages of 30-39 with a Masters degree, born in the United States and of the middle class. The average nonmember participant is an Anglo-American female between the ages of 40-50 with a Masters degree, born in the United States and of the middle class.

## **Interview Results: Authors**

I specifically selected four authors for this study. Table 18 on page 95 and the following paragraphs describe the major topics and themes identified through participant responses (see Appendix C for list of questions).

**Table 17. Educational Background of Participants**

Degrees/Certificates	Responses: Authors	Responses: Teachers	Sub-Total:	Total:
Bachelors Degree in English, Journalism	3		3	8
Bachelors Degree in Philosophy	1		1	
Bachelors Degree in Human Development, Education, Psychology		3	3	
Bachelors Degree in Theater Arts		1	1	
Masters in English Education	1		1	8
Masters in Fine Arts	1	1	2	
Masters in Math, Science and Technology Education		2	2	
Masters in Education		1 (2 in progress)	3	
All But Dissertation (ABD)	1		1	1
Multiple Subject Teaching Credential	1	2	3	3
Single Subject Teaching Credential (English)	1	2	3	3
Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development Credential	1	4	5	5

### **HESITANCY IN SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS AN AUTHOR OF ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S TRADE BOOKS**

Based on the authors' actual responses and the long pauses incurred, I ascertained that there was some hesitancy in their self-perceptions as authors of Asian-American children's trade books. For the most part, all participants were more comfortable with being broadly labeled as writers of multicultural books. One of the authors stated, "I would describe myself as a writer of many different cultures because my school reflected many cultures. Asian culture was only one of the groups I touched on." The authors also seemed more comfortable identifying their books than identifying their self-perceptions. Table 19 illustrates each author's published books. In addition, they were asked to determine how many of these books would they identify as being part of the genre of Asian-American children's literature.

**Table 18. Author Interviews: Major Topics**

<b>Purpose of Questions</b>	<b>Major Topics Extracted from Interviews</b>
(1) To identify the factors that inform their perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hesitancy in self-identification as an author of Asian-American children's trade books</li> <li>• Fear of being pigeonholed and/or labeled</li> <li>• Writing Asian-American children's trade books as a calling</li> <li>• Importance of research</li> <li>• Obtaining encouragement from reader response and reception</li> </ul>
(2) To determine the current preconceptions held by the participants about Asian-Americans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive changes in publishing and writing trends in regard to Asian-American children's literature</li> <li>• Need for more representation of contemporary experiences</li> <li>• Trend of writing a human experience from an Asian-American perspective versus writing about an Asian-American experience</li> </ul>
(3) To describe if and how the participants evaluate cultural authenticity in Asian-American children's literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precedence of literary merit</li> <li>• Ambivalence about defining and judging cultural authenticity</li> <li>• Importance of authenticating knowledge bases and "getting it right"</li> </ul>
(4) To discover the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity as perceived by the participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership and credibility of author</li> <li>• Membership and importance of insider perspective</li> <li>• Membership and controlling the authenticity</li> <li>• Membership and social responsibilities</li> </ul>

**Table 19. Published Books of Authors**

<b>Author</b>	<b>How many books do you have published (to date)?</b>	<b>Of these books, how many would you identify as Asian-American children's literature?</b>
Member A	6	6
Member B	2	"?"
Nonmember A	10	5
Nonmember B	12	1

Nonmember A identified 50% of the books as part of this genre; however, this participant also defined all of the books as being "multicultural." Nonmember B only has one published book that could be considered an Asian-American trade book. As a result, for Nonmember B, questions were specifically geared toward this one book.

For both the members, their published books (to date) would be considered Asian-American children's trade books. Member A was the only participant to self-identify 100% of the books as Asian-American. Member A stated, "All of them because they're written by me; but two of them are not specifically Asian-American in content or in their characters." Member A also self-identified with being a writer of Asian-American children trade books "because [his/her] books are about multicultural characters" and/or themes.

Member B was more ambivalent, stating,

This is a personal struggle. . . I don't know that my books are multicultural. They have the Chinese-American culture in them. But it's not about a universal struggle of a race and that I'd definitely consider a multicultural book. My books are about internal struggles of individuals who happen to be of a certain race and I think that I put things in there about the kids being Chinese-American. If I were Italian-American, I would probably do the same thing. I would have them eating foods from their ancestors and things like that. So, I found that my books—I hear this from librarians and teachers, etc.--that my books are being taught as multicultural but more often than not, they are being taught as contemporary realistic fiction which I love.

However, referring to the definitions established in this dissertation, I would categorize both Member B's books as being Asian-American children's trade books.

When asked about being an author of Asian-American children's trade books, Member B stated, "I don't know if I'm an ethnic writer because I don't know what that means." Member B seemed to be more accepting of being an Asian-American author versus an author of Asian-American children's literature; however, Member B would not cast off either identification, noting, "[The label] doesn't bother me. . . there's no denying it. I look Asian...As long as it's not the only label." Not only could this hesitancy be a result of ambivalence toward the meaning of such a label but it could also be related to a fear of being pigeonholed; this theme will be presented next.

### **FEAR OF BEING PIGEONHOLED AND/OR LABELED**

Of being categorized and labeled, Member B stated,

Well, I am an ethnic author but I am also a [gender] author. . . My being Asian is part of who I am. It is not my full identity. . . I'm a working [parent] author. I am many things. I don't want to be pigeonholed into one. There's nothing wrong with having lots of labels and that's what I decided I am. I am all those things.

Similarly, Member A stated,

Today's writers can write about anything they want and yesterday's writers felt like stories had to be based on their ethnicities. I used to think the opposite but I do think, your ethnicity is your home. It shapes my family's life so profoundly. How can you not have that be the base of who you are and what you are writing about? So even if I write about other things, I still think it's one of my homes. It's not my only home but it's certainly one of them. . . Your home base has to be your ethnicity in a way and one of the challenges is that sometimes you want to write about other things too.

For members, it appears that there is an expectation that they write about their cultures; as such, this expectation may limit their writing choices. However, in discussing future works, these authors do actively pursue other genres and themes that are not necessarily Asian-American. Member B reflected on advice that she had given to another colleague regarding the use of an ethnic name, "I told her that just because you have an Asian name does not mean you have to write Asian books." Interestingly, neither one of the nonmembers brought up this concern about being pigeonholed into a writing genre. In fact, one of the nonmembers stated, "Why waste time going outside this richness? If you're from this culture, why bother writing about white culture."

### **WRITING ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S TRADE BOOKS AS A CALLING**

When asked about their motivations, all four participants referred to writing Asian-American children's trade books as a calling. For the members, their motivations seemed to be directly related to their ethnic backgrounds. Member A stated, "I don't think it was a choice. It was so natural. It was a compulsion." Similarly, Member B stated, "I didn't even think about it. It's who I am and my writing is a reflection of me and that's what happened. It's very conceited." For the nonmembers, their motivations were related to their interactions with Asian-Americans. Nonmember A stated,

I did not intend on being a writer of Asian-American stories. These stories naturally fell to me because of my marriage to [an Asian-American] and [my half-Asian-American] kids and also, from my experience as a classroom teacher working with Asian-American students. The classroom is the heartbeat of yummy conflicts.

Nonmember B stated, "I didn't choose to write about Asian-Americans. The story chose me." Given their background and knowledge, the author participants felt natural about writing

Asian-American children's trade books. This comfort level is a result of extensive research as described in the next section.

### **IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH**

All of the participants, both members and nonmembers, cited the importance of researching topics. In order to accurately and authentically convey an experience, the participants needed to conduct research. For example, one participant stated, "I'd like to see what I am writing about. . . You have to read a lot about the people and places you are writing about." Another participant stated, "I think you have to research and you have to talk to people. I would never make up anything. . . Really get in there and talk to people and observe. That goes for not even different cultures but different sexes." Some of the cited research sources included: conducting internet research, conducting interviews, interacting with and observing people and cultures, traveling, reading books about that culture and in that particular genre, participating in various listservs, reading interviews, taking college classes, etc. A participant stated, "I read a lot of books from that culture. I watch a lot of movies from that culture. Documentaries. Nonfiction. As much as I can. Travel, if I can." All the participants intimated the importance of research in regard to securing positive reception from readers.

### **OBTAINING ENCOURAGEMENT FROM READER RESPONSE AND RECEPTION**

In considering the factors that informed the authors' perspectives, they considered the response from consumers including teachers, readers, editors and publishing houses; all of which were cited by the participants as influential, especially the readers. Only one participant specifically commented on the role of teachers. This participant stated, "a teacher's obligation is to present life from many different aspects and culture." As such, the relationship between producers, those who write about different aspects and cultures, and consumers, those who provide access to such writing, is solidified.

There seemed to be a dependence on the reader as a judge of authenticity; for example, one participant stated, "If a student feels I have represented his life accurately, then I guess I am 'authentic.'" Another participant stated, "I guess it depends on the reader and what they want to take from it." This being stated, as I will describe later in this section, the



author is largely responsible through research to provide authenticating details. Because of this research, one nonmember noted, "I haven't had bad reception at all. Ever." This positive reception encouraged this particular nonmember to write more Asian-American stories. Similarly, positive reception has encouraged a member to continue writing Asian-American stories as well, stating, "I was getting response from [protagonist] and I really wanted to turn stereotypes upside down at that point."

### **POSITIVE CHANGES IN PUBLISHING AND WRITING TRENDS IN REGARD TO ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

The members felt very positively about their reception in the world of publishing, in general. More today, than in the past, both members indicated that they felt like writing about Asian-Americans was a choice rather than an obligation. Member A noted, "[Maybe] at first, but I don't think it's true today. But I do think it was true when I was first starting out. The books that they wanted you to write about were being Asian-American. . ." Member B discussed the use of ethnic names, which in the past, could lead to pigeonholing; however, this member stated, "Actually, today, if you have these ethnic names, I think it might open more doors for you." Overall, the members felt that they had more options today.

A factor of this widening of choices relates to the increase of Asian-American authors and increase of access to high-quality Asian-American children's trade books. One participant stated, "I would imagine that that there are relatively few [Asian-American] novels, per se. But I also feel the number is growing." This feeling seemed to be consistent across all four participants. One member stated,

I think it's changing. . . I don't know if it's a trend. . . there are a lot of young-youngish-female Asian-American authors. . . People will say that I'm part of a trend. But I don't know what it is in the universe that is making it all come together but I'm very aware of all of a sudden with middle grade and young adult fiction, there seems to be this surge of Asian-American authors all of a sudden. . . I'm in my 40s, there seems to be a lot of 20-year-olds or early 30s female authors that are coming out. A lot of us know each other or know of each other because we make it a point to do that. . . In any case, we're the older ones and then, there are these younger ones.

All of the participants responded positively when asked about the current representations of Asian-Americans in the world of children's literature. One participant

stated, "I think they're really good. We've really come past the phase of stereotypes like slanty-eyed and buck-toothed. I think it's really good right now." Similarly, another participant noted, "I think the authors are making a tremendous effort to portray them authentically." Another member stated,

At the time the book came out, to my knowledge, it was the first time a contemporary Asian-American kid was on the cover. There are probably more now. But, it was the first time. I remember seeing the cover and was shocked because I didn't know what to expect and I didn't expect to see this [Asian] girl looking at me.

The authors seemed content with the current portrayal of Asian-Americans and the increase in access and availability; however, they did cite a need to continue to grow in this genre and to produce more contemporary images.

### **NEED FOR MORE REPRESENTATION OF CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCES**

As aforementioned, a positive trend in this genre is the increase of Asian-American children's trade books. One of the members described the trend as follows:

I almost see two [genres], like a division. Like you have books by [prominent Asian-American children's authors] and culturally, those are absolutely on target and correct. Yet, those tend to be more about the past. And then, you have the contemporary books coming out now.

As such, it's not just increasing the quantity of Asian-American children's trade books, it's increasing the quantity of Asian-American contemporary realistic fiction trade books. All of the authors reported a need more representation of contemporary experiences. In order to make a societal impact, there needs to be more as described by one of the members:

I think we need more faces out there. At first, I thought [people] were being rude because [they] would ask me where I was from and everything. Then, I realized they weren't being rude, they were being curious because they weren't used to seeing an Asian face and there aren't enough on television and movies and books. The more we can get out there, the less shocking it's going to be for someone to meet and see someone from a different race.

This aligns with research on the positive influence of multicultural literature.

On the need for contemporary images, one member noted, "Not another camp story!" Although these authors cited the importance of representing Asian-American experiences through time, they focused on the realities of today. Interestingly, the members seemed more concerned than the nonmembers in regard to creating contemporary images. The members

noted the differences in their experiences as third and fourth generation Asian-Americans: “When my parents came here, they were immigrants. They were a transitional race or generation. And then, when I was born. . . I still had that link because of my parents and grandparents. But, my kids’ generation. . . well, they’re far removed.” There is a separation between each generation and the heritage culture. For example, neither one of the members speak their heritage language. Of this, one member noted,

My grandmother wanted me to take [Asian language] lessons but I never wanted to do that. I was too busy. She would speak [Asian language] to me when I was little and I could understand her and I would speak English to her and she could understand me. I never did learn how to speak [Asian language].

Besides a very basic familiarity with their heritage language, the only other cultural marker that the members indicated related to food and eating rituals: “Rice was the center of our culinary experience growing up.” Another member commented, “We had chopsticks next to the forks in the silverware drawer.”

One member noted, “Today, it’s such a melting pot. You’d be hard pressed to find third or fourth generation kids who only relate to the culture of their homeland because we are assimilated and yet, at the same time, we are carrying pieces of our culture back.” Although cultural markers such as language and food can be important distinguishing factors for the genre of Asian-American children’s literature, current generations of Asian-Americans face different realities and experiences. One member stated, “I do get a lot from [Asian-American] girls who say things like, ‘I’ve never read a story about someone like me who’s just a regular kid.’” These “regular kid” stories are in demand.

#### **TREND OF WRITING A HUMAN EXPERIENCE FROM AN ASIAN-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE VERSUS WRITING ABOUT AN ASIAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

Even though the authors acknowledged that Asian-American consumers would be more likely to read and purchase their books, they all strongly claimed that they wrote for general audiences with no target audience in mind. One member noted, “I had no political agenda or anything when I made her Asian. I just wrote about someone like me. . . when I write, I write from the point of view of an individual and their personal struggle.” A

nonmember stated, “I didn’t set out to write about Asian-Americans per se. I set out to write about [a story].”

The participants all focused on commonalities we share as humans rather than on distinguishing Asian-Americans as a distinct cultural group. A member stated, “there were times when I felt, especially with my second book, although the character is mixed Asian, it’s not about being Asian-American.” This focus on common human experience resonated especially with one of the nonmembers:

I maintain that all groups share the same hopes, fears, joys and sorrows. Inside people are pretty much the same, cultural orientation aside. . . Seriously, are Asian mothers that much different from Italian or Jewish mothers? Aren’t all mothers overprotective? Again, I think it is very hard for a non-Asian to write about Asian culture, but I also maintain that there are more factors that unite us--the human condition--than divides us.

There is a strong preference for portraying the human experience from an Asian-American perspective rather than portraying an Asian-American experience, even among the members: “In reviews and things like that, nobody brought up the fact, except for one time, [the ethnicities of my characters]. And, I liked it. . . it’s not an issue and I was very pleased about that.” This preference could be related to the aforementioned generation gaps and the need for contemporary images; of course, the market comes into play as well. One member suggested that Asian-American stories would not sell as much as “regular” stories; on having an Asian-American girl on the book cover: “It might turn people off because they would think it’s a wholly ethnic book.” As a result, the authors focused on telling a mainstream story from an Asian-American perspective. Noting the viable market for such Asian-American stories, one member stated, “As for being part of a trend, like any trends, I think as long as you write well, you are going to be fine. But, I don’t think just writing a trend will be able to sustain a career.” As such, there is a strong emphasis on literary merit.

### **PRECEDENCE ON LITERARY MERIT**

As suggested in the literature review, there was a time when the focus was on increasing the quantity of multicultural children’s book while the quality of these books was secondary; however, the conversation has changed. Today, our discourse has changed from a focus on quantity to a focus on quality, which includes cultural authenticity. Interestingly, even when asked specifically about cultural authenticity, all the participants placed a strong

emphasis on literary merit and telling a good story. For example, one of the participants stated, "With the contemporary books, I think the focus is on telling the story rather than getting this many facts in there. The facts are more the fabric of the story." Similarly, another participant stated, "Whatever is right for the story. I could throw in all kinds of details about [Asian] culture but it didn't fit the story. They were extraneous and distracting and annoying." Cultural facts and details add to and/or authenticate the story but the culture, itself, is no longer the story; in other words, these multicultural children's trade books are less didactic. The objective is not to teach about the culture but rather, to tell a good tale. It's a bonus that this tale is told from an Asian-American perspective. A nonmember noted, "It helps if they are from that culture. But the more important thing is their skill as a writer." The other nonmember confirmed this by saying, "I do think that [members] are better qualified but a good writer can transcend the question. Didn't Twain 'understand' Jim?" As indicated by the nonmembers, there is precedence on the quality of the writing, on the actual storytelling of the culture rather than of the culture itself. Nonmember A clarifies this by stating, "It's much easier to be a person from that culture to get things authentic but some times that person is not a writer. They can't capture it. You can be from that culture and not be a writer."

Keeping in tune with issues related to literary merit, the authors expressed regard for authentically portraying a child's perspective; a good story accurately conveys the thoughts, emotions and experiences of its young protagonist. A member stated,

One, you need to get your facts right. Two, you have to get the emotion in there. What I strive to do is I really try to get the emotion first and then I go and layer it with the facts that the protagonist or anybody in the story has to understand who they are or what they are about or on their journey to find something out about it. It's not enough just to label somebody something and say Okay, that's who you are and I'm going to ignore it from now on and just right about it. It has to be woven into the entire story.

When using the Asian-American identify, cultural facts are important but they have to defer and support the experience and emotions. In analyzing the feedback the authors claimed they received from their critique groups and/or editors, it seems like the quality of the story depended on the accurate portrayal of youth culture rather than ethnic culture. For example, one member stated, "Sometimes my editor will say, 'Would a twelve year old say that?'" Another member stated,

[On writing a particular book with a male protagonist] my editor said, 'I love this. I love the voice. But he sounds like a girl'. . . I started noticing and taking notes. Then, what I do is absorb something, a character and I go into a different place when I write that person or that culture or whatever.

Telling a story from the protagonist's perspective, which in contemporary Asian-American children's literature is more in sync with mainstream youth culture than ethnic culture, is a characteristic of literary merit. One member noted, "I consider [my books] to be authentic in that the kids eat at McDonalds and. . . in that they do have chopsticks in their silverware drawer."

In considering literary merit, the authors also noted the importance of reader response. One author stated, "Part of really good literature whether it's Asian-American, African-American, any literature is leaving the question in the mind of the reader. . . [kids] just go for what they think are good books." Another author noted that the appeal of books lies in their portrayal of real experiences; successful authors write stories that respond to their readers: "It's daily life. It's about real life, real people living their real lives. . ." Again, this notion of expressing a general human experience takes precedence; such a precedence could be related to the authors' ambivalence about the concept of cultural authenticity in that the authors feel more sure about being human than being Asian-American. The latter gets judged and criticized more often than the former.

### **AMBIVALENCE ABOUT DEFINING AND JUDGING CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

Each author participant was asked the following question: How do you define cultural authenticity? Their responses are noted in Table 20.

**Table 20. Author Responses to Question: How Do You Define Cultural Authenticity?**

<b>Author</b>	<b>How do you define cultural authenticity?</b>
Member A	"I don't. It's personal. I actually object to people like [name] who feels that he can define it for other people."
Member B	"I think it comes from within."
Nonmember A	"I couldn't really define or judge that."
Nonmember B	"Authenticity means you live the experience. It depends on how you were raised whether when old enough you decide to adhere to cultural principles. . . One point: I'm not sure I know what 'culturally authentic' completely means."

As garnered from the author responses, cultural authenticity does not appear to be an easy concept to define. Their responses as described in Table 20 seem to align with the literature review in that cultural authenticity just “feels right.” As indicated by the members’ responses, having an insider perspective, which can be gained in a variety of ways as mentioned further in this paper, gives one the benefits of producing and judging the nuances of being of a particular culture. Judging cultural authenticity seems to be easier than defining it. One author stated, “If something rings as really false, I’ll notice it. If it seems really hokey and stereotypical, I’ll notice it. . . Anybody can tell. It just rings wrong.” One nonmember deferred to the readers as judges of cultural authenticity, noting, “If a student feels I have represented his life accurately, then I guess I am ‘authentic’ --not really sure how you define that term.” Another author noted, “If you find a book and think it’s inauthentic, it’s okay to challenge it but how do we judge that?” Conceptually, the authors were ambiguous about cultural authenticity; however, they were more forthright in describing the cultural authenticity of their books.

### **IMPORTANCE OF AUTHENTICATING KNOWLEDGE BASES AND OF “GETTING IT RIGHT”**

Even though it was difficult for the author participants to describe cultural authenticity as a concept, they were all comfortable answering questions related to how they authenticated their works, more specifically how they gained insider perspectives. As such, the authors relied on their research and knowledge bases, claiming their books to be authentic because of these. One author stated, “I want my stories to be authentic and reflect cultural background. You have to be true to your characters and true to the culture you’ve chosen.” As such, research is necessary: “It has to be based on fact. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have done the research I did. . . [my books] are based in fact and based on things that could happen or did happen.”

Having a knowledge base is more than just researching and knowing facts. As one member stated,

Just because you eat a particular type of food, does that make you part of that culture or is it that you have an innate understanding and appreciation? I think in terms of the books. . . you don’t have to be of a specific race to write about that race; however, I do think that you need to have knowledge of it and understanding

of it. And a respect for it. That's a big part of it, the respect. I think it is more than just research and facts. You really do have to have an appreciation for it in order to understand it.

A nonmember stated, "Going beyond the Chinatowns and the cultural festivals that we've become familiar with in holiday books and really learning the daily lives of how people live rather than the holidays." There is this focus on being immersed in the culture, of knowing the ins-and-outs of daily living. As such, travel and interviewing were popular sources cited.

Across all four author participants, there was this strong focus on authenticating details: "I can't put something out there that's wrong so that's why I researched it. . . but if I can't find it, I'm not going to put it in there." However, the nonmembers seemed to be more concerned with "getting it right." When asked about the challenges of writing Asian-American children's literature, the nonmembers were the only ones to bring up issues related to authentication. Nonmember A stated, "[My] challenges are to get it accurate. I use gatekeepers, collaborators. . . people that help me do that. . . I try to get it right. I'm really, really careful to get it right and be respectful of what really is and not lay my own expectations, my own fantasies. I didn't steal any stories." Later on in the interview, Nonmember A reiterated, "My concerns are that I might not get it right. . . that the picture might not be complete. That I'll have just a piece of it. That I might not have gotten some details right. That I might have said something that offended somebody." Similarly, Nonmember B stated, "Yes, I worry--did I get it right?...But there are limitations. I may be full of good intentions, but can I really know 'the life' in all its dimensions?"

As such, the nonmembers seemed to conduct more research than the members. Nonmember A cited the following sources: "A lot more exposure, travels to Thailand and Vietnam, gatekeepers (daughters and [spouse]), observations, member checking especially about facts and emotional reactions, reading books, internet research. . ." Being immersed in other cultures was an important source:

I was exposed to other cultures in terms of living in other cultures and interacting with people from various cultures. . . That's where most of it comes from. . . I either work with a gatekeeper or more recently, with collaborators, people from that culture. Really seeing it through their eyes as much as I can.

This author participant noted the importance of making careful observations and attending to details. Unlike the members, this nonmember emphasized the importance of gatekeepers and collaborators; as such, members are on "firmer footing." She states,



I wouldn't write without collaborators. . . I think that nonmembers have to check things out with people from that culture. . . I need the sensory details otherwise I'll end up making a lot of assumptions. [We judge authenticity] by detail. How much details there is in the book besides we all eat mooncakes, etc. I think to be culturally authentic, there needs to be details that are particularized, particular details for the real characters rather than the stereotypes like someone floating off into a cloud. [I need] to get the details right, to ground them in reality between a real character and another real character and a real setting. . .

Interestingly, this particular nonmember used the term, "honorary member" to describe his/her status in regard to the Asian-American culture. Nonmember A does not write African-American stories because of a lack of knowledge about and experiences with them: "I wouldn't feel comfortable writing about African-Americans. . . I don't know anything about that culture."

Nonmember B also focused on the human experience as a source of knowledge:

You use parts of yourself and parts of what you know to create a character and a situation. . . I just observed students from all walks of life. . . I do some research, but I am not a cultural anthropologist. I have been around teens my whole adult life and pray that I have 'captured' them successfully. . . I think I know something about what teens want, and what they want is what everyone else wants, love and acceptance. . . at the risk of repetition, I maintain that we all share similar feelings. Love is love and loss is loss no matter who you are or where you come from.

This idea that we use our lived experiences is important; however, in representing other cultures, it is not enough even for members.

Members did note that they were able to draw from their own lived experience. When asked how they came up with authentic details, one member stated, "mostly from being Asian-American and talking to other Asian-Americans. . . through research and through talking to people and through just being Asian-American." Another member stated, "I guess what I know about them is what I have lived and observed. . . Things are kinda embedded in my memory. . . I guess it's just by osmosis. Also, the things, the books I've read and things like that." However, the members both intimated that being Asian-American was not enough; they needed to conduct extensive research on a variety of topics. One member stated, "I did a lot of research and talked to a lot of people and read a lot of stuff. . . I run everything I write that has [Asian language] by somebody or by several people." Given that today's contemporary Asian-American writers are generations away from native Asian cultures, cultural details, especially language, need to be checked by more credible sources.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND CREDIBILITY OF AUTHOR**

Given the work they take in authenticating their own works, all the author participants referred to a trust in the author in regard to cultural authenticity. For example, one author stated, "To be honest, if it's a friend, I just accept [the book] to be authentic." Interestingly, by both the members and nonmembers, there seemed to be more trust in the members in regard to cultural authenticity. One member stated,

If there are two books, one is written by an Asian-American and one is written by a white person, even though the person by the white person is better, I think [the consumers] are going to buy the book by the Asian author. I think it's just what we do. I've had author friends who have written books who have written books outside of their race and have been invited to conferences and things and uninvited when they found out their race. . . It's interesting because originally it was based on the work itself.

A nonmember stated, "I tend to give more credence to a person from that culture if I am reading that book." Furthermore, this particular author, at one point in time, considered using an ethnic name in order to add more credibility.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND IMPORTANCE OF INSIDER PERSPECTIVE**

Despite the credibility given to members, all of the author participants strongly felt that nonmembers could write culturally authentic trade books as long as they actively pursued an insider perspective. Membership, although not a prerequisite, did have its advantages. One member noted,

I don't think [membership is] absolutely necessary but it sure helps a lot if you know what you are writing about and if you have experienced it. I think so much of what authors do, I know it's what I do, comes from experience. You take something that you've lived and you expand upon that. And that if you've gone through something, that's really going to help with your writing. I know that my experience growing up as an Asian-American in Los Angeles is very different than an Asian-American growing up in Appalachia or something like that. So, I could write that story but if somebody else were to, they'd probably have more of a head start.

Another member stated,

There are a lot of little things about manners or whatever that you learn in a different way when you're Asian. So, there are little thoughts you have in your head and you know that they are things that would happen to you and wouldn't happen to someone else. . . To me, the thing about a white person writing from an

Asian point of view is that they don't have that feeling; they don't know that feeling because they can't know it. . . [but,] if they do their homework, it's okay. [However,] if there is an [ethnic] writer out there who can do it just as well, why not? They are so underrepresented.

There is a preference for Asian-American writers but nonmembers should not be deterred from writing such stories.

A nonmember stated, "I think it is very hard for an outsider (maybe like me?) to understand all the nuances of one's culture that is not yours. . . [but, authenticity] depends on desire and research." Another nonmember raised the question: "Do you have a right to go into another culture? To presume you know the culture?" Member B further elaborated on this issue of nonmembership:

If you could only write about your DNA, about your specific ethnic heritage, then that would be very limiting. . . Ultimately, if you have a little background to write from, then that's easier and better but I don't think that authors or artists of any kind should be limited into what they could write about.

On nonmembers writing books outside their culture, this member stated,

I think they can. It's harder and more of a struggle just within the publishing industry and with consumers. I think they can because to deny someone even the right to try is wrong. . . So, what do we say? You can't write that because you didn't experience that. That's where creativity and imagination come in.

Nonmember A spoke to this notion of limitation:

You couldn't write from a girl or boy experience? No historical writing? Future?. . . Then, if you're straight, you can't write about gay people. If you're a woman, you can't write about a man. You can't write about a child if you are no longer a child.

Because of the author's research, Nonmember A claims,

I write through the eyes of a member. . . Nonmembers can write about members given the right circumstances, like some kind of personal tie to that culture, [people] who are willing to be a channel. . . As writers, we can transform ourselves into other states of being and/or other people's consciousness or cultures. Other people say that it's like stealing other people's stories like Chinese people should write about Chinese culture. But, some times, people from other cultures are not motivated to do that. . . I think as a writer of another culture, I have to be humble and put my own ego in the background and have to listen to others. . .

Some of the participants offered comments on nonmembers writing about Asian-Americans more than other cultures. A member stated,

For some reason, there's an unusual amount of Caucasians writing with Asian characters as opposed to non-Asian characters. What I mean is that with African-Americans, they may be underrepresented but the authors tend to be African-American; whereas. . . for some reason, more whites write about Asians. They might feel more free to write about Asians as opposed to other ethnicities. . . It kinda bugged me a little. But if they are doing their research, then they can write about whatever they want to.

In an informal setting, this participant acknowledged that Asian-Americans interact more with Caucasians than do African-Americans; there are more inter-racial marriages and Asian-Americans tend to assimilate more into mainstream culture. On this same issue, a nonmember stated,

Yes, it's easier to write about Asian-Americans than other groups especially Native Americans. . . I have a friend who wrote Native American stories in the 80s who actually got death threats. But, I think that was more of a case of they perceived she was stealing their stories. And, the kind of stories I tell are not anybody's story. To take a Native American story is more complicated. . .

## **MEMBERSHIP AND CONTROLLING THE AUTHENTICITY**

Another advantage of membership lies in the ability to control what is and is not considered to be authentic. A member stated, "We should control the authenticity. If not, at least challenge it. If it's fine, it's fine. . ." In dealing with readers, critiquers, editors, critics, publishers, etc., all of the author participants relied on an insider perspective and/or membership to guard the cultural authenticity of his/her writing. A nonmember stated, "[My editors] aren't familiar with [the culture]. I am the one who is more familiar with it than they are. So. . . I inform them."

Member A stated, "In one of my workshops, someone said that some of my characters didn't act Asian enough. . . I said that they were traveling on the road and they're not going to be eating sushi on the road." This member described another incident:

[A critiquer] said that you cannot write about Asians in [state in Bible Belt], which is where the story took place, without having them run into whites. I said that there were Asians living [there] and living their lives and having their stories. He said that it seems gimmicky unless they meet white people because that's the real story, the conflict between whites and Asians. I begged to differ.

Member B shared a similar story,

There was a turning point when I turned [ethnic] and that was a couple of years ago when the studio was interested in making [my character] into a television

series, however, they wanted to make her white. . . They thought she was too stereotypical. . . Until then, I wasn't into race stuff and then, all of a sudden, I became super [ethnic]. It was like, 'Wait a minute! You can't do that. It's who she is.' It's part of the fabric of the story. It's not about [an ethnic] girl. It's about a girl who is [ethnic] but I really started thinking about why that is so important to me.

The members seem to have more personal power to defend their cultures than the nonmembers; however, the nonmembers were able to check sources and perform member-checks in order to validate their power.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

In addition to controlling the authenticity, members commented on the need to control some other facets of writing and publishing Asian-American children's trade books. The participants did make some recommendations for the future of Asian-American children's literature.

Both the members indicated that a challenge they faced in writing Asian-American children's literature was the lack of books. As such, the quantity of Asian-American children's trade books and Asian-American authors remained an issue for them. One member stated, "There were so few Asian-American writers to emulate. Not to emulate but to make people believe that we can do it. That was the hard thing." In order to cultivate more Asian-American writers as well as Asian-American children's trade books, Member B noted the importance of building and maintaining networks: "We kinda have to stick together. We're not going to change the industry but maybe in increments, we can be a new face out there. So, that's what we are trying to do."

Furthermore, Member A intimated that members should feel a social responsibility to represent Asian-Americans, stating: "So, there are other things that I am interested in and I can imagine writing about them. But what I can't imagine is just writing a book about a 12 year old Caucasian girl. Never say never but. . . why wouldn't I just make her Asian?" Member B shared a similar story:

A friend of mine has a new cartoon series on the Disney channel and he's Asian. I remember watching it and getting mad because he doesn't have an Asian character. Would that be so hard? You're in a position to do that. I'm not saying that you have to do that and the show doesn't have to be about that but if you can and it doesn't hurt the story line and it can enrich it, I do think that it is something

that is kinda owed. I feel that way when I write. I have this blank canvas and I have this opportunity to create whatever world I want so why not populate it with a couple of people like me. I think that'll enrich the story and not hit people over the head with it, especially with this generation and the trends. We have somewhat of a responsibility to do that whenever we can if it doesn't take away or hurt the story.

Quantity also played a part in other areas; for example, there needs to be more Asian-American editors:

[These books] also being chosen by predominantly Caucasian editors. . . if you walked into a publishing house, you'll see a sea of white faces. There might be some non-whites. But even the books, even if they are by people of color, they are still being chosen by white people and maybe people of color would choose differently. I don't know whether that's true or not but. . .

Another quantity issue relates to the number of male writers in this genre. Member B stated, "I can just hope that if this is a trend, it continues and that we get some males because it does seem to mainly be young females."

In conclusion, the author participants created a vision of a publishing world in which labels are more blurred. A member stated,

We are still far off from the day when we don't label at all. I think we're very far away from that. But, I hope that in the future, our kids, educators, librarians will have such a choice in selection that we don't have to say that in this library or bookstore, we have to section things off.

A nonmember stated, "I think students are 'emotionally segregated' and tend to 'stick to their own kind' and are rather ignorant of other people and cultures. The more we can see that we are the same underneath, the more potential there is for peace and harmony."

## **SUMMARY: AUTHOR INTERVIEWS**

In examining the factors that informed their perspective, authors were quick to cite their extensive research as the main source of information and authentication. Secondly, authors cited their cultural knowledge; members were able to draw upon their own experiences and nonmembers employed gatekeepers, who consisted of members in a particular culture. Both members and nonmembers cited traveling and cultural immersion experiences. The authors in the sample exhibited hesitancy in self-identifying themselves as an author of Asian-American children's books. They were either fearful of being pigeonholed and/or of being labeled; this was more of a concern for the members. In addition, the nonmembers were more concerned with how members would perceive them.

For the most part, all of the authors have received positive encouragement from reader response and reception; as such, they felt authenticated in their writing of Asian-American children's literature. In their decision to write Asian-American children's trade books, the authors referred to their writing as a calling in that the stories naturally came to them.

In determining the current preconceptions held by the participants about Asian-Americans, the author interviews revealed positive changes in publishing and writing trends in that there is a viable niche for Asian-American children's literature. However, there needs to be more stories reflecting Asian-American contemporary realities. One major trend in this genre is the trend of writing a human experience from an Asian-American perspective, meaning that the themes are universal and experienced by all but the vantage point usually via the protagonist is Asian-American. Aligning with the data derived from the content analyses, there has been a notable change in the past decade in regard to the frame of reference. The author participants, especially the nonmembers, emphasized the importance of writing from an Asian-American perspective rather than writing about an Asian-American experience.

In describing if and how the author participants evaluated cultural authenticity in Asian-American children's literature, the study showed that literary merit took precedence over cultural authenticity. The idea was that if a book was well-written, it would naturally be more culturally authentic. Among both members and nonmembers, there was ambivalence about defining and judging authenticity. The members seemed to be more concerned with not being a token representation of a particular culture or ethnicity and the nonmembers seemed to be more concerned with authenticating knowledge bases. All of the authors in the sample were focused on "getting it right" but the nonmembers seemed to be more concerned with this.

In discovering the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity, the authors' perceptions provided interesting data points. All the authors, both members and nonmembers, perceived the membership and the credibility of the author, more so the latter, to be influential in determining cultural authenticity; membership has its benefits. As such, the authors perceived that members have more of an insider perspective. The authors did, however, state that this insider perspective can be obtained through research, interviews, etc. suggesting that nonmembers can write from an insider perspective. Having recognized this,

the members noted the importance of controlling the authenticity in that it is the responsibility of members to respond to a trade book's authenticity or lack of. All the author participants recognized the need for a substantive body of Asian-American children's literature.

### **Interview Results: Teachers**

I specifically selected four teachers for this study. As illustrated in Table 21, teachers were asked about their grade levels and/or subject areas in addition to their years of classroom experience.

**Table 21. Classroom Experience of Teachers**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>How many years have you been teaching?</b>	<b>What grade or subjects are you currently teaching?</b>
Member C	5	4th grade
Member D	3	5th grade
Nonmember C	13	8th grade English
Nonmember D	8	9th grade seminar English; 11 <sup>th</sup> grade AP Composition

The years of classroom experience by participants ranged from 3-13 years with an average of seven years. The taught grade levels ranged from 4th to 11th grade with all of the participants teaching English and/or the English/Language Arts. As such, all the teacher participants selected and consumed children's literature in their curriculums and instruction.

Table 22 and the following paragraphs describe the major topics and themes identified through participant responses (see Appendix C for list of questions).

### **AMBIVALENCE ABOUT MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND LITERATURE**

All the teacher participants expressed ambivalence about multicultural education and literature. For example, one teacher stated, "I don't really know what that word means any more. I don't know if I ever knew. It sounds really good. . . Of course, I believe in it but I don't believe in it just for fluff, just to have my multicultural lesson that I have out of nowhere. I think it should relate to the students' lives or to what they are learning about. I think all cultures should be represented. I think it's more about people and not just focusing on certain types of people in history or reading stories. I think it should be embedded. It



**Table 22. Teacher Interviews: Major Topics**

Purpose of Questions	Major Topics Extracted from Interviews
(1) To identify the factors that inform their perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambivalence about multicultural education and literature.</li> <li>• Limited knowledge base.</li> <li>• Limited time.</li> <li>• Precedence of school demands.</li> <li>• Lack of exposure, access, and availability.</li> <li>• Consideration of student demographics.</li> <li>• Self-identification as and ambivalence of being a culturally-responsive teacher.</li> </ul>
(2) To determine the current preconceptions held by the participants about Asian-Americans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typical definitions of Asian-Americans.</li> <li>• Limited knowledge base about the Asian-American experience.</li> <li>• Sources of knowledge base.</li> <li>• Limited interactions with Asian-Americans.</li> <li>• Ambivalence about current representations.</li> <li>• Distinction between images in trade books versus textbooks.</li> <li>• Students not responding to available representations.</li> <li>• Need for more popular trade books.</li> <li>• Making a case for Asian-American children's trade books.</li> </ul>
(3) To describe if and how the participants evaluate cultural authenticity in Asian-American children's literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambivalence about definition of cultural authenticity.</li> <li>• Minimal presence in classroom libraries.</li> <li>• Use dictated by available school materials.</li> <li>• Use relegated to supplemental status.</li> <li>• Reading and member-checking as main internal sources for judging cultural authenticity.</li> <li>• Use of external sources for judging cultural authenticity.</li> </ul>
(4) To discover the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity as perceived by the participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural authenticity entrusted to authors.</li> <li>• Importance of insider perspectives.</li> <li>• Membership and credibility of author.</li> <li>• Nonmembership and writing authentically.</li> <li>• Recommendation cycle</li> </ul>

shouldn't be a separate curriculum." Another teacher stated, "Yes, I do [believe in multicultural education but] not in the pre-packaged coursework of it or lip service to it. In the sense of tell me where you come from, why do you have this or why do you do that. . ."

Yet, another teacher stated, "I have very mixed feelings about multicultural education. In a class recently, we were reading about an Afro-centric curriculum. I was infuriated because I felt like one culture's experience was better than another's. But then I realized what it must

feel like to be from another culture and to have white culture imposed upon you.” All the teachers noted the importance of including other cultures and perspectives, yet, they didn’t exactly know how to put this into practice. One teacher noted, “I feel like I haven’t done a really good job of [implementing multicultural education]. I really can’t say. I’d like to do a better job.”

### **LIMITED KNOWLEDGE BASE**

Based on the following comments, teachers perceive their training in multicultural education to be insufficient; this limited knowledge base is one of the reasons cited for not using multicultural children’s trade books. One teacher stated, “In the credential program, there’s not a lot covered about multicultural education.” To reinforce, another teacher stated,

I’ve had lots of professional development...Very, very little [in diversity]. I remember one class when I was getting my credential. It was called multicultural education. I don’t really remember that much except that it was all about including cultures. It was very fluffy. Since then, all professional development at school, I don’t think, really covered it. I’ve had TRIBES training that gets a little into that but not really. It’s all been literacy. Now, I’m getting my masters...There’s been almost no cultural diversity training.

Interestingly, the teachers noted even less training and professional development in selecting and using multicultural children’s literature, especially Asian-American children’s trade books. One teacher stated,

I took a class in my undergrad called Children’s Literature but now that I think about the books we read, they were pretty white. . . I wasn’t exposed to Asian-American children’s literature. In my credential program, there’s more focus on Hispanic or African-American literature, the little that we did. But, I don’t think I had any Asian-American literature exposure through training.

There was one teacher, however, who took children’s literature classes on her own; she stated,

I did have a couple of children’s literature classes as an undergrad because I like children’s literature. . . When I credentialed, I had [a professor] for the content area literacy. Having her class. . . it just helped me really get this grasp and understanding for it which I did carry to my classroom. I actually use picture books quite a bit with older students. . .

Despite her comfort level in children’s literature, this same teacher noted how little multicultural and more specifically, Asian-American children’s trade books she employed in her classroom: “[This research] makes me painfully aware of what little I have in my class to

represent. . . There's really good children's books out there and there's really bad children's books out there. And, I wanted more tools to be able to discern between the two." Member D stated,

Maybe [I need] more guidance as to how to use it in [my] curriculum without being perceived as, 'Oh, she's the Asian teacher. That's why she's doing Asian-American stuff.' I don't know. I think I would like to feel more supported in order to do it well. I just don't want to half do it. I don't know. It's probably better than not doing any of it but I don't know. . .

As intimated in this case, membership does not mean that one is knowledgeable about the topic.

Nonmember C suggested the need for more training in assuming a critical literacy when teaching multicultural children's literature:

As a reading teacher, I would hope that students and readers could become more critical and realize when this was written, who wrote it, through what lens it was written, what message it is trying to convey, what you get out of it, what you bring to it. . . I mean, that whole idea needs to be there. It's not open your mind and we're gonna pour this in and you accept it as gospel. . .

In addition to not having enough pedagogical knowledge, teachers noted that they weren't comfortable and knowledgeable about Asian-American trade books in general. A teacher, Member C, stated, "No, I wouldn't be as comfortable [teaching with Asian-American trade books] because I wouldn't have enough knowledge. . . I don't feel very comfortable teaching it." Interestingly, this participant, Member C, also stated, "I think I own a bit more Asian-American books because I am Asian-American but I still don't have that much." The nonmembers admitted to knowing very little about Asian-American trade books.

Having a limited knowledge of the available Asian-American's children's trade books inhibits them from using such texts. Member C stated,

I don't really know of any good Asian-American books that I would even buy. I know about *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* and *Kira-Kira*. There are certain ones that I read and know that I like. And, if I buy books on my own, I usually choose books that I have read or know about. I think if I knew a lot more about Asian-American literature then I would probably purchase it.

Similarly, Member D stated,

For me, I don't really know of any great stories. I know of certain. . . like *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. I know Laurence Yep. So, I know certain ones but I've never actually picked them up. I haven't chosen them for literature circle

groups. I haven't chosen them for read-alouds. . . like I had that *Kira-Kira* book sitting on my shelf as a possible read-aloud but I wanted to read it first so it's been sitting there for years ever since it came out. I would like to. I guess, I just don't know which ones to pull from, which ones would be good ones to use in the classroom.

## LIMITED TIME

Another cited reason for not using multicultural or more specifically, Asian-American children's trade books was time. First, all the teachers self-identified themselves as readers, yet they said that they didn't have time to read. One teacher stated, "I really don't have much time to read. It's really sad. . . I think [the biggest factor is] time. . . I feel like there's no time for myself...once I start a book, it's really hard for me to stop." Another teacher corroborated, "This is a lame excuse, but my time factor. I would like to go and see and read different things. I want to go to the World Beat Center, the museums. . . but I don't. It's a time factor. . . I do very little cultural things." Furthermore, another teacher stated,

I have to say that I used to spend more time in the bookstore checking out books and I used to bring in books all the time when I had the time to read the books. . . I just feel like right now, my energy is really limited which is really horrible as a teacher. I think that really is the reality.

Second, the teacher participants claimed to not have the time to navigate through the texts or learn about them. One teacher stated,

You really have to seek different, good books for different cultures. It takes a lot of energy and if you are a busy teacher or an involved teacher that time gets cut back substantially...[I have not read] as much children's literature because there's just so much of it.

## PRECEDENCE OF SCHOOL DEMANDS

Third, the teacher participants claimed that they did not have time during the instructional day to cover multicultural issues. The curriculum and core literature, which is dictated by California standards, high-stakes testing, and district-adopted pacing guides, are some of the cited reasons for not implementing Asian-American children's literature. For example, one teacher stated,

A lot of what I read is based on standards and core lit is based on social studies. So, [Asian-American children's literature] is not a big part of the curriculum. There's the Chinese railroad with California history. . . but, because of California history, I focus a lot more on Native Americans. . . [Multiculturalism] is not part of what I think is the curriculum. I think Asian-American children's literature is

kinda like technology where you're like, 'I have so many other things to do.' Yes, I think it would be good to incorporate it more and use those computers every day but your plate is so full that it's the thing that is most likely going to. . .

Because of high stakes standardized testing, the literary canon, and standards-based instruction, teachers felt like they didn't have time to effectively use Asian-American children's trade books; as a result, multiculturalism was perceived to be a separate subject and thus, pushed to the wayside.

The canon is another cited reason. A teacher noted,

I've been trying to veer from the canon as much as possible as an English teacher. It's hard because there are certain books that the district, that the school, that our English Department has said that 'You will read.' My kids have to read *The Odyssey*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet*. All written by dead white men. So, I struggle with that. . . When I did my first year of teaching at [Name] High School, I did *Farewell to Manzanar*. . . [On choosing this book] A couple of reasons. I was trying to correspond to what they were studying in American U.S. History and they were talking about WW2 and U.S. participation and I felt that looking at their history text, they weren't covering what was happening at Manzanar. So that was kind of the first reason. But then, we also have a coach, who grew up in Manzanar and, so in talking to him, I thought how powerful that would be to read *Farewell to Manzanar* and have this person come in and talk about his experiences at Manzanar and let the kids ask him questions. I felt like it was a living history thing and not just a bunch of pages but that this really did happen. So, that was my motivation behind it. . . I don't feel I have as much freedom to branch out. . . you were asking me would I expose the kids and if I had the time, you bet!

### **LACK OF EXPOSURE, ACCESS, AND AVAILABILITY**

Going along with limited knowledge base, limited time and school demands, another reason teachers cited for not using Asian-American children's trade books was due to a lack of exposure, access, and availability. Common responses were: "There's just not that much out there" and "there's just not an abundance." Without time and knowledge, teachers were not exposed to available trade books and therefore, are denied access. Member D stated that she didn't really use Asian-American children's trade books in her instruction; when asked what would encourage this particular teacher to use these books, she stated, "I think just availability. I think we need knowledge that it's out there, what good texts are out there."

Another teacher commented,

[Asian-American children's trade books are] very difficult [to implement into practice] because it's not readily available and it takes a lot of time to hunt and search out specifically non-fiction documents with a multicultural emphasis. . . If I had exposure to it. . . The young adult books I had read, I was handing them out as I had consumed them. My exposure lately has been really limited. . . some of these questions are really difficult for me to answer because I feel like I'm really limited and. . . Exposure. I really think that the crime here is that there really is not that much exposure. The librarian all the time throws across the top of my desk grammar books. . . I've never expressed to her that I want multicultural books so I'm not being exposed to them. I walk into the children's books section at Barnes & Noble and the very first thing you see is the rounder that has the holiday books on it. . . I'm not seeing Mexican-Americans, Black-American, Asian-American books for my daughter. And then, on the back wall, they have bestsellers and Newbery Award winners. It's really limited and there just is not enough exposure.

Because of their lack of exposure, knowledge and time, teachers admitted that they did not actively search out Asian-American children's trade books. For example, one teacher stated, "I don't think I've searched them out. People have either exposed them to me or I've heard about them through other things." Another teacher stated, "I don't have enough time to go out there and seek all the literature." Even still, another teacher stated, "It would be interesting to see if more of that becomes available and is out there and I just haven't found it." This teacher noted the possibility of these trade books being available but her lack of access to them.

On the other hand, all of the teachers stated that they were more likely to choose and use trade books representing other cultures, mainly African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans. One teacher noted, "I think there's more available of other cultures. . ." Another teacher stated,

Even thinking of Asian-American authors and books is really difficult for me but I can shout out Mexican-American authors and Black-American authors. Because we live near the border and we have a huge Mexican and Black population. Exposure. . . [Books about African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans are] easier to find. I hate saying that but it's easier to find. . . I think that's why there's so much Black-American literature out there because there's lots of exposure to it. To me, the issue is exposure. I don't have enough time to read everything that is out there.

Among all the teacher participants, they noted that they had the most exposure to African-American trade books. When asked which group was represented the most in school curricula, one teacher commented, "Hands-down, Black Americans." This is mainly due to

the fact that they are exposed to more of these titles and they have more access to these trade books, which are more readily available. One teacher stated,

I think a lot of the texts in our curriculum, the Houghton-Mifflin curriculum, we have lots of stories that talk about an African-American perspective. I think that maybe there's more texts on them. I don't know if that's the case or not but I feel like in my experience with the books that I have and the books that I purchase, there are more texts on African-Americans and I guess, it's just easier to pull from and use.

Similarly, another teacher stated, "It seems like what's available through the district or the titles that come across are more African-American." This particular teacher also noted the increase of Hispanic-American trade books: "This year and the last two years, a lot of my struggling readers are Latino so I have a lot of that literature. It has Spanglish in it or Spanish terms or Mexican-American authors or that kind of experience. I have a lot of that to meet their needs, to try to appeal. But, that's what's available. So, that makes a difference."

Interestingly, two teachers noted how small the population of African-Americans was compared to the texts available. One of these teachers noted,

It's funny because at our school, [African-Americans] are the smallest population and we had this big, big, big black history month because one of our PTA Presidents put it on and had a play and everything. It was just very big. . . I don't know if it's the case or not that there's just more literature. . . Like during January and February, we pull books for black history month. Our school did a big black history month thing so I pulled literature for that and shared that with the kids. And, I know Asian-Pacific Islander month is in May? April or May? But, there's not as much of a. . . I guess it's not as openly celebrated at least not in my school, not that I know of.

Another teacher commented,

A lot of the titles that come from my peers, teachers and teachers of struggling readers, are that young adult genre of a lot of African-American or urban things that my particular [Asian-American] student population, by and large, can't relate to.

## **CONSIDERATION OF STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

The teacher participants all noted that they considered student demographics, recognizing the under-representation of Asian-Americans in the texts and curricula. One of the teacher participants stated,

[My school] is close to the border so there's a good amount of Spanish-speaking students and Spanish students. But, there is also a pretty big Asian-American

population. The biggest I think is the Japanese-American population because there's a [Japanese-owned] corporation close by so we have a lot of kids who come by for four to five years and then they go back to Japan. I have a lot of Filipinos. . . With my students, I feel the need [for more representation] or I noticed that I don't have enough and it'll make me choose it.

Another teacher stated,

It's kinda funny. In the last eight years because of where I teach, there's a diverse culture where I am. . . there's a huge Asian-American population and within that, much diversity. I teach students who are Chinese, Chinese-American, Japanese, Japanese-American, Vietnamese, Vietnamese-American., Laotian, Cambodian. . . My interests is piqued in doing this [research] because of the large population of Asian-American students that I teach. . . I've learned a lot more about Asian-American culture. [My curriculum] varies year to year depending on what type of students I have and depending on how I can meet their needs.

Even though the teachers noted the under-representation of Asian-Americans in trade books, they commented on their students' lack of knowledge. When asked how they determined there wasn't enough representation, one teacher commented, "Definitely not from the kids. They've never said, 'How come you don't have enough books about me?' or anything. I think it's something that has come up to my attention every once in awhile."

Another teacher stated,

When I talked to my students, I mentioned that I [talked about under-representation in one of my graduate classes] and asked my students if they were interested in Asian-American representation and books about that. . . a lot of the kids, a couple of kids had said that they didn't look at it that way either. They didn't think that the young adult literature wasn't what they chose to read on their own so it wouldn't matter. . . I talked to my students and I said that I had just finished talking to someone who was looking at Asian-American children's literature and how there doesn't seem to be a lot of it and how they are represented in the broad range. I mentioned that to my classes. [A student] came forward and said that she was interested. So, I gave her [a book].

Teaching in Southern California, all of the teacher participants worked with diverse student populations, including a significant Asian-American population yet they still did not use Asian-American trade books in a way that is commensurate with the demographics. One teacher noted,

I think it's a real struggle in our system because in my classroom, I have ten different cultures represented and how do I address all of their needs in literature, in instruction. . . and then how do I address the needs of their parents because each parent comes with their own criteria of what education should be. I mean, I think it's a real struggle in classrooms right now especially in California and San Diego, with us being a border town. There's just so many different cultures.



In planning curriculum and selecting trade books, the teacher participants did note the importance of meeting their students' needs and interests. Because teachers did not have a strong knowledge base, they relied on students to bring in the diversity and to inform their perspectives. One teacher noted,

I like to involve the kids. Like, my first year I had a kid that was very much into his Muslim/Islamic culture and he very much wanted to share about it and I don't know what we did but we were pen pals with someone who was from a country that was Muslim. And he just shined at that moment. So, I kinda like to use the kids and go with them. I don't know. . .

### **SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS AND AMBIVALENCE ABOUT BEING A CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE TEACHER**

All of the teacher participants claimed to be culturally-responsive teachers especially in regard to addressing students' ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds; but, none of the teachers mentioned specific teaching practices or materials and curricula. As such, they seemed ambivalent when asked about its definition. Interestingly, the members seemed more ambivalent than the nonmembers. Member C stated,

I guess the way you respond to other cultures is with respect is how I think about it. And, in that way, I am. I don't think I would ever belittle another student's culture or make them feel bad about it. But, it's possible that I might ignore another culture, not on purpose...So, I am very open-minded about cultures, but I don't go out of my way to ask them or to have them share. . . I don't think any culture is better than another. I don't have any judgments like that so in that way, I guess I am culturally-responsive.

Again, teachers noted the time factor in that if they had more time and exposure, they would have more knowledge to be more culturally-responsive. Member D stated,

I try to be. I think that there's a lot of room for improvement. I think that what's difficult is having the proper resources to do it well and I think for me, I feel like I don't want to have to do it. I want to do it well. I don't want to just try it out and do it in a way that commodifies the culture. You know, I don't want it to become like ok, Chinese New Year is all about red envelopes and food and words about the new year, prosperity and all this. I guess part of me feels like I just don't want to portray it in a way where the kids come out of it not really getting the cultural significance behind it. I think if I had the time and the resources, maybe I could be a more culturally responsive teacher.

Nonmember C stated, "I would hope so. Although, we learn more every year that goes by. You don't realize what stereotypes and things that you see things through until it's right in front of you. . . I'd like to believe so. Yes." And, Nonmember D stated,

Responsive means of course, responding to cultural issues and the different cultures that are out there. I've become more culturally aware since I've been in the masters program. . . I've noticed how I respond to my black students as opposed to my white students. I've stopped making assumptions that a student is Mexican or Asian because I don't know. I've stopped making assumptions regarding ethnicity or culture.

### **TYPICAL DEFINITIONS OF ASIAN-AMERICANS**

When asked about the definition of "Asian-American," the teacher participants offered typical responses. One teacher stated, "Of people that are Asian that live in America. They could be born in America or in another Asian country but their home is now America." Similarly, another teacher stated,

I have two other students who are Chinese. . . One that has been here for a year and a half and one that is Chinese-American. Their experiences are also vastly different. One who was raised here and one who just came here. It's interesting to see how the two of them react to separate things. . . I actually see a lot of my students cringing because they don't like being referred to as Asian. I start seeing in my head the whole list of different Asian-Americans. But I also see my students who were born and raised in the country.

These teachers noted the differences between being Asian, being American-born Asian and being Asian-American.

Furthermore, teachers commented on the multiple facets of being a hyphenated identity. For example, one teacher noted,

My student, [student's name], I don't see her as Chinese-American. She's Chinese; how she conducts herself, how she dresses, how she writes, everything about her is not of an American culture. So when you tag, when you hyphen the American and tag that on, I specifically see children of immigrants who are trying to create this subculture out of two separate cultures.

Even though the discourse does not limit Asian-Americans to being children of immigrants, this teacher did note the play between two cultures that is expressed by Asian-Americans. Member D stated, "For myself, I always think of that dash that comes in between, how it's not one and not the other."

All the teacher participants were also able to cite common stereotypes of Asian-Americans mainly related to the model minority theory. Nonmember D noted, "I know the typical stereotypes. Smart students." Member C noted,

They're smart, good at school. They are--I don't know if I want to say--superficial. With kids, I tend to think quiet. . . They play the piano or violin. . . by model minority, it means that we tend to do well even though English is not their first language. They have some of the barriers that are kinda the excuses used for why Hispanics don't do well, we still tend to do well. I've heard that. Also, that we don't speak up a lot against discrimination...Overall, I feel that [Asian-Americans] come from other countries and they've done pretty well here. That's how I think about them. They still keep their culture but they seem to be able to fit into whatever America requires you to do to be successful. They're pretty good at it.

Member D noted,

[The model minority theory is] about how the stereotypes about how Asian-Americans do well. It's the model minority because it's a minority that's doing well and is comparable to whites. . . I think that while certain people can follow the trends and what the statistics say, it's a lot of pressure. I think most of the time it's a stereotype. I grew up not being terribly good at math and science. . . it's kind of unfair. . . for Asian-Americans growing up, feeling like they have to be good. People when they see you automatically thinking you're good at math and science. . . While people can follow it and fit into the stereotype, I don't think it's as general as maybe people perceive it to be.

This particular teacher was the only one to suggest the negative impact of the model minority theory.

On the other hand, there were two teachers who did make note of how the model minority theory was supported in their classrooms. One teacher, a nonmember, noted,

In the school setting, the stereotype holds true in terms of academic achievement. The quest for the grades. Pressure for grades. A lot of competition amongst themselves. And, the girls in particular are very stereotypical. Quiet, high-achieving.

Another teacher, a member, stated,

From an educator's standpoint, I know that they score higher on standardized tests. They're not a group that we talk about when we talk about the racial gap. Asian Americans are rarely talked about. They do fine in school. They're not a group that we worry about or have special instructions for.

One of the nonmembers also offered other stereotypes:

There's this stereotype of the steering wheel is taller than the Asian-American or close to the steering wheel. . . When you bow. That's a whole stereotype. Quiet, soft-spoken women. . . Here's a great one. This is not my assumption but my

friend that's Chinese says that it infuriates her when people ask her where to get the best Chinese food and she has to tell them, 'I don't like Chinese. I don't eat Chinese food. I don't like it.' People will ask her, 'Well, aren't you Chinese?' 'Yeah, but it doesn't mean I like Chinese food.' Not all Mexicans like Mexican food. That's an interesting stereotype that I had never thought of.

Even though all the participants were able to list some stereotypes, the members took particular care to note how they did not fit completely into these stereotypes. Member C stated,

Well, I guess I fit some of it but not all of it. . . Any teacher who had me all through elementary school would say, 'Yes, she's a totally typical Asian student.' I cared about school a lot and I tried really hard. I was good at math and that kind of stuff. . . I remember seeing that group of Asians and thinking that I was nothing like them.

Member D stated,

For me, I've always felt in between like I'm not completely [Asian] because I don't fit in there and I know if I went [back to] the Motherland or whatever, I don't think I would fit it. But, the American culture, too, I don't really feel like I fit in. Maybe more so than my Asian background but. . . I'm also not that good in math and science.

### **LIMITED KNOWLEDGE BASE ABOUT THE ASIAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

The teacher participants' knowledge base about the Asian-American experience seemed to be very limited. First, they seemed to know more about Chinese-American and Japanese-American populations than any other Asian-American subgroup. Furthermore, because these historical moments are included in standards, their knowledge did not extend beyond the Transcontinental Railroad and internment, respectively. One teacher commented,

I know about Japanese, I guess, recent history, with the internment camps and really not that much more. After World War 2, there was prejudice against them. I know a fair amount about the Chinese and the railroads because I teach about it. But, I don't feel like Asian-Americans are discriminated against as much as other minority groups. That's just my thinking. . . You don't hear the Rosa Parks stories or Cesar Chavez, people that are rising up against it.

Second, the members know more about their own particular Asian ethnic background than any other subgroup; but, they still admit to not knowing a lot. One member stated, "I think I know pieces here and there. . . Not as much as I like to. More about [specific Asian ethnic group's] history than any other Asian-American culture."

Third, their knowledge appeared to be a hodgepodge. A member stated, "Yeah. I think it's kinda of a mish-mash history. I get pieces of things. . ." Another member noted,

I know that in terms of religion, I don't know much about it. I know a lot of them are Buddhist but then a lot are Christian. They have a pretty strong work ethic. Family is important. Asian men are usually more doted upon by their mothers rather than daughters. Overall, they haven't progressed as far with women's liberation as we have. I see that a lot.

A nonmember stated, "The idea of a debut, idea of Girls' Day. . . all these things, they're not common. . . the idea of the debut, a cultural coming of age and those kinds of things interests me."

### **SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE BASE**

One of the major sources of knowledge for the teacher participants was their interactions with Asian-Americans. The teacher participants depended on their students to give them knowledge; the nonmembers acknowledged this more. For example, Nonmember D stated,

What I do know about, from my students, is that. . . there's a really strong emphasis on individual culture. . . Two of my girls that are Vietnamese in my 9th grade class told me that they go to school after school and learn Vietnamese language and culture. They were completely fluent in Vietnamese, in the writing and the language. I just don't see that with other cultures...because I have a huge portion of Vietnamese kids who are actually open and talk a lot about their culture. My Chinese-American students will answer questions if I ask them but they don't volunteer any information. My kid that is Laotian, he talks at all and I throw a party. Some of that is just personality. I just have more exposure [to Vietnamese culture].

When asked to identify the main knowledge source, Nonmember D stated, "From kids."

Nonmember C also stated, "Through my students. Just the idea of different cultural things. . . Having grown up in SDCS and teaching here. . . and raised Catholic. . . Filipinos and Vietnamese-Americans have a large Catholic following."

On the other hand, the members emphasized their families and their lived experiences as being a main source of knowledge. Member D stated,

I know what my parents raised me with, pieces. . . When I have children, I wonder if I'm going to be able to pass this down to them because I don't know. Like why do we do the Lunar New Year festival? I'm not going to be able to teach them Chinese because I don't speak it well enough. I would like to though and it's important to me. I just don't know how it's possible. I guess I do have more history coming from my family than I notice.

Member C stated, "I grew up in a house that had a lot of [Asian] traditions and foods. . . I only spoke [an Asian language] to my mom growing up and I was very familiar with [Asian] culture." (Similarly, a nonmember noted how she acquired a stereotype from her father, or rather how her knowledge base was initially acquired from her father: "When I saw my dad who found any woman who was Asian-looking really attractive to him. That was his thing. It was lumped together. The diversity is my focus right now. I'm looking at it.") As such, family plays an important role in indoctrinating culture and preconceptions about that culture.

However, when asked how they obtained their knowledge base about other Asian ethnicities besides their own, both the members identified the same sources as the nonmembers with equal weight. For example, all the participants depended on their intimate friends as a source of knowledge. Member C stated,

Mainly from friends that I have from those cultures. . . I'll hear things about how important food is. Or, I'll go to those friends' houses. . . just from going to their house and hearing their stories from their childhood; that's how I mostly learned about their cultures. But, I haven't learned about the history of the Chinese through them; that's from teaching. But, little cultural things. That's how I learned most of it.

Nonmember D mentioned her Asian friend several times:

I'm starting to notice subtle things and especially in talking to my friend who is [Asian] and about her experiences in the educational system and her need to please and work herself to the bone to prove that you're worthy--I think are words that she had used--and then still not feeling that it was enough.

Nonmember C also made note of the interactions with Asian-Americans as a source of knowledge:

I don't profess to know a lot. I'm just an observer. In a lot of this, I often see it not necessarily through the lens of a teacher, but as a parent with the choices my children make in their friends. Two of my kids went to or are going to UCSD with a large Asian-American population on that campus. My daughter was in a sorority as the only Caucasian. It wasn't supposed to be an Asian-American sorority but it was.

In addition to friends, cultural events were cited as sources of knowledge. One member stated, "I'll go to the Asian grocery store." A nonmember described a visit to an Asian church:

So, it was kinda of an eye-opener thing to see this whole mass in Vietnamese and then to see my students who I didn't know were Vietnamese or that they went to Catholic Church, recite in Vietnamese with all these other people.

This nonmember mentioned a teacher friend with a Vietnamese wife who explained the customs and translated the language.

Another source of knowledge was related to the media, including books, T.V. shows, movies, documentaries, etc. Member D stated,

I read books, history books but you know, of course it's from one perspective. . . Probably documentaries, television, Discovery channel. . . I don't know. I think pieces that I've kinda just picked up on throughout my education, school, history books.

Nonmember C stated, "Pretty much in my reading and newspapers and magazines and TV shows and things like that so I am aware of when mass media, pop culture and Asian-American culture collide or become news media." Nonmember D stated, "It's better now on television but, the media [is a main source of knowledge]."

Nonmember D also shared a story about the dangers of stereotyping as derived from the media:

I love the show 'MASH' but now that I think about it, that has got to generate stereotypes because it's a really specific period in time at an even that was absolutely horrifying and you're seeing one very small aspect of Korean culture. People see things out of context and make assumptions.

## **LIMITED INTERACTIONS WITH ASIAN-AMERICANS**

Even though the teacher participants noted how interacting with Asian-Americans was their main source of knowledge, three of the four teacher participants noted how very few Asian-Americans they interacted with on a daily basis. Nonmember D stated,

Outside of my students and outside of school, I'd say that my contact is fairly minimal. I don't live in a neighborhood that has a huge population of Asian-Americans. I don't operate in a circle of friends that is Asian-Americans. I had friends in high school. I think she was Chinese. It's interesting. I seem to be in more contact with people who are Chinese than I think I am. . . My daughter has a teacher who is Filipino. I don't think that I'd sit down and talk about culture with them. . . 10-15%.

Nonmember C stated,

I was raised for six years with my cousin, who was half-Japanese but she was adopted. My aunt tried to infuse some Japanese culture. Very different kinds of

thing. Things like what kinds of foods, what kinds of reading, what kinds of language, what expectations of the girls or the boys come up more now than in the past. . . My son is best friends with someone who is Filipino-American. . . My sons' girlfriends. My brother is married to a Japanese woman and they have two kids. We socially interact with them on occasion. A colleague I talk to and have lunch every day. I'm trying to think about who's Asian-American. . . I don't know. 4-5.

Members were able to mention more Asian-Americans. Member D shared the following story:

We were the only Asian family and my family opened [an Asian] restaurant. So, I ended up growing up in the restaurant, playing in the booths and messing with the waitresses and stuff. . . I don't remember having any Asian friends growing up over there. And, then coming over here, it was totally different. Everyone was [Asian]. Everyone spoke [an Asian language]. Everyone's all different colors and different races. It was a big culture change, at least for me. I can somewhat remember the moment we got off that plane and like coming to our apartment and thinking, 'I've never seen so many [Asian] people in my life.' So, it was different. . . Most of my friends are Asian-Americans. Not exclusive to [one ethnicity]. . . I don't know why most of my friends are Asian-Americans. We just happen to congregate towards each other.

Member C stated,

I have one really good Asian-American friend in San Diego. In high school, I had a lot more. Right now, I have two friends from high school that I still keep in touch with that are both [of a particular Asian ethnicity]. I feel like in high school, I had more Asian friends than white friends or that it was almost even. But, ever since I came to San Diego, I haven't really been close to any Asians except for one.

Member C quantified her interactions to six Asian-Americans.

Interestingly, Member C also made the following statement: "I think I'm the only Asian teacher at my school." Similarly, Nonmember D stated,

What I have found though in the community of readers that I exist in, first off, I'm trying to think if there are any Asian-American teachers at our school and I don't think there are. We are predominantly white with a couple of black teachers. I'm struggling to think of teachers...I think our culture reflects what we read and I don't think...Wow. I've never really thought about this but we don't have any Asian-American teachers at our school.

This limited exposure to Asian-American people suggests a limited exposure to Asian-American texts and media. The limited number of Asian-American teachers and its affect on the consumption of Asian-American trade books is also an interesting data point.



## AMBIVALENCE ABOUT CURRENT REPRESENTATIONS

Due to their lack of knowledge about and exposure to contemporary Asian-American children's trade books, the teacher participants were ambivalent about the current representations of Asian-Americans. Member C stated,

I don't know because I can only think of so few. . . I've read *Kira-Kira*, *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, *A Single Shard*, *The Jade Dragon*. . . a lot of those books took place in the past when discrimination was a little more common. . . There are definitely discussions about differences and how the protagonist gets along with other people or how she deals with being different. So, I think they're usually portrayed fairly accurately from what I remember as being Asian. . . I can't say that there's this--I guess in movies, you can almost say that there's these generalizations or typical Asian women. . . but, I couldn't say in books because I've only read about four or five so it's hard to make any generalizations.

In other words, based on this particular participant's limited experience with these texts, Member C felt that the current representations seemed to be accurate, basing this on" [her] personal experience being Asian."

Member D noted,

Let's see. I don't know. . . I think there are some cultural stereotypes that come along with it. Like, I'm thinking of *Angel Child*, *Dragon Child*. . . anyways, she had just come over and she's waiting for her mom to come over, I think that's the story line. I don't know. I feel like it kinda glorifies it a little bit.

It's interesting to note that Member D's trade book example was written in 1989 and not considered to be contemporary.

Nonmember C stated,

To a point, some of it is [accurate]. . . I think there's a range. I think there are some that are very pigeonholed: the stoic, quiet Asian-American giving up kind of thing or the reparation trying to tie into that. It's changing. So, some of it, yes and some of it is just trying to be politically correct. . . About 50/50. . . if it is personal, if it is telling how somebody felt at that time in the context of the time, then I feel like it's more accurate than somebody trying to put today's values on it. Or, try to ascribe an entire, half of the world's population or diversity to one Japanese-American people in a certain time period of experiences. . . some of it is presented like this is what we did and this is what we made of it and this is over and this was a chapter in life. And, others are poor, poor pitiful them looking back on it.

When asked to identify book titles, this participant first responded, "I can't think of the titles. . ." But, then she responded,

*Journey to Topaz*, I feel is more authentic than *Baseball Saved Us* only in that the imagery and the feelings and those kinds of things come through more as a fictional kind of piece even though it's that memoir-blur thing that is happening today. *Baseball Saved Us* just seems too neat and tidy.

Both Member D and Nonmember C complained about the representations being "too neat and tidy." Member D said of the text, *Angel Child, Dragon Child*: "I think it's a little bit too nice and neat and cookie cutter. I don't know." It's interesting to note that both *Baseball Saved Us* and *Angel Child, Dragon Child* are picture books.

Nonmember D stated,

My limited knowledge. One of my favorite books is about *Ping*, which I perceive to be very old school, traditional. I don't even know which culture it is now that I think about it. But, wearing a Mandarin buttoned down shirt with braided hair in the back, I think that just the art of that alone. . . it's either extremely traditional. . . it's not modern. I think it takes place in late 1700s, early 1800s. That's not a modern representation. 'Mulan' is not a modern or accurate representation. . . If I think back, I was in high school about the time of Tiananmen Square and so, when I think back, I do see pictures in my head of things that happened so it's either really current in the newspaper media or really traditional. There's nothing in-between.

Like the other participants, Nonmember D did not draw from an extensive bank of contemporary Asian-American children's trade books. Nonmember D did note, "I think the older you get, the more accurately it might be depicted. . ."

All the teacher participants identified the following as the most cited representations of Asian-Americans in the trade books and textbooks: Immigrants and Japanese internment. One teacher stated,

I don't see Asian-Americans in books other than being like the immigrant that like came over. Like when you read children's books, oftentimes when they talk about the characters' friends, I usually don't see like an Asian friend. At least not that I can remember off the top of my head. The ones where they're more of the main character, I think, most of the time, at least in the ones I read, they're more of the immigrant that came over, that doesn't speak English, needs to fit in, needs to learn this whole new culture type of thing.

Another teacher stated,

Wow. It's a very, very narrow lens. I really see it. . . of course, being English with a Humanities focus, it's seen more recently through the idea of, big, big deal of Japanese internment camps. I see that. That's about it, honestly. It's the Japanese-American students that I see represented in the anthologies, in the trade books that are supplemental in the reading. I don't see a lot of other

representations . . . It seems to be focused on the Japanese internment because we have a humanities focus. Very limited scope.

Again, such knowledge is reflective of not having read or been exposed to contemporary Asian-American children's trade books.

### **DISTINCTION BETWEEN IMAGES IN TRADE BOOKS VERSUS TEXTBOOKS**

The two high school teachers made a specific note of the distinction between trade books and textbooks. One participant stated, "How [Asian-Americans are] being presented in social studies textbooks is different than how a storybook might be. A storybook might be somebody who is making their money off books about historical things and they have no contact with it. I always come back to who is the person behind the story, where is it coming from, that kind of thing." Similarly, another participant stated,

The novels that I have read, I'm hoping, are a little bit more in detail about culture and things that happen in the psyche. The children's books I've read are fairly general and non-fiction books are fairly broad and sweeping. In the textbooks, I don't think that they give enough time and space to other cultures except for ours. I think they're just really broad and general.

Textbooks do come into play more at the secondary level; they are used more often than not to guide curriculum and instruction. These participants' responses suggest that the textbook representations are even more monolithic and one-dimensional than trade books.

### **STUDENTS NOT RESPONDING TO AVAILABLE REPRESENTATIONS**

All the teacher participants noted that they responded to students' needs and interests. In regard to reading choices, the teachers gauged their responses. One participant noted,

There's no response [to Asian-American representation]. It's pretty much. . . because it's always presented in some historical context, they take it as content rather than literature. Or the descriptions that we focus on for literary style are disassociated from the ethnic or cultural background.

Again, this participant further expounded upon her Asian-American students' lack of voice:

I don't think that many of my Asian-American students have shared in any way so I have no perception. The kids who are Mexican-Americans jump right in. There's Spanish words here or whatever. The kids who are Asian-Americans aren't going to say anything if there are Japanese words in it, or Mandarin, or Cantonese. They're not as likely to make that connection and it's probably because there aren't that many of them. It's limited primarily to the Japanese

internment because of the humanities focus and none of my students currently have experience with that or share about that so it doesn't come up. It just doesn't seem to come up as something different so whether it's they're reticent to share or there isn't that much or I haven't noticed it. . .

As such, the teacher participants noted the importance of connecting to students' lives. One participant stated, "I don't know if stories like *Sadako* that portray it from the child and from that perspective if the kids read it and they can understand it. So, I don't know." *Sadako* is not a contemporary Asian-American story as it describes the experience of a Japanese girl living in Japan after World War II. On why students weren't connecting to the available texts, another participant stated,

They didn't think that their particular lives would be represented in the text because they see themselves as pressured for college kind of thing and having to read things that were academic for school as opposed to trying to identify with a character in a book.

In other words, these stories did not reflect their realities nor were these stories presented in a purposeful way.

A teacher shared this particular story:

I recommended *A Single Shard* and *Kira-Kira*, but they didn't take well. . . I had students who were Asian and high readers who said they needed a book to read so I told them to read those books because they were really interesting. But they didn't finish them. Because *A Single Shard* is kinda dry and old and there really isn't that much excitement in it. . . but I liked it. I liked both of them. *Kira-Kira* I recommended to a couple of students and they haven't finished it. And so, I think I recommend those books less now. Even though the books weren't Goosebumps or Harry Potter or anything but I thought the students would find a connection because they were Asian. But if they didn't even like it, then I really don't feel like recommending it to my white students. Because I feel like if my Asian students didn't even enjoy it, then my white students would have even less reason. . . Well, we spend a lot of time in my class just reading independently books that they choose. And I often have a lot of students who don't know what to read. So, we go to the library and I help them choose a book and then, if I read a book, I'm more likely to recommend it because I know what it's about. But then, after awhile, just from teaching awhile, I know that there are certain books that kids really respond to, that they really like. . . there are certain books that...like *A Wrinkle in Time* is one of my favorite books and most of my kids can't get through it for a lot of reasons. It's really challenging. So, I try and after awhile, I just stop recommending those books because from past experience, if other kids didn't like them, then this kid won't either.

Student response is extremely important in regard to whether or not a teacher recommends and uses the book. A teacher stated,

Most of my titles, I would rather get from what my students are talking about. . . I usually buy book club titles. I usually get my ideas from students: What are you reading? What are you interested in reading? What kinds of things are you talking about? I get that diversity because I have kids whose parents are in book clubs so through their parents, through their mouths, come these titles. And then, what they're reading on the street or in other classrooms.

As these comments suggest, students' reactions and responses to various texts, especially trade books, is of high value to teachers. Thus, these trade books need to appeal to students. As such, they need to incorporate more popular and contemporary themes.

### NEED FOR MORE POPULAR TRADE BOOKS

When asked what is needed to address the needs and interests of our students, particularly of our Asian-American students, one teacher stated, "What's currently in and popular." To expound on this, another teacher participant shared the following:

I don't think [students are not choosing to read Asian-American children's trade books] because they're Asian-American. I think it's because it's too serious. Both [*Kira-Kira* and *A Single Shard*] are really serious. When my kids read *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, they liked it a lot. . . So, a lot of these books that try to be serious and try to show discrimination, the children just don't respond to them. . . *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* is a bit more popular but it really goes into a lot of these issues. . . we should have a book about an Asian-American character and it has nothing to do with Asian-American. She just happens to be Asian-American. I think even white kids would get turned off thinking that it was a different kind of book and don't want to read it. *Harry Potter* threw in that Asian-American love interest. Things like that. . . there should be books that focus on being Asian-American but more authors should throw in, or rather, have these Asian-American characters that aren't there because they are Asian-American but because they're just another character which happens to be Asian-American. Like the book would work whether they were Asian or not. . . I always remember that a *Babysitters'* book had a Japanese character in it. I just thought of that. And, that's the only book that I read when I was younger that had an Asian-American character but she's not very Asian-American. . . I didn't identify with her character at all but I remembered it. . . I don't know if authors, or Asian-American authors, feel. . . that their book is going to be in this special category and they want it to be looked upon as high quality literature which is great. And, pretty much all the books I've read that I've talked about are extremely well-written and I've enjoyed them as adults but they're not these silly, fun, *Captain Underpants* books that the kids really like. I think that the authors that write them are Asian-American and they don't want to write some stupid book. They want to write a literary book that has some merit. So, a lot of these books that out are well-written but they're not the kind of books that all the kids are crazy about.

In other words, these participants are suggesting that we need more trade books that have characters who are Asian-American but that don't necessarily have to be about Asian-Americans. A participant stated, "I kinda want [my kids] to be exposed to [cultural details] but not forced." Having a substantial body of such literature would increase exposure and was a point raised by the participants. One participant stated,

I think a variety of things need to be out there by a variety of people and we need to read a variety of things and realize that everything is through the lens of who it came from and it might be a matter of educating readers than pigeonholing writers.

Another participant stated, "So, maybe there's more. . . the more literature that is out there, then they'll be a variety of different types of stories. I guess the more books that are available, the better."

Member D stated,

I would like to see more Asian-American literature out there. It goes along with the whole Asian-Americans in the media. . . It's like everyone else seems to have penetrated the media. They take a big part of that pie and Asian-Americans have a small piece of that pie. It's so sad when people like William Hung get famous for being that stereotype and portraying Asian-Americans that way. I know there's a lot of people saying that Asian-Americans are so passive and that they don't say very much and that they just let things happen. I hope in my lifetime that I see more and more literature and more and more people in the media and movies and just out there and not just the stereotypical Bruce Lees and Jackie Chans of the world. That's my hope.

## **MAKING A CASE FOR ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S TRADE BOOKS**

Varied and multiple exposure to positive and contemporary images of Asian-Americans is perceived to be very beneficial. The teacher participants made a case for using such literature. For example, the members both shared how they did not identify with being Asian-American. Member C shared: "I'm half-[Asian] and half-white. For most of my life, I identified more with being white even though I did all that [Asian] stuff. I didn't want to be [Asian]." Member D shared:

I had this coloring book that I still have. I find it very interesting. I drew myself and I drew myself with blonde hair and blue eyes because everyone around me had blonde hair and blue eyes. . . I remember not understanding why everyone looked different than I did.

Member C noted how positively she responded to reading an Asian-American book, one that seemed representative of her experience:

When I read this book, I think it was the first children's book I read about [an Asian-American] family. Even as an adult and being comfortable with being [Asian], it was really exciting to have this. The book talks about [Asian] food or [Asian] words. In a book! I never experienced that when I was younger. It was kinda cool to have something that was part of me represented in a book. I never experienced that growing up. When I was reading it, I was thinking that I wished I read books like this when I was younger. It made me feel that I'm not the only one. It made me identify with the character so much more than I normally do. I just really enjoyed it and it made me wish that there were more books that were out there. I think that's why I was trying to recommend it to my students. I wanted them to feel that connection. But, I wonder if I had read this book when I was ten and if I would have liked it or if I would have abandoned it like my other students. . . It was an interesting experience. I don't exactly know what it did to me but I liked it. . . Most kids can relate to characters in the books they read because most of them are written about white kids or whatever. It was kind of a cool experience.

A nonmember also described some positive responses from her students reading Asian-American trade books:

I'm glad that she has gotten [the book] because maybe it'll help her become aware that there are other people who have gone through her experiences that she is going through. . . I think that she does feel kinda lonely. . . I saw my student who is [Asian]. I saw it in her backpack. Aside from the fact that I offered extra credit, I did notice that it was in her backpack.

### **AMBIVALENCE ABOUT DEFINITION OF CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

All the teacher participants expressed ambivalence about the meaning of cultural authenticity. There were a lot of pauses and uncertainties in their responses. Member C stated, "I guess in a book it'll be that the author represented the characters and their culture authentically." Member D more uncertain in her response: "That's a hard one. Um. . . I don't know. I think it's a fine line, a dance. I feel like it's a very thin line to pull across. I don't know. . . It's hard to define. . . I don't know how I would define cultural authenticity."

Nonmember C did even attempt a definition. This participant simply stated, "I don't think you can determine 100% cultural authenticity." Nonmember D reiterated this sentiment: "Well, limited in inaccuracies. Every person's experience is different even within

a particular culture so my guess is that you can't be 100% accurate all the time. . . I think that you have to account for some inaccuracies because of personal experience."

It was easier for the members to talk about literary merit than cultural authenticity. Interestingly, only the members referred to literary merit, which is worth mentioning. Member C stated, "I had them read *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. More because I think it's a great book rather than because it's Asian-American." On selecting books, Member D stated,

Like *Number of the Stars* is a really good book and I feel like it portrays the whole World War II and what was going on from the perspective of that child. I think the kids can relate to it and they can understand the story. They kinda get a glimpse of what it was like during that historical period. I think in that sense, it's a great story.

This ambivalence about the definition of cultural authenticity grouped with the teachers' limited knowledge base of selecting and using multicultural and of Asian-American children's trade books in general may be the leading cause as to why teachers do not chose to use such books. The teachers stated that they feared offending their student populations. One teacher noted,

[In regard to multicultural children's trade books,] especially if it was a book from another culture, I would want to read it first to make sure that there isn't anything that would be offensive to a student, but how would I know that? I'm also not just thinking about the student who is from that culture but a student who is reading this and learning about a new culture and reading something that is more negative.

To go along with this, another teacher added, "[My concern is]. . . how students would perceive themselves through that text's presentation of it." Similarly, another teacher stated,

It's that fine line in the classroom. When are you acknowledging and when are you insulting a culture? And, I think that sometimes that's what I experience with literature because I struggle with am I acknowledging or insulting a culture?. . . I'm not going to insult my students. . . I think that's some thing that teachers really struggle with. Trying to find authentic material that is approved of and that's not watered down.

## **MINIMAL PRESENCE IN CLASSROOM LIBRARIES**

Because teachers lack knowledge about this genre, they oftentimes do not bring these trade books into the curriculum. When asked to what extend Asian-American children's trade books were used in their classroom, Member D responded, "I haven't [used any]. . . I haven't



chosen any.” Nonmember C responded, “It’s probably in the 5%, I would say. Again, it’s real broad.” As a result, these books are relegated to specific spaces. First, in regard to physical space, these books are placed in classroom libraries, with little, if any, pitching. All the teachers claimed to have Asian-American children’s trade books in their libraries; however, they cited small numbers. Member C stated, “I have it available in my classroom library. . . . But, I don’t think that I have a good representation in my classroom library; 8-9 out of 200.” Member D stated,

I have about 10. I remember buying a pack of picture books from Scholastic that had an Asian-American theme. . . . I think that I could probably count them off on the top of my head and I think I have ten books. I know that I have at least 1500 books. So, not many.

Nonmember C stated, “There’s over 2000 books in my classroom library. There might be 4-5 [Asian-American] titles. Not very many. And, I don’t have it as a separate category.” About the number of multicultural titles in the classroom library, Nonmember C added, “I’d say maybe up to 40% or more. A lot of Latino and African-American protagonists in addition to just teenaged, young adults. . . .” Nonmember D stated, “Well, I can see one in front of my face right now but I can’t tell you the name of it. I would say probably 5%...I think I’m being generous.”

The classroom library seemed to be a place where token diversity occurs. Member C stated,

Like at school, we have a literacy coach and we’ll have discussions about how different cultures are represented in the library. We just had a charter meeting and one of the parents asked how we have diversity or how we represent different cultures in our schools and one of the things we said was our classroom libraries. So, it just comes up every once in awhile and whenever it comes up in my head, I’m like, ‘Oh, mine is probably not as good as it could be.’

In general, teachers put out the books that they are familiar with; therefore, they are informed by their cultural backgrounds and knowledge bases. Nonmember D stated,

[This research] got me thinking about what books I put out there for my kids to read. I put out there *Harry Potter* because I love Harry Potter. I put out there my favorite books. *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Harry Potter* are not exactly accurate representations of the different cultures out there.

Nonmember C claimed to have grown up as “white, lower class” and now, claims to be “white, middle class.” As a result, of the books in the classroom library, Nonmember C stated, “I do have a lot of the middle class young adult [literature].”

## USE DICTATED BY AVAILABLE SCHOOL MATERIALS

Second, Asian-American children's trade books seem to occupy space in the school curriculum as dictated by available school materials. The main sources are the textbooks and/or anthologies. Member C stated,

We have the anthology books. . . I remember last year, we read a story about something 'dragon.' It was about a Chinese character. We just recently read *Yeh-Shen*, which is the Chinese version of Cinderella. So it comes up in literature. But, more just randomly.

Nonmember C stated, "Only what's available in anthologies and things. . . district mandated type of things."

Another source comes from available core literature books. Nonmember D noted, "*Farewell to Manzanar* is the easiest to do because our school has it. It was a book that we had and it corresponded to what they were doing." Two of the teachers made note of other outside sources. One teacher stated, "A lot of the books we get, over half of the books we get, the school bought them. They haven't bought a lot of Asian-American literature. That's part of [the problem]."

## USE RELEGATED TO SUPPLEMENTAL STATUS

Third, Asian-American children's trade books seem to assume supplemental status during the instructional day. As such, the use of Asian-American children's trade books in the classroom is minimal. They are limited to book club selections, author studies, and suggested readings. For example, one of the teacher participants stated,

I had my kids do book clubs and I have several titles in my library. . . I do book talks on books to try to get them interested in them. I did a book talk on *The Jade Dragon*. Some of my students decided to read that.

Another teacher participant stated,

I know that we've done some when we do biography units, author studies. Amy Tan. Some of the students have read work by her. Some have read short stories by her. . . Other than that, nothing is coming to mind. . . I read *A Single Shard*. We shared that as one of our book club choices. . . We talked about the book club titles like *A Single Shard* and Amy Tan is an author to study. And, *Journey to Topaz* and *Baseball Saved Us* as book-shares. But, that's about it.

Using Asian-American texts as a supplement to the main anthologies and textbooks is another technique teachers employed. For example, a teacher participant stated,

I do try to supplement with short stories here and there. When you asked earlier about Asian-American books, I actually use this textbook, the company is called NextText. I have this textbook that says, *Asian-American* and one that says *Asian-American Women*. And they're all excerpts of short stories. I've tried to use some of those to help supplement. . . I have tried to incorporate Asian-American literature through the non-fiction texts: essays, historical documents. . . You know, a couple that I've used are just Asian-American authors not necessarily about Asians, specifically women. Usually writing about their experience as women in the country so that's kinda two separate issues. The biggest one lately that we've been working on is this document about China.

Assuming an additive approach to multicultural education, the members both shared how they would fit in Asian-American children's trade books whenever it comes up, especially during holidays. Member C stated,

Only when it really comes up. I mainly think in social studies is where it comes up the most or I guess in literature. But then, our literature is usually connected to our social studies. If it happens to come up in the curriculum or holidays, I'll try to address it. . . And, it's mainly about seeing multiple perspectives.

Member D stated, "I try to, whenever there's a holiday or whenever stuff comes up, I try to incorporate something. I'll read to them a short little read aloud or something."

### **READING AND MEMBER-CHECKING AS MAIN INTERNAL SOURCES FOR JUDGING CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY**

This minimal use of Asian-American children's trade books seems to be a result of the teachers' ambiguity about the meaning of cultural authenticity. Even though the teacher participants expressed difficulty in defining this concept, they were able to cite sources of how they judged, or evaluated cultural authenticity in trade books. All the teachers cited the actual reading and member-checking as their main sources. However, the members depended on reading more and the nonmembers depended on member-checking more.

On the actual reading of trade books to determine cultural authenticity, Member C stated, "Mainly, I read them or if someone recommends them to me or if they have some kind of award. That's definitely going to get me more interested in them. But, mainly, I read them." Member D stated, "I kinda like to read the books before I give them to the kids and

sometimes, it doesn't always happen but I just want to make sure that, you know, the kids will get [something] out of the book. . ."

Both the nonmembers relied heavily on their students to member-check the accuracy of trade books and texts. Nonmember C stated,

Sometimes, I'll just ask my students who might be able to relate to it. I've done that quite a bit actually. Is this real? Does this seem real? I'm very sensitive to how people perceive people. . . I want to see what someone of that culture may say. But then again, I don't think of one person as representative of their culture.

This particular participant noted the importance of cross-referencing. Nonmember C continued,

There's generalities across. . . I don't think you can make broad sweeping gestures. Just little minutia things. Like I knew yesterday was Girls' Day in Japan because I read it somewhere and I had forgotten about it and I talked to one of my students who was Japanese, not Japanese-American but Japanese.

Nonmember D shared a similar story:

When we were reading that text about China, my students who I knew were from China, I asked them, 'Is this culturally accurate?' You get the opinions from people who are part of that culture. . . we started by asking questions of the two students who were Chinese. so we were having these open discussions about the texts. . . We talked a little about that. It was very cool because my two Chinese girls explained what kowtowing was to the class and talked about Chinese culture. [A student] actually said that this was pretty accurate which made me feel good that the college board is not using inaccurate pieces. . .

Nonmember D described another instance: "I did ask my two Chinese-American students if this was accurate . . ." Nonmember D admitted to depending on the responses of her students; she stated,

Kids who are part of that culture, you can see in their face when they relate and associate with something that is happening in the text. . . If I read a book that ends up not being authentic, like maybe I think it is and it's not, the kids will let you know. They do. . . So, that's another way I judge authenticity.

The members also noted the importance of member-checking. There is this common theme of deference to members. Member D stated, "In terms of cultural authenticity, I think sometimes the best person to ask about a culture is a person of that culture." Member D provided a personal example: "I'm the only [Asian]-American person at my school and people will come to me and ask me, 'Does this mean. . . ? Is this okay?' I appreciate that because that means that they don't want to misrepresent something."

## USE OF EXTERNAL SOURCES FOR JUDGING CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY

In regard to determining the cultural authenticity of a trade book, all the teacher participants cited outside sources such as recommendations, awards, websites, reviews, etc. Although these sources were influential, they were not as influential as reading and member-checking. Recommendations were the main external source as indicated by a teacher participant: "You know, a lot of it is based on recommendations. If I have someone who says to me, 'This is a really good book.' I'm inclined to use it." Another participant stated, "Recommendations from people, peers, someone who is doing a workshop, someone who is in class. . . a lot of the ones coming across from my desk are recommended by students. . . District-suggested, school site-suggested, peer-suggested."

Awards also seem to be a source of cultural authenticity for teachers. One teacher participant stated,

*A Single Shard.* We have this thing called Battle of the Books where the librarians in Chula Vista choose several books for the kids to read and that was one. Plus, it won the Newbery. That's why I read *Kira-Kira*. I try to read all the Newbery books.

Similarly, another teacher participant stated, "Because it was the Newbery award winner and then, when I actually got it, I didn't know that it was based on an Asian-American theme so that was kind of interesting. . ."

Reviews are another source. A teacher participant stated,

Reviews. If I'm getting really serious about a book I'm reading and it's not something I've read before, reviews. Especially as I get toward the end of the year and we have more time to do more fun stuff, I'll go on amazon.com and I'll read some reviews on it and I'll just see if it's worth my time.

Another participant stated,

I look far and beyond what it is to be a representation of cultural authenticity. I want to see what the author says. I want to see what the reviews say. . . I look for the author's note or the foreword or that type of thing. I look at reviews of the book. Where it's coming from.

Teachers mentioned other external sources. One participant mentioned websites: "You look at different websites that are there. The generic websites like the ALA websites and things." One participant mentioned blurbs in purchasing catalogs such as Scholastic:

Most of the books I purchase are from Scholastic. So, I'll read the little blurb there and if it has to do with Asian-Americans, I'll be like okay. And, sometimes,

you know, like if it feels like a glorified version or culturally commodified version of Asian-American culture. . . . Mostly, I buy my books from Scholastic so most of the blurbs in there, if they intrigue me or ring true, I'll purchase it.

Another participant added, "I also look if it's on the recommended list. Bookstores and of course, there are books on display."

## **CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY ENTRUSTED TO AUTHORS**

In all of the teacher participants' responses, there seemed to be a trust in the credibility of the author. There was deference to the author's assumed knowledge base; this could also mainly be due to the limited knowledge base of the teachers. Member C stated,

[A culturally authentic book means] that the author who is writing about them knew what he or she was talking about and that someone else reading it who was a member of that culture could identify with it and make a lot of connections to it. It's not just based on stereotypes. I almost think that a person who wrote a culturally authentic book would almost have to be of that culture or have a lot of experience with people of that culture.

In describing the author of a culturally authentic trade book, Nonmember C stated,

Somebody who is time-immersed in a culture and writes of it. Time observing a culture. I'm talking time-time. A year living among. Ten years working among. Somebody who is of that culture. And then, I expect some qualifiers. Like Gary Soto. He says that, 'I'm not Mexican. I'm not Latino--whatever that is. I'm not South American. I'm Mexican-American from Fresno and that's the experience I write from.' So, when that's thrown out there like that, to me, that's cultural authenticity.

Nonmember C continued to expound upon this concept of trusting the author:

I think [ethnicity] is a factor [in evaluating cultural authenticity] but no where near as strong as a factor as the writing of it. I think. Because I would hope that I could read writing from any number of places and try to figure out if it might be useful or if the cultural authenticity is a factor in understanding the texts for the purposes of how I want to use it for teaching.

Similarly, Nonmember D stated,

My guess is that authenticity means that this person has done their research. That they established, somehow, whether it's on the back pamphlet, you know the backside of the book, where they got their information from, who they are or inside the text, they create that ethos for themselves. It has to be created through the text. . . A lot is plausible and I think that's why it is difficult for people who are not part of a culture to determine if something is culturally authentic.

## IMPORTANCE OF INSIDER PERSPECTIVES

All the teacher participants noted the importance of having an insider perspective, especially in the judging and/or evaluating of cultural authenticity. Member C stated,

I honestly don't think that someone who is not a member of that culture could really determine the cultural authenticity of the book unless they had a lot of experience with that culture. I don't see how they would know. If I read a book about Hispanics or African-Americans, I couldn't really tell how authentic it was. I would probably say, 'Oh, this is weird.' If it wasn't culturally authentic, I might be able to question it but I wouldn't know for sure because I'm not a member of that culture. I think the reader plays a really big role. If I heard a white person say that *Kira-Kira* isn't culturally authentic, I'd say that they didn't know what they were talking about because they don't.

Member D stated,

I think [ethnicity] does play an important role. . . It depends on the person too because we all have our different experiences and depending on your experience, you might not know as much about [a particular culture]. Like I don't know very much about Mexican-American history and I don't know very much about African-American history either. There's lots of gaps in my understanding. . . I think that your own identity stems from your ethnicity, where you come from, where your parents come from, how you grew up. I think that you really can't ignore that when it comes to being sensitive to or having people be sensitive to your culture and you understanding different cultures. It's such a big part of who you are. It's really tough to ignore it.

Nonmember C stated, "I'm not in a position to be able to [judge cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's trade books]." Similarly, Nonmember D stated, "I don't know if I am a worthy judge of that because I'm not Asian-American. I'm white-American so I'm not sure I can judge that. Entertainment-wise. . ." When directly asked, both nonmembers deferred their authority to make judgments on the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's trade books.

## MEMBERSHIP AND CREDIBILITY OF AUTHOR

Membership has its privileges. A member of a particular culture is automatically assumed to have an insider perspective and to have credence. All of the teacher participants perceived a member's book to be more authentic than a nonmember. As such, the ethnicity of the author matters. These sentiments were reflected in both the members' and nonmembers' responses.

For example, Member C stated,

Definitely the Asian-American author. . . it's not even like a male or a female because you read a lot of books that are written by a female but the main character is a male. But, I feel like in our lives, we have a lot of interactions with people of the opposite sex and we know a lot of how they think and how society treats them. I have very little idea of how races feel or how they are treated. I would never dream of writing a story from the perspective of someone who was African-American or Hispanic. I would rather write a story from the perspective of a male before I do that. I think that I'd be better at it. It's a very personal experience and it's really hard for someone who is not a part of that culture to understand what it is like. . . If it's the author of the book, I think [ethnicity] makes a huge difference. If I were to read a Japanese-American children's book, or any book, and it was written by a Japanese author, I don't think that I would doubt its cultural authenticity at all. Even if there were things in it that I didn't completely agree with, I'd go, 'Oh, maybe that was just something that I didn't experience.' I wouldn't question it.

Member D stated,

When I picked up *Kira-Kira*, that was one of the first things I looked at to see if it was written by an Asian-American. . . I think [I would choose] an Asian-American text written by an Asian-American author. . . [A member will] have more of an understanding of the little things that may be behind the scenes. Like the little things that people don't see, that the general public doesn't understand. Like for me, I know what it feels with my parents growing up and how hard they worked and how they valued my education. I don't know if people would understand that from reading a book about Asian-Americans or if they would understand that from even being my friend. I don't know if I would share that with them. I think it would be really hard to portray it accurately. I think they could portray it in a way that could be fun to read, maybe, or interesting to an audience. But, I don't know how culturally authentic it would be. . . Because if [Kadohata] is writing using her personal knowledge, her family background, her family stories or friends' stories, then maybe it would be more culturally authentic than let's say if I were to write about Japanese culture. . . There's no other way to explain it unless you experience it.

Nonmember C stated,

In general, one written by one of that culture might be--odds are--more authentic. I mean, it just makes more sense. . . Well, it's a factor that I can't really relate to because I'm of the dominant culture if you are going to use those words. So, I think it has to be part of it. I don't think you can truly write of an African-American perspective if you are not of that culture. Asian-American, the same type of thing, I would imagine. I can only imagine because of the dearth of availability of such things. But, when I talk to my students, their experiences are very different from my students who are not Asian-Americans so I wonder. . . it has to be a factor. . . but there are exceptions.

Nonmember D stated,



I'd have to say if I am forced into choosing and I'm just looking into titles, Asian-American author. . . Because I'm going to make the assumption that they have more experience with that culture. That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm right but I'm going to make that assumption. . . We can make some wild assumptions about how people writing from their own cultures might be more passionate about it. The story that you tell of your Chinese-American upbringing might be more compelling than my depiction of your Chinese-American upbringing. But, in the reading end, there is going to be more connections. If you write about your Southern California experience as opposed to your Virginia experiences, I might have an easier time relating to it. . . It gets kind of weird because I know that you had talked about your name, Loh, and that you could attach that to a text and it would lend it more credence, or credibility. And, it's the way our culture is. America. Definitely. We would see that. Just like if you attach biography to something as a label, we assume that it is real even if somebody embellishes for profit or whatever reason. It's a factor but I don't know how strong of a factor.

## **NONMEMBERSHIP AND WRITING AUTHENTICALLY**

All the teacher participants recognized that nonmembers could write culturally authentic trade books; however, they also came to consensus regarding the difficulty of such a task. In other words, the teacher participants conceded that nonmembers could write culturally-authentic Asian-American trade books if they obtained an insider perspective but, members have a head start as it is assumed that they are also cultural insiders.

Member C stated,

It's possible but I think it's a lot harder. Some times, I wonder why an author would even want to attempt that. It would be so much work. . . they have to really do their research or grow up with many friends or family members some how like if you were an adopted member of some family. If you weren't that ethnicity, I think you'd have a pretty good idea of what it's like or if you studied it especially if it was a book that took place a long time ago in history, you have to study that culture. . . But then, if the book, like *Memoirs of a Geisha* was written by this white guy, I would read that with a more critical eye. But I remember reading it and thinking that it was pretty right on. So, if someone is not a member of that culture, I wouldn't automatically say that there is no way that it could be culturally authentic. It can but I am more likely to be more critical of it.

Member D stated,

I think if a person is knowledgeable enough, like they have enough friends, or they studied it, or they experienced it firsthand like going abroad; from that perspective, you could probably write a story. I don't think it would be as culturally authentic as if it were from a person who actually grew up like that but I

think they could come pretty close. . . I think it's tough. I think it's different; they could say, 'Hey, my parents are immigrants too and I understand what it feels like to be a first generation.' I feel like it's different for different cultures. I feel like Asian immigrants have a different experience than African-Americans or Irish-Americans. I guess it would depend on whether they know enough [information] or portrayed it in a way that wasn't glorified and perfect and happy or too unhappy or too extreme one way or another. It's tough. . . I feel like I would have to go study and read up and it would be my perspective on that. . . I think it has to do with the whole thinking that if they are writing about the experience that they would have more of an insider's perspective and maybe be able to portray it in a way that doesn't do a disservice. Actually portraying it in a real way and not just for the sake of story-telling or making a culture looking like this.

Nonmember C stated,

Yes, I think it can be. I think observers can. But I think that needs to be part of how it's presented too. . . When you're writing, writers write about what they know but also writers have other factors beyond their ethnic identity that influence what they want to say to some body, I would imagine and I would also imagine that your ethnic identity is not the sole lens from which you represent your ideas. . . I think if somebody had lived in and was immersed in, like if you grew up in Little Saigon in Orange County and you were not Vietnamese, that's where you grew up and that's where your friends were and that's where you went to school and church, you might be able to write a little about that, a lot about that, I would think. If that was your best friend and you went through the angst of the teen years with somebody outside of your culture, you might be in a position to write about it, you might. I don't see myself in a position to write. . .

Nonmember D stated,

Yes. If they are well-versed in it. I don't see why they couldn't. If they know what they are talking about, yes. There are all sorts of people who do it all the time. And, I'm speaking to fiction and non-fiction. Historians all the time research other cultures and write about it and are considered world-renown experts. So, yes. . . There are certain markers or cues in cultures that you just can't avoid. That doesn't mean that I can't become an expert on a culture and totally submerge myself but there will be things about my upbringing that will reflect in my writing and in my depiction of another culture. That doesn't mean that it's not culturally accurate but there are ways in which I construct my sentence that mark me as white, middle class. I think there are some unavoidable things. I don't think they necessarily take away or distracts from cultural authenticity but I think it makes it obvious that it was written by someone from another culture.

On the notion of whether or not nonmembers were "stealing" stories from other cultures, the teacher participants were ambivalent. A member responded,

I don't know. I think it would really depend on whether or not the person really, you know, is very knowledgeable. I'm sure that there are lots of people out there

who I'm sure are more knowledgeable about Asian-Americans than even I am. They might be nonmembers. . .

A nonmember responded, "I don't think that we'd have any history books if that were true. I think a lot of our popular literature would not be around either. I don't think you can pigeonhole literature in that way."

## RECOMMENDATION CYCLE

Recommendations have already been previously described as a main external source for determining cultural authenticity meaning that if the book received a positive response from an insider or member then the book is deemed to be authentic. Recommendations have also been previously described as a main selection tool as well meaning that teachers are more likely to read and employ books that are recommended to them. As such, recommendations are important. Nonmember D stated, "That whole culture of readers. Some books, kids have handed to me and said that I should read it. Some books, adults have handed to me and said that I should read this. . . I'd say one out of ten [are recommended books]." The teacher participants have not been exposed to and recommended Asian-American children's trade books. One participant stated, "Not Asian-American lit, necessarily. In fact, I can honestly say none has come that way." As such, they do not read these books and ultimately, they do not use or recommend these books to their students.

First, the teacher participants admitted to not having read a lot of Asian-American children's trade books. One participant in trying to recall the Asian-American children's trade books read stated,

*Sadako*. . . I remember reading that growing up in 4th or 5th grade. I know there's *Dragonwings*. It's sitting in my library but I've never read it. I just bought the *Kite Fighters*. I haven't read that though. And, *The Single Shard*. I haven't read that. I haven't read really many of them.

It's important to note that none of these titles are contemporary and that three out of the four titles take place in Asia, not the United States.

Another participant stated,

Do I read [Asian-American literature]? Yes. As it comes across my desk or classroom, which is not much as you know. . . *Baseball Saved Us* as a children's book and as a stepping stone for talking about that time in our history. Amy Tan. I've read a couple of her novels. It's pretty limited. . . Out of what I read as a reader? Wow. [Long pause] 1-2%...I read a lot, especially during the summer. I read a lot of junk lit. I don't look at what I choose based on what culture it comes

from. So, it's a matter of whether I want to be entertained or if it is on the bestseller list or somebody recommends it.

Another participant stated,

I'm running through the rolodex of books in my head. I have to be honest with you. I'm ashamed to say, not often. . . Amy Tan. *The Joy Luck Club*. *Sagwa*. My daughter loves that one. I'm not sure how accurate that is but my daughter adores it. . . I think I've read the--I almost feel like I'm admitting something bad--but there's this book called *Ping the Duck*. That was one of mine as a kid. That I would make my mom read to me all the time. It's about this Chinese boy who gets in trouble and I just remember him with the soap in his mouth and my mom just found it and gave it to me. My daughter has looked at it a couple of times. . . I mean, it's limited. . .

However, the members are more likely to read and recommend such books. Member C stated,

If I am choosing a book for my own enjoyment, if it takes place in [Asia] or has [an Asian] author--I'm definitely more biased toward [specific Asian ethnicity] literature--I'm more likely to want to read it. That's definitely something to get me more interested in the book. I'm pretty positive that I read more [Asian-American] literature than the average person my age. With children's literature, it's kinda similar. I don't really seek it out but I think I am more likely to pick a book with [an Asian-American] character or author given a choice. I think that's probably more true now than a couple years ago.

Member D recalled reading a lot of Asian-American texts during college:

More so when I was in college than I do now. . . In college, I was really involved in the Asian-Pacific Islander Student Alliance so I was really gung-ho about that for awhile. I read a lot of books then in college. . .

Second, not having read a lot of these trade books, these teacher participants are not able to recommend them. All but one of the teacher participants admitted to not interacting with Asian-Americans on a regular basis. As such, they are denied another point of contact. Once titles were exposed to them, both the nonmembers specifically noted how they read and recommended Asian-American children's trade books. Nonmember C stated, "I know that I got recommended a book title by you and I don't remember the title. I gave it one of my students. . . one of my girls read it and gave it back to me and thought it was interesting."

Nonmember D stated,

I'm trying to put out there more books. After you came and talked to us, I actually went to my 9th graders and based on the conversations we had is the only reason why I can say this, I have a kid that is Laotian. A kid that is Chinese. A couple of students that are Vietnamese. One's that Mexican and Filipino. And, I had suggested your book. . . So, I had brought up your book because I have this group

of girls in my 9th grade seminar class that I think would really benefit from reading a book about young adult issues, multicultural issues, especially after what you said in class. . . You handed this book to me and I'm going to read it and pass it along to my kids because it's been handed to me and I've been exposed to it. . .

The recommendation cycle is as follows: Teachers don't read Asian-American children's trade books and as a result, they don't recommend them to other teachers or to students. And, because they don't recommend them, these books are not being read. And, because they are not being read, they are not being exposed to teachers and as a result, teacher don't read them. The idea is that teachers recommend books to students once they are exposed. Teachers serve as the point of contact; they play an influential role in exposing students to Asian-American children's literature.

### **SUMMARY: TEACHER INTERVIEWS**

In identifying the factors that informed their perspectives about Asian-American children's literature, the teachers cited their limited knowledge bases and the limited amount of time they had to increase their knowledge. In general, the teachers, both members and nonmembers, were (1) ambivalent about multicultural education and literature and (2) ambivalent about being a culturally-responsive teacher. Again, this ambivalence seemed to be related to the time factor, which came up a lot in the interviews. The teachers felt that school demands consumed most of their time; as a result, they expressed a lack of exposure and access to Asian-American children's literature. In regard to Asian-American trade books, the teachers would use what was readily available at their school sites, which was limited in scope. Overall, the teachers did not seem to be knowledgeable about trade books reflecting contemporary realities of Asian-Americans; however, the members seemed to know more Asian-American titles than the nonmembers. The teachers, however, did consider the demographics of the students and expressed a need for more Asian-American trade books in schools.

In determining their current preconceptions about Asian-Americans, the teachers held typical definitions and stereotypes of Asian-Americans, mostly in alignment with the model minority theory. All the teacher participants, including the members, expressed limited knowledge bases about the Asian-American experience; however, the members' seemed to be more confident in their knowledge bases about their own ethnicity. The teachers cited the

following as sources of knowledge: intimate friends, students, attendance at cultural events, and the media. Even though friends were determined to be the main source of knowledge, interestingly, only one member claimed to have regular interactions with Asian-Americans. Such a limited knowledge and experience base could be a main contributor to why the teachers were ambivalent about the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's literature. The teacher participants distinguished between images in trade books versus textbooks, the latter of which they have more access to. The teachers claimed that their students were not responding to the available representations and thus, there was a need for more popular, mainstream trade books featuring Asian-Americans and/or the Asian-American experience.

In describing if and how cultural authenticity was evaluated in Asian-American children's literature, the teachers, more so than the authors, were ambivalent about the concept of cultural authenticity. Again, the teachers contributed this to their lack of time and knowledge. Because of their ambivalence about cultural authenticity, their interactions with Asian-American children's trade books were limited to available school materials; as such, these books have a minimal presence in the classrooms and when they are used, they were relegated to supplemental status. The teachers were hesitant to use Asian-American books in their classrooms that were not deemed to be culturally authentic, relying on school-sanctioned materials instead. Even though the teachers were hesitant to judge cultural authenticity, they did note the use of two types of sources for such determinations: (1) internal sources such as reading and member-checking, and (2) external sources such as recommendations, awards, reviews, websites, etc. Interestingly, in the case of the former, members relied more on the actual reading of the texts and nonmembers relied more on member-checking.

In discovering the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity, the teachers' perceptions revealed that the cultural authenticity of a trade book relied heavily on the credibility of the authors. Furthermore, authors who are members were perceived to naturally have more of an insider perspective and thus, their work was deemed to be more authentic. However, there was recognition that authors who are nonmembers could write culturally authentic trade books if they did their research and if they were culturally immersed. One of the main findings from the teacher interviews was the importance of the

recommendation cycle. Because teachers are ambivalent about judging cultural authenticity, they depend on recommendations. In turn, they recommend trade books to their students. But, if Asian-American trade books are not being read, then they can't be recommended and are thus, excluded from the cycle.

In general, I found that the lack of consumption or use of Asian-American children's literature by the teachers is more of an issue than the quantity and quality of such books.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **BACKGROUND ISSUES**

The multi-ethnic diversity in the United States has increased and as a result, school populations have become more ethnically and linguistically diverse. Despite this, the research data demonstrates that authors of color and multicultural literature continue to be under-represented. However, the need to recognize and understand the importance of multicultural literature in classroom practice has grown as school communities have developed into ethnically diverse and multilingual communities. In response to changing student demographics, pedagogy has become more culturally-responsive; as such, the multicultural literature market has increased. Such an increase can be attributed to changing instructional practices which encourage the use of trade books in the classroom in conjunction with teacher preparation programs which also promote the use of such books. But, even with this growing popularity and increased availability, teachers are still not consuming these trade books to the extent needed to reflect a truly pluralistic society. There is research (Bishop, 1992; Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002) suggesting that teachers are hesitant to use multicultural trade books due to a lack of knowledge related to cultural authenticity; this study also found that teachers are wanting in terms of time and exposure, which contributes to their limited knowledge about Asian-American children's literature in that they did not have the time to expose themselves to and learn about this genre. As such, a major problem still exists: How can we help teachers better use Asian-American children's trade books? Secondly, how can we help teachers evaluate whether or not a trade book is culturally authentic?

My motivation for doing this research was to seek a working definition of cultural authenticity germane to the Asian-American experience. In doing so, I also wanted to support the increase of the quality and quantity of Asian-American children's trade books and to make a strong case for the continued production and consumption of Asian-American children's literature. When I began this study, the only bases for my assumptions were my



own experiences as a classroom teacher and as a published author. I wondered if there were commonalities shared by other teachers and authors in regard to cultural authenticity as related to Asian-American children's literature.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to systematically analyze Asian-American children's trade books in terms of their cultural authenticity using a critical literacy lens. In addition, I studied the perceptions of teachers and authors in regards to cultural authenticity, including the perspectives of members and nonmembers.

The specific objectives of this research were:

- To identify how Asian-Americans are currently represented in children's trade books and to determine how culturally authentic these representations are;
- To identify teachers' perceptions of these representations;
- To identify authors' perceptions of these representations; and,
- To identify how insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was an effort to draw out the perceptions and perspectives of teachers and authors regarding the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's literature. This led to the decision to conduct two phases of data collection: (1) content analyses of 15 trade books and (2) qualitative interviews of four authors (producers) and four teachers (consumers). In addition to interview protocols (see Appendix C and D), a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F) was designed to provide personal and professional information about the participants. A participant profile was completed based on this demographic questionnaire.

Identifying study participants was a little challenging because I was specifically looking for an equal representation of members and nonmembers who fulfilled my selection criteria. However, there was a high degree of interest in this study as observed by the participants' thoughtful responses, personal notes and expressions of interest and encouragement from participants, and most importantly, by the 100% return rate of requested questionnaires, etc. It is important to note that I interviewed both members and nonmembers and analyzed books written by both members and nonmembers. Using a theoretical

framework of critical literacy as the main guiding principle and a qualitative research approach, I examined the intersections of power and perspective to determine their influences on people's judgment of what is culturally authentic.

For my data analysis, there were also two phases: (1) content analyses of trade books, and (2) interview analyses of teachers and authors. Descriptive statistics and a concept-ordered matrix were used to analyze and summarize the data gathered in this study. The results of this study were presented in the following forms.

- A descriptive record of major themes and findings;
- An annotated bibliography of Asian-American children's trade books used in the study;
- A list of suggested protocol questions that teachers can use to evaluate Asian-American children's trade books; and,
- A list of recommendations for teachers, teacher educators and authors to increase the production and consumption of high-quality Asian-American children's trade books.

To reiterate, not only does my study have multiple data sources as illustrated in the Triangulation (see Figure 1 as seen on page 65) in terms of teacher interviews, author interviews, and a content analyses of Asian-American children's trade books, but I also have multiple data sources in terms of perspectives of different individuals, including my perspective and the perspective of teachers and authors as well as the perspectives of members and nonmembers.

### **SUMMARY OF STUDY**

In this study, the content analyses and qualitative interviews were utilized to provide a range of ideas about the current preconceptions of Asian-American children's trade books by producers and consumers as well as the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books, especially in regard to cultural authenticity. The hope is that the data derived from this study will increase the production and consumption of Asian-American children's literature, specifically the use of such trade books in school classrooms.

Analyzing across the multiple data sources, which included the recording forms, open-ended protocols, forced-choice protocols, and qualitative interviews, several big patterns were discerned. The content analyses and participant responses were aggregated by analyzing the responses in order to address this study's main objectives:

- To identify how Asian-Americans are currently represented in children's trade books and to determine how culturally authentic these representations are;
- To identify teachers' perceptions of these representations;
- To identify authors' perceptions of these representations; and,
- To identify how insider and/or outsider perspectives and membership and/or nonmembership influence these perceptions.

Reframed, these objectives were also the initial research questions for this study.

These themes are further explicated in the following paragraphs.

### **Question 1: How Are Asian-Americans Currently Represented in Children's Trade Books and How Culturally Authentic Are These Representations?**

Based upon the trade books used in this study, the contemporary Asian-American children's trade books that are currently available and that were published in the last decade appear to be realistic and authentic. As such, there is a strong possibility that positive images of Asian-Americans in the contemporary body of children's literature sans picture books are increasing. It is important to note that the trade books used in this study could be found in natural sources such as libraries, bookstores, amazon.com, etc.

As determined specifically by the forced-choice protocol, 91% of the selected trade books did not have stereotypical images of Asian-Americans; as such, given substantial access to Asian-American children's trade books, children would be positively affected by the representations in these trade books. As derived from the forced-choice protocol, about 40% of the contemporary trade books in the research sample conveyed Asian-Americans as exceptionally smart.

The interview participants shared common preconceptions of Asian-Americans, especially in regard to how well they performed in school. Although these model minority stereotypes were cited images, the content analyses as a whole, as determined by the open-ended protocols, forced-choice protocols, and anecdotal notes revealed that the current representations did not rely on such stereotypes or caricatures. Even if Asian-American characters performed well in school, they were not presented one-dimensionally. For example as derived from the anecdotal notes, in *The Homework Machine* (Gutman, 2006), the Asian-American protagonist Brenton Damagatchi is a nerd who is good in math and science; however, the story has very few, if any, cultural markers and Brenton is described as

having mainstream problems with friendships and girls. As such, his character is much more than the token model minority.

The other major stereotype of Asian-Americans often featured in trade books is that of the “perpetual foreigner,” an image which appears to be decreasing in today’s contemporary stories. In the past, Asian-American children’s literature would employ “broken English” as a marker of being an immigrant, or foreigner. Question 12 of the forced-choice protocol looked specifically at how dialogue or “broken English” was portrayed in the selected trade books. There were 11 positive responses and four negative responses. Again, the four negative responses were “Not determinable” as the Asian-American experience was not a central theme and/or the Asian-American characters were of the third or fourth generations where there would be no evidence of “broken English.” This issue of dialogue is particularly pertinent to me. As an insider, I am very sensitive to how “broken English” is portrayed in trade books. If done unnaturally, the dialogue is offensive and thus, stereotypical. As such, because of the minimal presence of “broken English,” it is possible to suggest that the “perpetual foreigner” image is diminishing.

The Asian-Americans currently represented in the trade books selected for study are not necessarily children of immigrants and therefore, have been Americanized. Since only three trade books in the research sample featured the theme of immigration, this appears to be a fading image in contemporary trade books. This is interesting to note because immigration has consistently been a major theme in Asian-American children’s literature. Looking at contemporary trade books and considering current immigration patterns, it does make sense that immigration themes in Asian-American children’s literature have decreased in their prevalence, especially since current Asian-American student populations are American-born and belong to, at least, the second or third generations. Today’s Asian-American youth still contend with identity issues but they do not face the language barriers or culture shock of their predecessors, who were first-generation immigrants. Instead of immigration, there seems to be an increase of themes of biculturalism and adoption.

Today’s Asian-Americans have fewer ties to the heritage culture and thus, cultural markers such as food, language and customs, are less of a presence in their daily lives; as a result, contemporary trade books, as based on this sample, seem to follow this pattern of

subtlety presenting cultural markers. These cultural markers are presented as part of the fabric of the story and not necessarily as the story. Such representations are more representative of the contemporary experiences of today's third, fourth, fifth generation of Asian-Americans who are living in the United States than the stories about immigration and/or internment; on that note, the content analyses also suggested that current representations of Asian-Americans are not tied to a historical event like Japanese internment or in relation to another person, as they were in the past. Unfortunately, the teacher participants, as garnered from the qualitative interviews, noted how these immigration and internment stories are still prevalent in the available school texts and trade books.

The data from the content analyses also suggested that the more contemporary trade books are less didactic; as aforementioned, cultural markers as well as the culture are not forced or "in the reader's face." Instead, there is an emphasis on the story rather than the culture; in fact, the author and teacher participants agreed on their preference for such stories, stories that appeal to a broad public. As determined by the open-ended protocol, 14 out of the 15 selected trade books addressed general audiences; as such, one could conjecture that contemporary Asian-American trade books are making an effort to be more pluralistic in order to reach a wider reading public or rather, consumers. In fact, in order to access and interest this wider reading public, especially students, some of the interview participants suggested that Asian-American children's trade books assume a more popular approach. For example, one teacher participant stated how students, especially Asian-American students, would respond better to trade books that were more humorous and contemporary in theme and not so "literary." This participant also mentioned the need for more stories that have Asian-American characters but that do not necessarily describe an Asian-American experience.

In general, the contemporary Asian-American children's trade books selected for the content analyses talked about Asian-Americans as opposed to talking to Asian-Americans, as determined by the open-ended protocol and anecdotal notes. Bishop's study found that most of the African-American trade books talked to African-Americans from an Anglo-American perspective; hence, they were more didactic in nature and less authentic in representation (Sims, 1982). In that most of the trade books chosen in this sample were written for general audiences especially Asian-Americans; these trade books described both a human and

Asian-American experience, and were informed by an Asian-American insider perspective. As determined by the open-ended protocol, the majority of the trade books, ten out of 15 or about 66%, were informed by an Asian-American insider perspective, which essentially means that the author gave evidence of detailed knowledge of the culture about which he/she was writing. The good news is that such books are on the rise and hopefully, will become the standard. Interestingly, all ten of these trade books were written by members. The interviews with the authors also supported this notion of more members writing about their own culture, as more trade books are published by members.

In this similar vein of detailing an Asian-American perspective within the framework of a general experience, it seems like the authors and teachers are proposing that Asian-American children's literature becomes more a part of the American narrative, more mainstream, instead of a separate category; this was determined by their responses in the qualitative interviews. For the most part as determined by the content analyses, Asian-Americans are portrayed as a part of the American mainstream; for example, they are not solely living in Chinatowns and they are not all depicted as immigrants. As aforementioned, this notion of Asian-American literature as a separate category did come up in the interviews repeatedly. The authors, in their interviews, stated that they did not specifically write with the intention of being placed in a separate category labeled "Asian-American." Similarly, the teachers, in their interviews, also intimated that they would rather not categorize such books according to ethnicity; however, in not doing so, they would not be exposed to it meaning that the teachers would probably seek out such literature to an even lesser degree than they currently do. Having these trade books labeled as Asian-American at least gives these books a special recognition that may stand out to teachers. Also, because the curriculum dictates much of what is being taught in schools, genre studies is a popular pedagogical approach; in the interviews, the teachers cited how school demands take precedence over things such as increasing knowledge about Asian-American trade books. Making the study of the Asian-American children's literature genre an option for teachers may increase the use of such books in the classrooms. Thus, such categorization is necessary until the general body of literature becomes inundated with Asian-American representations.

As all the interview participants indicated, there was a strong desire to mainstream the Asian-American experience. Having stated this, there was also recognition of Asian-

Americans having a unique perspective, different from other ethnic groups and from the mainstream; however, there was a preference for seeing Asian-Americans as having commonalities with the majority of the population. The interview participants suggested that Asian-Americans not be portrayed as a special group outside of the American narrative but rather, as having a unique perspective within the American narrative. As such, the majority of the selected trade books in the content analyses, specifically nine out of 15, interpreted, or rather, described the Asian-American experience as being both a human experience and an Asian-American experience. Again, this goes along with the current trend of appealing to a broader audience. This also aligns with the general climate of Asian-American politics, which assumes more of an assimilative approach than other minority groups.

Even though the genre of Asian-American children's literature is growing in numbers, the number is still not commensurate with the Asian-American student population in schools as determined by the literature review, content analyses, and teacher interviews. Consumers have more difficulty finding access to such books than producers as their knowledge bases are more limited. Teachers are not as aware of the market and therefore, do not expose students to this genre. Having a substantial body of Asian-American children's trade books in regards to quantity is equally as important as quality, more specifically in attending to cultural authenticity and positive representations. Presenting Asian-Americans more positively and in more contemporary settings and experiences may increase the positive perceptions of Asian-Americans, as they will become more visible and more multi-faceted. Considering the varied perspectives of the interview participants, authors and teachers as well as members and nonmembers, they were fairly positive about the current representations, especially in comparison to past decades. However, the participants, especially the teachers, also admitted to not having a large knowledge base of these books, meaning that they haven't read a substantial body of books to qualify them to answer this question. The authors have more knowledge about the availability of Asian-American children's trade books than the teachers and the members more than the nonmembers. Overall, there is a lack of knowledge about Asian-American children's trade books. The teachers cited exposure as their main obstacle. Getting the available trade books into the hands of teachers seems to be a major finding of this study. Based on their responses, teachers needed to be exposed to Asian-American children's trade books; furthermore, they

needed to have more access, meaning these trade books needed to be readily available in order for the teachers to use them.

The quality and quantity of Asian-American children's literature has increased, especially in recent years as more books are being made available. However, as aforementioned several times, a substantial body of Asian-American children's trade books is still needed in order to convey multiple conceptions of contemporary Asian-Americans. Furthermore, looking at intended grade levels allowed me to assess the areas that may need more representation. Based on the recording forms used to garner information about the data sample, I found that five or 1/3 of the selected trade books were written for grades 4-7, suggesting that there are more Asian-American trade books available for upper elementary student populations. For grades 6-8 or the middle school population, there were two books available from my sample and three trade books were available for both the grades 3-5 and the grade 8-12 student populations. Only one trade book out of my sample was intended for grades 1-3; this makes sense since picture books rather than chapter books are more predominantly used for this population. Having stated that, I contend that we need more chapter books representing this age group since there are students in grades 1-3 reading chapter books. In addition, from my experience as a practitioner, most students self-select and read books featuring protagonists who are of their same age or older but not really younger than them; so, we need more books featuring Asian-American protagonists of all ages. It's important to saturate all the children's literature markets from picture books to mid-grade chapter books to young adult novels with a substantive body of Asian-American literature. The more trade books there are, the more images there will be; and the more images, the less likely one will stereotype. The market may be increasing in supply but the demand is not commensurate and without demand, supply diminishes.

Furthermore, given my sample, there seems to be more Asian-American trade books written in the latter half of the past decade than in the first half, which seems to correlate with market trends suggesting that the quantity of Asian-American trade books has increased, albeit slowly, as the years progress. The positive trends in the Asian-American children's literature market could also be attributed to Asian-American trade books winning the Newbery Award.



In addition, this research sample correlates to market trends in that there are more trade books available about the Chinese-American and Japanese-American experiences, respectively. The Chinese-American experience has the most exposure in that those trade books represented 60% of my sample. Interestingly but not surprisingly, members wrote about their own ethnicity; for example, Joyce Lee Wong (2005) is Chinese-American and she wrote about a Chinese-American whereas Linda Sue Park (2005) is a Korean-American and she wrote about a Korean-American. Of the selected trade books, there was only one character who was bicultural, specifically half-Japanese and half-Jewish (Werlin, 2001) and one character who was adopted (Smith, 2003). Considering the increase of picture books featuring such characters, I predict that the themes of biculturalism and adoption will be more popular in the multicultural and Asian-American children's literature market.

## **Question 2: What Are Teachers' Perceptions of These Representations?**

As determined by the teacher interviews, the teacher participants seemed to be less knowledgeable about the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books than the authors; and the nonmembers were less knowledgeable than the members. In regard to Asian-American children's literature in general, the teachers' confessed to not knowing very much; the knowledge that they did have was dictated by what was made available at the school site and district-adopted curricula. Anthologies and textbooks were the main vehicle for dissemination in regard to the textual representations of Asian-Americans in schools, especially in secondary schools. Such materials are limited to immigration and internment experiences; as such, teachers knew even less about the representations of contemporary experiences of Asian-Americans in trade books.

Teachers' limited knowledge bases are mainly due to their lack of exposure to such books. Not being exposed to these books, they do not read, recommend or employ Asian-American children's trade books in their instruction. As teachers are the main point of contact in the reading choices of children, not exposing teachers to the availability of trade books in this genre is also limiting such exposure to children. So, even though there are trade books available in this genre, as the content analyses suggest, teachers are not exposed to them and thus, do not make them available or accessible to their students. Teachers noted

occasions in which they used Asian-American children's trade books once they were exposed to them and once they were made available to them.

According to data garnered from the teacher interviews, Asian-American children's trade books are currently being excluded from the "Recommendation Cycle." People, including other colleagues, students, etc., do not recommend Asian-American children's trade books to teachers; thus, teachers are not exposed to trade books in this genre and as a result, they do not read them. Because the teachers are not exposed to these books, they do not purchase them and do not recommend them to their students. The students do not read them because they are not been exposed to them. There are other factors contributing to this cycle. For example, as determined by the interviews, members are more likely to read Asian-American children's literature and if teachers have limited interactions with Asian-Americans, then they will also have limited exposure to such books. Thus, limited knowledge and limited exposure negatively affect the consumption of Asian-American children's trade books.

In addition to a lack of exposure, the teacher participants cited several other reasons for their limited knowledge bases; all of which related to time. Over and over again, teachers described the problems that time posed. Because of time demands on the school day as dictated by standards and high-stakes testing, teachers did not feel like they had enough time during the instructional day to address multiculturalism, which includes Asian-American experiences. As such, they perceived the inclusion of Asian-American voices as a separate entity to the core academic subjects. Teachers admitted to needing more training on how to effectively incorporate multicultural issues. This lack of professional development was another cited reason for their limited knowledge base.

Not only did teachers cite that they did not have enough time to search out these books, but they also claimed to not have enough time to read the books. Teachers wanted to read books before using them in their classrooms or recommending them to their students. The teachers intimated that their instructional demands, as dictated by standards and textbooks, did not necessarily require them to incorporate Asian-American children's literature into their curriculums; as such, they did not take the time and effort needed to find high-quality, culturally authentic trade books. They did not have the time to do this navigating. Without a tool to determine cultural authenticity and without having the time to

actually read trade books in this genre, the teachers expressed hesitancy in using trade books for fear of offending a culture by choosing an inauthentic trade book. They'd rather not use Asian-American children's trade books at all than risk using an offensive one. The nonmembers expressed more anxiety assessing cultural authenticity because of their lack of an insider perspective. Essentially, teachers claimed that they did not have the time to expand their knowledge bases, above and beyond what is available to them at their school sites. I would also contend that the teachers would also claim to not have the time to use a heuristic for evaluating cultural authenticity if they were given one; as such, teachers would prefer annotated lists and recommendations.

Because of their limited knowledge bases about Asian-American children's literature, teachers relegated such books to the margins of the instructional day. These books are positioned in such a way that they are not part of the academic mainstream. For example, teachers would use Asian-American children's trade books as book clubs, book talks, and as choices in the classroom library. Interestingly, all the teachers admitted to having few Asian-American children's trade books in their libraries; contemporary titles would be an even smaller number. The one trade book that was cited several times as a core literature book, meaning that it was required reading and taught to the entire class, was *Farewell to Manzanar*, which is about the Japanese internment and thus, not a contemporary representation.

In considering their knowledge bases about Asian-Americans in general, the participants cited the following as sources of information: people, books, college courses, and media including T.V., documentaries, and movies. Their interactions with Asian-Americans, especially their students, provided the most knowledge. Because they teach in Southern California, all the teachers served diverse student populations. Oftentimes, the only exposure to Asian-Americans that these teachers, especially the nonmembers, have is with their students. The nonmembers learned the most about Asian-Americans from their students; whereas, the members learned the most about Asian-Americans from their family and friends. However, all the teachers considered the needs and interests of their Asian-American student populations; as such, all the teachers wanted to learn more about the Asian-American experience and to incorporate trade books representing such an experience; however, time was the main reason cited for not doing these things.

### **Question 3: What Are Authors' Perceptions of These Representations?**

Interestingly, both the nonmembers were former teachers before becoming writers; as such, they used their experiences working with Asian-American students to authenticate their representations. According to the author interviews, interacting with people from a particular culture was cited as the most effective method of obtaining an insider perspective, which is needed to authenticate a work. These people included students, friends, family, and other experts or gatekeepers; experts and gatekeepers were not necessarily personally connected to the authors. In some cases especially when writing about a culture or event outside of their knowledge base, the authors had to interview and immerse themselves among cultural insiders and/or members, people who have expertise with the details of that particular experience.

In addition to people, the authors employed other sources to authenticate their work. They immersed themselves in the culture either by traveling and/or participating in cultural events. They conducted extensive research via the internet, which although may not necessarily be factual, it is a good source for natural information. They also conducted research by reading both narrative and expository texts about the culture and/or experience. The authors cited the importance of reading in the genre in which one writes. They also watched movies and other media. Furthermore, authors, especially, nonmembers practiced member-checking, meaning they had members check their work for accuracy and authenticity. Because authors take tremendous effort in authenticating their work, they entrusted that other authors did the same; as such, they put a lot of stock in the credibility of the author. As it is, the author participants believed the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books to be positive and accurate.

The author participants did make reference to some changes in this genre. First, there are more members, Asian-Americans, writing Asian-American children's trade books; whereas, in the past, there were more nonmembers writing these trade books. As noted in the content analyses, 11 out of the 15 selected trade books were written by members. This suggested that in comparison to past trends, more members are writing about their own cultures and/or that more members are getting published. Actually, I had a more difficult time finding books written by nonmembers that fit my inclusion criteria. Today, it appears

that we have greater access to Asian-American trade books written by Asian-Americans than in the past. The members also seemed to have built a network, a community of readers and writers. They know each other and mentor other Asian-American writers. The hope is that they build a solid presence in the children's trade books industry. Three of the four author participants directly mentioned a niche in the current market for Asian-American children's trade books; thus, there are more opportunities available for Asian-American authors. As part of the younger generation of Asian-American authors, I observed that these authors have paved the way, creating a viable market place for this genre. In order to perpetuate the growing response to Asian-American children's literature, an author participant noted the importance of building networks of support:

The second change cited by the author participants was that the authors seem to be taking more control over the representations of Asian-Americans. The members seemed to have more personal power to defend their cultures than the nonmembers; however, the nonmembers were able to check sources and perform member-checks in order to validate their power. The authors' responses suggested to me that these authors resisted being defined by dominant culture and stereotypes, seeking to control the authenticity and/or the experience they have portrayed.

The third change cited by the author participants was that Asian-American children's trade books used to be more didactic, focusing on telling a story about Asian-Americans; but, now the contemporary trade books are more focused on describing a human experience as told from an Asian-American perspective. As such, they are less didactic and more natural. As determined by the content analyses, the selected trade books do not necessarily teach about a culture in general terms as much as reflect an experience in a culture. Going along with this notion of telling universal stories rather than just Asian-American stories, the author participants' responses suggested that they have resisted being pigeonholed; rather than being identified as an Asian-American author or having their books categorized as Asian-American, these authors would rather have their books be a part of the mainstream. That being said, the authors did not mind having themselves or their books identified as being Asian-American, just as long as that was not the only label. Nonmembers, more than the members, relied heavily on what they considered to be universal feelings shared by all

children and teenagers. This could be because of their acknowledgement of how readers may perceive their credibility.

Considering universalities in human experience, the author participants made a point that all writers write outside of their identifiable groups. For example, women write from the male perspective and vice versa. However, the point was made that writing out of gender is not as hard as writing out of culture because of the frequency in which we interact with the opposite sex; interestingly, this point was also reiterated in the teacher interviews. Regardless of the gender or culture represented, all of the author participants seemed to focus more on telling a good story with cultural authenticity weaved into this; in other words, a book should be of high literary merit and thus, being culturally authentic is assumed. Because the major book awards such as the Newbery specifically address the quality of the writing, literary merit seemed to take precedent.

#### **Question 4: How Do Insider and/or Outsider Perspectives and Membership and/or Nonmembership Influence These Perceptions?**

As evidenced in the teacher and author interviews, both the author and teacher participants, inclusive of members and nonmembers, deemed the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books to be positive and accurate. However, even though both groups expressed ambiguity in defining cultural authenticity, they were even more ambiguous about evaluating, or assessing cultural authenticity. Essentially, they deferred to the author's ability to accurately represent the culture and the character. And, to add to that, membership matters. All the interview participants gave more credence to members, who have an assumed knowledge base as well as an assumed insider perspective.

Given the decrease in stereotypical images of the model minority and "perpetual foreigner," the content analyses found little discrepancies in how an Asian-American experience was conveyed. In examining cultural authenticity, the representations seemed to be authentic, in that there weren't any jarring details or caricatures. These details seem to be the main determining factor in evaluating cultural authenticity. According to the interview participants, cultural authenticity is represented in the details. In trying to define cultural authenticity, the interview participants noted the importance of authentic facts and details. How these facts and details are obtained (i.e. research, cultural immersion, etc.) was easily

cited by both the author and teacher participants; however, how these facts and details are evaluated and who determines the authenticity of these facts and details were more difficult questions for the interview participants to answer. And, that's where the ambivalence lies. The data derived from the qualitative interviews suggested that consuming or evaluating cultural authenticity is more difficult than producing it. When asked about the cultural authenticity of their books, the author participants expressed confidence in their authenticating work in that they relied on their research and knowledge claiming their books to be authentic; but when asked about judging, they deferred to the credibility of the author and to the reader responses. In determining cultural authenticity, the ideal reader, whose judgment matters, is a member with an insider perspective. According to all the study participants, it would seem insider perspectives and/or membership matters more in evaluating cultural authenticity than in writing it; authors were more confident in their abilities to create an authentic story than in their ability to judge another culture's authentic representation. In Leung's (2003) study of bicultural perspectives on a text about an American in China, she found that ethnic identity matters in their responses. She states, "Knowledge of Chinese culture, stage of ethnic identity development, personality traits, and prior experiences with the genre of fictional autobiography was found to be major factors contributing to differences in responses" (para. 1). But, even with an insider perspective, it was difficult for the interview participants to evaluate cultural authenticity. Instead of citing examples of cultural authenticity, they were more comfortable citing non-examples. All the participants who claimed to have membership and/or insider perspectives stated that they were able to tell when something was wrong more so than when something was right.

The interview participants gave the majority of the responsibility of a trade book's cultural authenticity to the authors; even the author participants held other authors' responsible. The authors were given credit for authenticating the cultural details. The authors cited specific steps they took to authenticate their work. To reiterate, such steps included member-checking, researching, and collaborating and/or interviewing members of that culture. Since determining cultural authenticity was constantly put off onto others, the data seems to suggest that none of the interview participants were confident in their own determinations of authenticity. Originally, I had set out to find a concrete definition of cultural authenticity; however, I found, instead, that cultural authenticity is dynamic and is

difficult to define. In this case, for teachers, cultural authenticity is mainly about trust: Trust in the credibility of the author as the main determining factor as well as trust in other sources. I have categorized these sources into three groups: external, internal, and natural. External sources include reviews, recommendations, and awards; there was preference given to recommendations from members and/or cultural insiders. Internal sources include reader response and member-checking. Natural sources consist of comparisons and contrasts transacted between a reader who is an insider and the actual text. In determining cultural authenticity, the teacher participants claimed to use a combination of these sources; however, doing so requires time and effort, which teachers have cited as reasons for not consuming Asian-American children's trade books.

Interestingly, even though all the interview participants acknowledged the ability of nonmembers to produce culturally-authentic Asian-American children's trade books, they gave more credit to members than nonmembers. All the interview participants stated that if they had to choose, they would deem a book written by a member to be more authentic than a book written by a nonmember. In addition, they all stated that it would be more difficult for a nonmember to represent the authentic details necessary for a culturally-authentic book. As such, the role of ethnicity matters in how books are perceived and received; as nonmembers have been writing outside of their cultural groups and have received critical acclaim for doing so, ethnicity or membership is not a requisite. Writing Asian-American stories is not the sole domain of Asian-Americans or rather, of members; however, an insider Asian-American perspective is needed in order to write and judge authenticity. Interestingly, nonmember authors relied more on member-checking when authenticating their work and nonmember teachers relied more on member-checking when assessing authenticity.

An important point that was noted by both author and teacher participants was that an author's membership does not ensure authenticity. According to the content analyses, the one trade book that did not merit a positive response in the area of literary merit was written by a member and written several years ago, in the beginning of the decade used in the inclusion criteria. I contend that the genre has changed and the author's writing style probably reflected his/her time period. A competitive market does influence writing; since there seems to be more Asian-American trade books available, writers have to stay abreast of literary trends and styles. Furthermore, it should not be taken for granted that members can write



multicultural literature; first and foremost, they must be able to write. Overall, literary merit seemed to be a more important factor to the participants than cultural authenticity in regard to representation. Both the authors and teachers intimated that they were more concerned about how well a book is written; the question of how well the culture is represented is subsumed under this umbrella. If the story is told well, then the representation is more likely to be deemed authentic. It is assumed that the cultural details are accurate.

Both members and nonmembers need to research their topics and immerse themselves in the culture of which they are writing. The objective is to increase the amount of high-quality, culturally-authentic Asian-American children's literature; by invalidating the work of nonmembers just for being nonmembers, we may be unnecessarily decreasing the number of available resources and subverting the need for high quality books in this genre. The underlying issue is the extent to which the ethnicity or race of the author affects the text. In outlining definitions of high quality multicultural literature, rarely is the race of the author identified, which seems to suggest that race may not play as important a role in determining the quality of the text. However, it does play a role in the perception of the text.

According to the interviews, one's culture and personal experiences do significantly add to the content and quality of the text so being a member makes it easier; but, again, an insider perspective is more important and can be obtained. In order to write effectively about a culture outside of your own, there needs to be a commitment and/or passion for that culture; the nonmember authors in the study seemed to be much more concerned about authenticity and "getting it right" than the members. They took more steps in authenticating their work and conducted more member checks. On the other hand, member authors were more concerned about being pigeonholed as ethnic writers. Thus, all of the author participants focused on writing a human experience; however, the nonmember authors seemed to focus on this more, which makes sense since they are more likely to be perceived as cultural outsiders. That being stated, the nonmembers seemed to take great efforts to acquire insider perspectives. As such, a very interesting finding is that an insider is not necessarily a member, but a person who is familiar with the culture.

The responses of the interview participants indicated that there needs to be a reconceptualization of membership. First, membership specifically refers to one's ethnic and/or cultural background. A member is someone who shares the same physical and/or

cultural traits and behaviors as a particular group of people. A member is usually born into a particular group and as a result, assumes an insider perspective of the subtle nuances of that group. However, there can be adopted or honorary members; in these cases, someone is immersed wholly in another culture such as by being adopted into or being married into that culture. Second, an insider perspective can be obtained by nonmembers via research, interactions with people, etc. As aforementioned, such an insider perspective is required in order to write Asian-American children's trade books and to assess Asian-American children's trade books. It is interesting to note that not all members will have an insider perspective; for example, an Asian-American adopted by Caucasian parents will not have the familiarity with the Asian-American culture needed to assume an insider perspective. As such, I argue that perspective is more important than membership in that the two terms may not necessarily be synonymous as is generally assumed.

The issue of membership also comes into play in regard to the content of the trade book. The interview participants, especially the teachers, indicated that a need for more Asian-Americans featured in a popular context. For example, *The Homework Machine* (Gutman, 2006) features Brenton Damagatchi, a genius who invents a homework machine. He is also a Japanese-American. In this story, membership is not an issue as there is no evidence of Brenton's cultural background beyond his name and his picture on the front cover of the book. In fact, one can question whether or not his character had to be Asian-American. In actuality, Brenton's character could be of another nationality. Brenton's being Japanese-American, however, gives Asian-Americans more representation in children's trade books. Although not a major point of dissension, there were questions brought up by a few of the interview participants as to whether or not such stories can even be considered "Asian-American." Given the importance of quality and quantity, I contend that these books, as long as the images are not negative or stereotypical, should be included in the genre as Asian-Americans need to be perceived as part of the mainstream American narrative. Furthermore, until there exists a large body of Asian-American children's literature, these trade books need to be included in the genre.

## MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this section summarizes the major findings of this study. They are as follows:

- The current representations of Asian-Americans in contemporary children's trade books may be changing in a positive way, as the images appear to be realistic and authentic. As such, the current children's book market is conducive to the growth and development of Asian-American children's literature, in that there is a need and viable market for more stories reflecting the contemporary realities of Asian-Americans.
- The contemporary Asian-American children's trade books analyzed in this study conveyed a general human experience as told from an Asian-American perspective. As such, I determined that a characteristic of a high-quality Asian-American trade book is one in which the cultural markers are woven naturally in the story. Furthermore, the details describing the nuances of a culture largely determine a multicultural trade book's cultural authenticity, as judged by a cultural insider.
- Originally, I thought that the limited use of Asian-American children's trade books were related more to problems with the quantity and quality of such books; however, as a result of this study, I learned that the problem lies more with consumption than production. There are Asian-American children's trade books available for teachers to use. However, teachers are not adequately using the available Asian-American children's trade books, mainly due to lack of exposure, time, and availability. Essentially, teachers do not have the time to expose themselves to the available trade books. The implication is that we need to do a better job of getting these trade books into the hands of teachers.
- Given the demands on their time, recommendations seem to be the main source for exposing teachers to books and for teachers to use in order to evaluate cultural authenticity; as such, the "Recommendation Cycle" plays a major role in the consumption of Asian-American children's literature. Basically, teachers are not recommending these books to students because they, themselves, are not being recommended these books. This, in turn, affects authors as demand for these books decrease due to lack of exposure.
- Teachers expressed ambivalence about the definition of cultural authenticity; this ambivalence may be a reason why teachers do not use Asian-American children's trade books. Teachers expressed hesitation in using multicultural literature for fear of insulting members of the culture as well as the culture, itself; and since they did not have the time or knowledge to determine authenticity, they chose not to use the books.
- In operationalizing a definition of cultural authenticity, teachers and authors expressed hesitancy and ambivalence in doing so; however, the participants were able to agree on two things: (1) cultural authenticity is contextualized by politics and history and is not just a given feature of visible markers such as race, ethnicity, gender, even though there are cultural markers present such as food, traditions, and

language and (2) cultural authenticity is the accurate representation of a particular culture, inclusive of its people and lived experience, as determined by a cultural insider.

- Although the interview participants were hesitant to define cultural authenticity, they did cite three main sources from which they drew to determine cultural authenticity: external, internal, and natural. External sources include reviews, recommendations, and awards; there was preference given to recommendations from members and/or cultural insiders. Internal sources included reading and member-checking; members relied more on reading and nonmembers relied more on member-checking. Natural sources consisted of comparisons and contrasts transacted between a reader who is an insider and the actual text. In determining cultural authenticity, the participants claimed to use a combination of these sources; doing so required time and effort, which teachers have cited as reasons for not consuming Asian-American children's trade books.
- None of the participants were confident in their determinations of authenticity; as such, membership has its benefits. The author's credibility and mainly, the author's membership played an influential role in the perception of a trade book's cultural authenticity for both the teacher and author participants. All of the participants noted that given a choice, they would deem a member's book to be more authentic than that of a nonmember. Automatic credibility is given to members because of their assumed lived experiences and assumed knowledge bases.
- Another important factor of cultural authenticity relates to literary merit. Literary merit seems to take precedence over cultural authenticity in that first and foremost in all of the participants' responses was the quality of the writing. Accurately representing a culture is important but telling a good story is essential.
- Based on the results of the qualitative interviews, there needs to be a reconceptualization of membership and perspectives, with more emphasis on the latter. As such, the production and evaluation of cultural authenticity depends largely on insider perspectives, which can be obtained in a variety of ways: (1) membership in the culture, (2) extensive research which includes reading books in that particular genre and about that particular culture, (3) cultural immersion via traveling, participation in cultural events, and/or (4) member-checking. Experience, research, and a personal investment were deemed to be more important factors than ethnicity or rather, membership.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHERS**

As indicated in my findings, the problem is not so much with the quantity and quality of books as I had originally thought but with the lack of consumption. Many school districts today are very cognizant of the needs of a diverse student population. Tenets of multicultural education including cultural sensitivity and awareness are espoused along with culturally-responsive instructional strategies. Multicultural literature, especially African-American and Hispanic-American literature, is increasingly becoming a part of the

canon and school curricula; teachers are aware of the benefits of using such literature. This is no longer a topic of debate. Leung (2003) states:

Cross-cultural literature provides opportunities for children to examine cultural issues and historical events from different perspectives. However, because these texts can give biased or one-sided presentations of cultural and historical experiences, it is important that teachers provide guidance to students as they read these works. (p. 2)

This guidance is what is lacking. Educators know that using these books are beneficial; however, they do not know how to effectively change their practices and curriculums in order to maximize the benefits of these trade books.

First, teachers and school leaders need to keep abreast of the availability of contemporary multicultural children's literature, especially Asian-American children's trade books since this genre is not as well represented in schools as African-American and Hispanic-American books. Teachers need to participate in a community of readers and share recommendations and reviews. They also need to be more aware of small presses, since most multicultural children's literature is disseminated by these presses.

Second, teachers need to include a substantial number of Asian-American children's trade books in their classroom libraries. Teachers and students need to read a body of literature and not just use one or two trade books of a particular culture. Boutte (2002) notes the importance of having an accessible collection of books, one covering wide range of topics, etc.; he refers to having a "balanced collection" (p. 151) as no one book will provide a complete picture. In order to get at a comprehensive view, there needs to be a substantial body of Asian-American children's literature. Students need books that represent their realities. The research on reader response (Galda & Beach, 2001) supports the use of curricula and materials reflecting the lived experiences of our students.

Third, teachers need to assume more of a critical literacy approach when reading and teaching texts; in doing so, critical literacy can be an important tool for teachers and students to learn more about marginalized voices and cultures, such as Asian-Americans.

On the same note, the fourth recommendation is that teachers should not be afraid to use Asian-American children's books for fear of offending. Employing a critical literacy lens, these books could offer important teachable moments. The point is not to remove books but to examine them for biases. Critical literacy allows for the recognition of ideologies, stereotypes and biases, acknowledging multiple views and perspectives on a variety of topics.

Fifth, teachers need to set aside time to examine their preconceptions about Asian-Americans; this reflection may help teachers overcome some of their hesitancies in using Asian-American children's literature. Mendoza and Reese (2001) state, "Teachers may be less vulnerable to the pitfalls if they are aware of deficiencies in their schooling, of the nature of white privilege, and of their own racial identity development" (p. 31). Similarly, Travers (as cited by DeKay, 1996) stated, "What is read, how it is read, whether and how it is discussed, and the teacher's beliefs about reading, learning, and literature all influence the experience of a child with a text" (p. 4); as such, this scholar found that teachers' behaviors and attitudes toward poetry have a greater impact on students' attitudes than specific methods of instruction.

Sixth, teachers need to reflect on their instructional practices in regard to the delivery of Asian-American children's trade books. For examples, teachers need to host discussions and response activities that foster diversity and empowerment; and, they need to recognize the important role they play in fostering how students respond to various images, including trade books. Galda and Beach (2001) cite a number of studies showing how instructional practices and classroom contexts shape student responses; they stress the importance of interpretative communities of practice and in building prior knowledge and cultural identities.

More specifically, teachers can easily implement the effective instructional practices such as book clubs, which is the seventh recommendation. Book clubs promote shared social thinking and allow participants to construct sound beliefs (Galda & Beach, 2001); they are also important for building cultural identities.

Eighth, teachers should encourage students to write responses as well via journaling, etc. Rosenblatt (2004), the reader response guru, writes, "When a reader describes, responds to, or interprets a work--that is, speaks or writes about a transaction with a text--a new text is being produced" (p. 1380).

Ninth, teachers need to take the time to expose themselves to Asian-American children's literature; teachers can also learn to be more creative about their time. They can do this by having students engage in book talks, or rather, book pitches, about Asian-American children's literature. In doing so, teachers and students can expose themselves to potential new titles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHER EDUCATORS

Because of the important role teachers play in exposing (or not exposing) students to Asian-American children's literature, it is pertinent to consider the role of teacher educators. As a result of my study, I discovered that the main problem is getting Asian-American children's trade books into the hands of teachers; as such, a major finding of this study is that teachers are not adequately using the available Asian-American children's trade books, mainly due to lack of exposure. Even though the teachers and the authors in the study expressed positive comments about the current representations of Asian-American children's trade books, the participants, especially the teachers, expressed a limited knowledge base and exposure to such books. All participants indicated that they would read and consume these books if they were exposed to them. Teachers indicated that they did not have time to read or search out Asian-American children's trade books; thus, they relied mostly on recommendations, their main source of exposure. Not having access and exposure to contemporary titles, teachers did not use or recommend Asian-American children's trade books, which are then, excluded from the recommendation cycle and thus, excluded from school curriculums. Not only do teachers need to be exposed to such trade books, but they also need more training and resources on how to use them. Thus, teacher educators can serve a crucial role in two ways: (1) Teacher educators can expose teachers to Asian-American children's trade books, and (2) Teacher educators can provide the necessary professional development.

It is my recommendation that teacher educators require teachers to read Asian-American children's trade books; a possible assignment would be to develop annotated lists which can then be posted on the internet for public perusal. In methodology classes, teacher educators can also require teachers to include the use of such trade books in their lesson plans. In order to teach Asian-American children's trade books, teacher educators must also read such trade books. Thus, the recommendation cycle can be initiated by teacher educators.

It is also my recommendation that teacher educators train teachers on how to use Asian-American children's literature. Using the tenets of multicultural education and reader response, teacher educators can provide guiding discussion questions, literature circle models, etc. In addition, teacher educators can engage teachers in the process of evaluating

cultural authenticity; teachers could read books and discuss the merit of the texts via a book club format. The teacher educator could use the forced-choice protocol (see Appendix A) as a springboard for discussions. Providing teachers opportunities to engage with Asian-American children's literature in such a way may pique their interest; it will definitely make them aware of the availability of Asian-American children's trade books.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO AUTHORS

Even though the current status of Asian-American children's literature seems to be positive, there is still room for much more growth and development. As determined by this study, the production of Asian-American children's trade books does not seem to be as problematic as its consumption; however, the contemporary realities of the Asian-American experience are constantly changing, as they are influenced by time and culture. Thus, authors need to maintain the momentum and push forward.

First, authors should continue to read and write high-quality, culturally authentic Asian-American children's contemporary realistic fiction trade books and contribute in the establishment of a substantive body of literature. There needs to be more writers writing from an Asian-American perspective.

Second, authors need to write books for all ages. Students should have access to grade-appropriate reading materials. Authors must consider the readability of their texts and provide trade books for all levels of readers.

Third, authors need to keep abreast of the interests of today's young readers. For example, authors need to explore various popular genre styles. Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006), which won the Printz award, is a graphic novel; and, Glenn's *Split Image* (2000) is written in narrative verse. Both of which are popular genre styles.

Fourth, as the data indicated, a lot of responsibility is given to the author in regard to cultural authenticity. As such, authors need to continue to authenticate their work as well as the work of others, which leads into the next recommendation.

Fifth, authors need to take more of an active role in evaluating and controlling authentic representations of Asian-Americans. In other words, authors can provide their own lists of authentic trade books and publicly list them on their websites. As such, they need to play active roles in the recommendation cycle,



Sixth, authors need to actively defy stereotypes, such as the model minority theory. I am not suggesting that Asian-Americans should be portrayed as stupid. I am also not suggesting that having stories about Asian-Americans living in Chinatowns, about Asian-Americans living during certain historical events like internment, about Asian-Americans having Asian-American friends, and about Asian-Americans being employed in math and technology professions should be avoided or deemed to be negative portrayals as these can be accurate and true depictions; however, we need a substantive body of literature that depicts Asian-Americans in multi-faceted dimensions.

Seventh, authors and publishing houses should consider developing teacher resource guides to accompany their trade books. This will facilitate the teachers' consumption of Asian-American children's trade books in their classrooms.

Eighth, authors and publishing houses should also focus efforts on how to market Asian-American children's trade books so that teachers and other consumers are exposed to them and have easy access to them. Some suggestions include: Sending books to established book clubs and/or bloggers, accessing networks that teachers and students use, attending teacher conferences, creating annotated lists, etc.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion, Asian-American children's literature can play a vital and important role in school classrooms; yet, why aren't these trade books more accessible and available in today's classrooms? Since cultural authenticity is determined largely in part by the author's credibility and external sources such as reviews, prizes and recommendations, there needs to be a concerted and aggressive effort to increase the exposure of available culturally-authentic Asian-American children's trade books by capitalizing on these sources. Quantity and quality do not seem to be posing as big of an obstacle as marketing. Because there have been such pressures in the past to increase Asian-American children's trade books and to accurately represent Asian-Americans and their experiences, the current status of Asian-American children's trade books is promising: Asian-Americans seem to be accurately depicted and there seems to be a growing body of literature reflecting the contemporary experiences of Asian-Americans. The changing student demographics demand culturally-responsive instructional practices, one of which is the use of multicultural literature. In addition, there

are changes in pedagogy that encourage teachers to incorporate multicultural trade books in their curriculums. As such, there exists a viable market for such a genre. The current political climate is conducive to Asian-American children's literature; we just have to be more insistent about getting these books into the hands of teachers and ultimately, the students.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Based on the data gathered from this research study, further research must be done on Asian-American children's literature. The following is a list of research questions and topics to explore that have not already been mentioned in this study:

1. Considering the importance of insider perspectives especially in the evaluation of culturally authenticity, is there a difference in the perceptions, cultural beliefs and values of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, etc. generations of Asian Americans when reading these trade books? In what ways do their reader responses differ from and/or compare to nonmembers?
2. Since reviews are a cited source that teachers used to determine cultural authenticity, it would be interesting to examine the reviews of Asian-American children's trade books. How have they changed over time? How has their influence changed over time? How much of an insider perspective do the reviewers have?
3. As mentioned before in the literature review, winning awards and/or recognition is important for authors because such acknowledgement increases book sales, influences market trends, and are perceived to be a source for determining cultural authenticity. It would be interesting to study the political nature of the award process and to examine the merit of the award. Are some books privileged over others? If so, how and why?
4. Based on the content analyses and author interviews, my study indicated that there are more women writing Asian-American children's trade books than men. Is this realistic? Is this a trend and if so, how and why? Are fewer men writing Asian-American children's trade books and if so, why?
5. An unintended objective of this study was to create a heuristic for teachers to better evaluate the cultural authenticity of Asian-American children's literature. Such an evaluation tool may help teachers who are reluctant to use such trade books for fear of offending their students, both Asian-American students and non-Asian-American students. However, what I found was that teachers needed a tool for selection more than a tool for evaluation. Having such a heuristic might reduce some of the obstacles the teachers expressed with time. As a result of my study, I discovered that there is a difference between selection criteria and evaluation criteria. The latter assumes that the trade book has been read and that the user has some knowledge of the genre; whereas, the former is used before the trade book is read and assumes that the user has a limited, if any, knowledge base of the genre. I hope that my study inspires future research in developing such tools.

6. Considering the above, do teachers even want a tool? As derived from the qualitative interviews, teachers cited time as their biggest obstacle. This was cited over and over again: No time to read, no time to use the trade books, no time to be exposed, etc. As such, I contend that teachers would rather have an annotated list developed by a credible source, most likely a member. I hope that my study will encourage myself and others to create such lists for public perusal.
7. As determined by the open-ended protocol, the majority of the trade books, ten out of 15 or about 66%, were informed by an Asian-American insider perspective, which essentially means that the author gave evidence of detailed knowledge of the culture about which he/she is writing. All ten of these trade books were written by members. Is there really a trend of more members writing Asian-American children's literature? If so, to what extent can this trend be attributed to the increasing quality of such books?
8. It would be interesting to study the reader responses of students in regard to Asian-American children's trade books. Some of the teacher participants alluded to the fact that students had a different response to the book *Kira-Kira* (Kadohata, 2004) which was deemed to be more literary than what the students preferred. By creating a survey of students' needs, interests, perceptions, etc., scholars and teachers might be able to determine the reading preferences of today's students.
9. Considering the relative difficulty of finding Asian-American teachers for this study, one could claim that there aren't many Asian-Americans in the teaching force. In addition, considering that Asian-American teachers are more likely to read and consume Asian-American children's trade books than nonmembers as indicated by the qualitative interviews, it would be interesting to study the correlation between Asian-American teachers and the consumption of Asian-American trade books. What are the effects of having such diversity in regard to students' reading choices?

I would like to close my study with this quote from Bishop (1982): "...the experience of any distinct cultural group. . . is broad enough on which to build a body of literature, distinct enough to provide unique perspectives on the world, and universal enough to be worth the effort" (p. 11).

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**APPENDIX A**

**PROTOCOL FOR CONTENT ANALYSES**

## PROTOCOL FOR CONTENT ANALYSES

### Recording Form for Selected Trade Books:

Book Title	
Year of Publication	
Author: M=Member N=Nonmember	
Asian Ethnicity Represented	
Time Period and Location of Story	
Intended grade level(s)	
Awards (if any)	
Publisher	

### Open-Ended Protocol: Focus Questions Based on Bishop's Study:

To whom is this trade book primarily addressed?	
How is the term Asian-American experience interpreted?	
What cultural perspectives inform this trade book?	

Source: Sims, 1982.

# Forced-Choice Protocol: Evaluative Instrument for Content Analyses

Modified from the Sherriff (2005) study:

- (G) indicates information about protagonist and general information
- (S) indicates stereotypes and/or negative representations of Asian-Americans
- (C) indicates culturally-authentic representations of Asian-Americans
- (L) indicates literary merit of the trade book

(G) Name of the Asian-American protagonist: \_\_\_\_\_

Male or Female Protagonist: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of Protagonist: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is the book well-written and of high quality? Is it engaging and interesting? (L)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
2. Is the book free from errors in grammar, syntax, word usage, etc. which makes the book easy and enjoyable to read? (L)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
3. Is the book free from vocabulary that is demeaning, offensive, or condescending? Is the language respectful? (L)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
4. Does the book have a strong plot and strong characterization? (L)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
5. Could the book embarrass or offend an Asian-American reader? (L)(G)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
6. Does the book help a child from another ethnicity accept and appreciate the Asian-American culture? (L)(G)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
7. Does the author have the qualifications and the background needed to deal with the Asian-American experience accurately and respectfully as evidenced by the book? (C)  
☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable

8. Is the book written from the protagonist's or rather, from an Asian-American point of view? Does the book show evidence of the subtleties and nuances of the Asian-American experience? Does it reflect the realities and ways of Asian-Americans? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
9. Are the Asian/Asian-American traditions or expressions of Asian/American culture represented in the book realistic and believable? Does the book include the idea of harmony, spirits, traditions, luck, and horoscopes in a natural and unexaggerated manner? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
10. Are the Asian-American characters in the book depicted living their daily lives (working, being with family, solving problems, etc.) as well as but not always taking part in Asian-American traditions and/or celebrations? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
11. Is the protagonist portrayed as an individual and not as a combination of culturally stereotypical characteristics such as smart, studious, nerdy, math and science-oriented, etc.? Is he/she portrayed as a genuine individual with distinctive features? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
12. Is the dialogue, including "broken English," realistic? Do the characters use speech that accurately represents the oral traditions of the culture? Are non-English phrases used correctly? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
13. Does the character assume leadership roles and/or solve his/her own problem in a realistic matter meaning he/she does not need assistance from a white authority figure and he/she does not have to exhibit extraordinary qualities to gain acceptance or approval? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
14. Are the Asian-American characters portrayed in contemporary lifestyles, dress and customs with realistic names? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable

15. Are conflicts between traditional and contemporary cultures or between Asian and American identities which may result in rebellion against parental and/or cultural constraints portrayed realistically? Does the protagonist have options other than choosing one culture over another? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
16. Does the book illustrate a community among family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors leading toward mutual help, communal support, and collective wisdom? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
17. Does the book illustrate the importance of honesty, hard work, selflessness, sacrifice, filial piety, reverence for the elderly, ancestral worship, the arts and/or education without exaggerating the values and customs of Asian-American culture? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
18. Does the book illustrate the adjustment and assimilation to a new or unfamiliar in a believable manner? Does the protagonist realistically encounter feelings of isolation, loneliness, poverty, language barriers, and racial discrimination? If the protagonist needs to belong to a desired group and obtain acceptance leading to feelings of ethnic ambivalence and confusion, is this presented authentically? (C)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
19. Does the Asian-American protagonist do exceptionally well in school especially in comparison to other minorities? Does the book perpetuate the model minority theory? Does the book give the impression that Asian-Americans have overcome the early oppression against them by hard work, turning the other cheek and passively accepting hardship? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
20. Is the Asian-American protagonist viewed as a perpetual foreigner? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable



21. Are the Asian-American characters represented as one-dimensional and as caricatures? Are the Asian-American male characters portrayed as smiling, polite and bowing; squinty-eyed and bucktoothed; wise, inscrutable or mystical; sinister or sly; expert in martial arts? Are the Asian-American female characters portrayed as sweet, well-behaved; sexy "china dolls"; evil "dragon ladies"; overbearing, old-fashioned grandmothers? (*Circle all that apply. If there is one character in the book that is portrayed as such, then check yes.*; S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
22. Are the Asian-American characters depicted as only residing in a certain area (i.e. Chinese-Americans are depicted as living only in Chinatowns)? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
23. Are the Asian-American characters depicted as only having a certain type of job (i.e. Filipino-Americans as nurses or servants.)? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
24. Are the Asian-American characters only depicted as being tied to a historical event (i.e. Japanese-Americans are depicted only as participants in World War II)? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
25. Are the Asian-American characters only defined in terms of their relationship to others (i.e. Mr. Smith's Suzie Wong)? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
26. Does the Asian-American protagonist prefer to be white without any resolution? Does he/she show no appreciation for his/her culture? Are the Asian-American characters portrayed as imitation Anglo-Americans? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable
27. Are the Asian-American characters portrayed only as followers and/or menaces to society? (S)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No/Not determinable

**APPENDIX B**

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF**

**ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S TRADE**

**BOOKS**

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ASIAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S TRADE BOOKS

### American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang (First Second, 2006)

Yang cleverly weaves three stories about fitting in and finding one's true self. Jin-Wang is an American Born Chinese boy who is picked on in school. He reluctantly befriends Wei-Chen, who is Fresh Off the Boat, and falls in love with an Anglo-American. The Monkey King does not see himself as a monkey and engages himself in all these antics. Danny, an Anglo-American, is embarrassed by his very stereotypical cousin, Chin-Kee. I was very impressed with the new form, graphic novel, and the story's simple complexity. It was humorous and profound. However, the content needs to be checked for age-appropriateness. Grade: A.

### Black Mirror by Nancy Werlin (Speak, 2001)

Frances Levanthal is half-Japanese and half-Jewish. Her mother runs away to a Buddhist monastery in Japan. Her father runs away to his mother's house and is an unsuccessful writer. Upon receiving UNITY scholarships, Frances and her brother, Daniel, run away to an elite prep school where Daniel becomes involved in a drug-dealing ring fronted as a charitable organization, UNITY. After Daniel supposedly commits suicide, Frances unravels the mystery and finds herself. Besides a handful of references about her Asian eyes and Buddhist aphorisms, being Asian-American is not a major theme of this book. Grade: B.

### Kim/Kimi by Hadley Irwin (Puffin Books, 1987)

Sixteen year old Kim Andrews goes in search of her Japanese-American heritage. She travels from Iowa to Sacramento where she tracks down her biological father's family, the Yogushis. She learns that her biological father was disowned for marrying Kim's mother, a Caucasian. She learns about the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. She learns about sushi and about being a sansei. She eventually comes to terms with her identity claiming her name to be Kimi Yogushi Andrews. Although the plot was interesting, the dialogue and cultural references seemed a bit contrived and didactic. Grade: C.

### Ruby Lu, Brave and True by Lenore Look (Aladdin Paperbacks, 2004)

Ruby Lu is a charming young heroine who happens to be Chinese-American. The Chinese culture is presented as a natural part of this community. Look presents a series of vignettes describing Ruby's adventures as a competitive big sister, a daring magician who puts on shows in her backyard, a precocious driver, etc. Young readers will delight in Ruby's antics. A glossary is provided at the end for the Chinese terms and customs that are naturally woven into the language in the text. Although these books seem to take place in a Chinese-American community, their ethnicity does not take the forefront. I found myself chuckling out loud. Grade: A.

The Homework Machine by Dan Gutman (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006)

Four fifth graders from different walks of grade school life (a nerd, bully, rebel, and goody-goody) form a reluctant friendship. Brenton Damagatchi, the nerd/genius, builds Belch, the homework machine. Told from different points-of-view, Gutman presents a compelling and fun story. Although one of the main protagonists, Brenton, is Japanese-American and does follow some of the stereotypes attributed to the model minority, the book is absent of Asian-American culture, which begs the question of whether or not this can be considered to be an Asian-American trade book. The only part I found contrived was toward the end, when romantic relationships started to blossom. Grade: B.

Honeysuckle House by Andrea Cheng (Front Street, 2004)

Cheng tells this story from two alternating perspectives. Sarah is an American-born Chinese girl who is searching for her best friend and whose dad is constantly traveling. Ting, or Tina, is a Chinese immigrant with whom Sarah is forced to befriend being the only other Asian girl in the fourth grade. Tina must learn the language and culture. Her family is also dealing with immigration, job hunting and a new baby. Both girls reluctantly build a friendship and discover that they have a lot in common. Tina's growth and development is much more compelling in that she becomes a true hybrid of two cultures. Grade: B.

Moon Runner by Carolyn Marsden (Candlewick Press, 2005)

Mina Lee discovers that she is a fast runner. Ruth, one of her best friends, is the athlete in the group. Will Mina's talent disrupt their circle of friends, the Fellow Friends? Will it unravel their Friendship Ball? Mina pretends to lose in order to keep Ruth as a friend; however, she feels "icky" doing that. Mina struggles between finding herself and keeping a friend; but, in the end, she discovers that she doesn't have to choose. Being Chinese-American is not a major theme of this book. It is brought up in a handful of minute details. Grade: A.

Name Me Nobody by Lois-Ann Yamanaka (Hyperion Paperbacks, 1999)

Thirteen-year old Emi-Lou Kaya struggles with her weight, her best friend's sexual orientation, her mother abandoning her, her classmates using her and her own insecurities. She combats a variety of demons before learning about acceptance. Immersed in the local Hawaiian culture, Yamanaka presents an authentic portrayal of an American subculture. The dialect, foods, traditions and characters feel so real and natural. Grade: A.

Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo by Greg Leitich Smith (Little, Brown and Company, 2003)

Told from the viewpoints of three friends, Elias, Shohei, and Honoraria, this is a humorous story about friendship, expectations, and science. As the three friends compete in the annual school's science fair, they discover more about themselves and each other. Shohei, the Asian-American protagonist, is adopted by privileged Irish-Americans. They set out to "Japanize" Shohei, wanting to introduce him to his heritage. Shohei rebels and wants to choose his own culture. Shohei does not fit any stereotypes in that he is not a brainiac nor is he an outcast. He is a popular, gregarious kid. This is a very endearing story. Grade: A.

Project Mulberry by Linda Sue Park (Clarion Books, 2005)

For their Work-Grow-Give-Live (WIGGLE) project, Julia, a Korean-American, and her neighbor and best friend, Patrick, decide to raise silkworms in order to win a state prize. At first, Julia tries to sabotage the project because she thinks that silkworms are “too Korean.” As the two friends learn about each other’s fears and insecurities, Julia learns that her family’s Korean culture makes things more interesting. First and foremost, this is a coming-of-age story. Julia being Korean-American is part of her character and is naturally woven into the plot without seeming contrived. There are lots of moral dilemmas cleverly presented in this book like the racism between Koreans and African-Americans and the killing of the worms in order to obtain the silk. Park also inserts dialogues between her and the protagonist in which they discuss the writing process. Grade: A.

Seeing Emily by Joyce Lee Wong (Amulet Books, 2005)

Sixteen year old, Emily Wu feels like an outsider in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia. Her isolation is made even clearer when she is forced to befriend Alex Huang, a Taiwanese immigrant; surprisingly, he also helps Emily define herself. She essentially grows up in the Chinese restaurant, the only one in town, which her family owns. In addition to normal teenage angst like boys, school, friends, etc., Emily is learning to come to terms with her cultural identities. I related to her relationship with her mother and to her need to stretch her wings. Written in free verse, the poetic images seemed to be in alignment with Emily’s artsy character and with Chinese culture; however, I found the cat/tiger images to be a little distracting. Grade: A.

Split Image by Mel Glenn (HarperCollins Publishers, 2000)

Everyone has a different image of Laura Li. Boys want to date her and girls want to be her. She is subjected to stereotypes of the sexy, China doll. She is duty-bound by filial piety to take care of her family. She must honor the sacrifices of her parents by living up to their expectations. Laura Li works in the library and comes into contact with various characters. In free verse and told via different points-of-view, Glenn presents the angst of a misunderstood and depressed teenaged girl who feels like a foreigner in more ways than one. Although Laura Li does play into common stereotypes, that seemed to be the point. Compelling story. Grade: A.

Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time by Lisa Yee (Arthur A. Levine Books, 2005)

Told from Stanford Wong’s point of view, Yee tells his part of the story that was first presented in Millicent Min, Girl Genius (Yee, 2004). Stanford flunks his English class and not only disappoints his father but he is at risk of losing his spot on the basketball A-team. Stanford must endure summer school, being tutored by his arch nemesis, Millicent Min, and constant comparisons to his super-smart sister. At the same time, he strives to maintain his popular status and his friends. He also has a crush on Emily Ebers, a friend of Millicent’s and doesn’t want her or anyone else to know about his flunking out. He’s also worried about his parents getting a divorce and his Yin-Yin, grandmother, who has to move to an old folks’ home. Besides having an Asian-American protagonist and a grandmother who makes dim sum and who tells stories of the “motherland,” this book mainly focuses on normal teen angst. Grade: B.

Tae's Sonata by Haemi Balgassi (Clarion Books, 1997)

Taeyoung Kim misses Korea, where she didn't have to work so hard to fit in. When she is assigned to do a report on South Korea with the most popular guy in school, Tae is mortified. She is embarrassed that she lives in an apartment. She's embarrassed by her Korean heritage. She's embarrassed by her mom's broken English. Although the resolution seems too easy, the details and feelings feel authentic and realistic. Tae struggles with belonging, making friends and coming to terms with her Korean and American identities. Grade: B.

The Amah by Laurence Yep (Puffin Books, 1999)

Yep presents a nice portrait of a struggling Chinese-American family living in San Francisco. After the Chins' father dies, things are tough. Mama must work leaving the younger kids in the care of Amy, the oldest. When Mama gets a job as an amah, a Chinese governess, for a rich girl named Miss Stephanie, Amy feels like the ugly stepsister, which she plays in her ballet recital. She grapples with her jealousy and resentment. Amy does not like having to give up her ballet lessons or her Mama. In the end which was the most contrived part of the book, Amy learns that things are not always what they seem. She learns to share her Mama and makes a new friend in the process. Grade: B.

Yang the Eldest and His Odd Jobs by Lensey Namioka (Little, Brown and Company, 2000)

Told through the point of view of Third Sister, this book is about a struggling but musically-talented (except for Fourth Brother) Chinese-American immigrant family. Eldest Brother is the most talented Yang and also the most sheltered. When he hears a buzzing in his violin, he is forced to work various odd jobs as a baby-sitter, street musician, telemarketer and waiter. He wants to earn enough money to buy a new violin. However, Eldest Brother seems to fall into American capitalism and becomes more concerned with making money than playing music. The story line moves from helping Eldest Brother make money to bringing him back to the music he loves. Community and family are very important themes. However, a major criticism is that the O'Mearas and the Conners, Anglo-Americans, come in several times to "save" the Yangs. Grade: B.

The Year of the Dog by Grace Lin (Little, Brown and Company, 2006)

In addition to finding herself or rather, her talent, Pacy/Grace must also come to terms with her Taiwanese/Chinese and American identities. This book provides a very humorous and upbeat multi-faceted glimpse of a Taiwanese-American family. Beginning and ending with the Chinese New Year celebrations, Lin presents the trials and tribulations of young Pacy/Grace as she makes new friends, tackles Chinese school, tries out for the school play, enters a book contest, competes in the science fair, etc. Lin also shows snippets of various family members through backstories which become a natural part of the overall story. Although the cultural elements do seem contrived and didactic especially in the beginning, it is a cute story. Grade: B.

**APPENDIX C**

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR AUTHORS**

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR AUTHORS

*MAIN PURPOSE: To collect background information and learn about the subjects' experiences and which may have influenced their perspectives; To learn about their self-perceptions of power and positioning.*

1. Describe your cultural background. Describe your upbringing.
2. Describe your educational training.
3. Describe your employment history.
4. Describe your accomplishments in the field of children's literature. To what extent do your editors and/or publisher inform your writing?
5. Would you describe yourself as a writer of multicultural/Asian-American trade books? Why or why not?

*MAIN PURPOSE: To find out the current preconceptions held by the participants.*

6. What do you know about Asian-Americans? About the Asian-American experience? How do/did you obtain your knowledge base?
7. What do you think about the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books? How authentically do you think Asian-American customs, traditions, food, etc. are portrayed in these books?
8. Describe the journey that led you to write/publish Asian-American children's literature. What are some challenges?
9. Why did you choose to write/publish books about Asian-Americans? Do you write about any other groups? Why or why not?

*MAIN PURPOSE: To find out if and how the participants evaluate cultural authenticity in Asian-American children's literature.*

10. How do you define cultural authenticity?
11. What does it mean to write and/or publish a culturally authentic text? Do you choose particular story lines, representations and not others?
12. Do you consider your books to be culturally authentic?
13. What steps (if any) do you take in authenticating your work and/or the work of others?

*MAIN PURPOSE: To find out the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity as perceived by the participants.*

14. To what extent (if any) do you think one's racial/ethnic identity plays in regard to cultural authenticity? In regard to production and consumption?
15. If a nonmember: Do you worry about nonmembership when writing about Asian-Americans and their experiences? If so, why and what are some of your concerns? What do you say to those who say only members can write about members?
16. If a member: Do you think nonmembers can authentically represent the Asian-American experience? Why or why not? Why do you think your membership takes precedent?



## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS**

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

*MAIN PURPOSE: To collect background information and learn about the subjects' experiences and which may have influenced their perspectives; To learn about their self-perceptions of power and positioning.*

1. Describe your cultural background. Describe your upbringing.
2. Describe your educational training.
3. Describe your position and/or job history.
4. Do you read/teach/employ Asian-American children's literature? If yes, how much and in what contexts?
5. Would you describe yourself as a culturally-responsive teacher? Why or why not? (Do you believe in multicultural education?)

*MAIN PURPOSE: To find out the current preconceptions held by the participants.*

6. What do you think of when I say Asian-American?
7. What do you know about Asian-Americans? About the Asian-American experience? About the model minority theory? About religions, food, traditions, history, etc.?
8. What are the current representations of Asian-Americans in children's trade books? How authentically do you think Asian-American customs, traditions, food, etc. are portrayed in these books?
9. How many Asian-American do you know?

*MAIN PURPOSE: To find out if and how the participants evaluate cultural authenticity in Asian-American children's literature.*

10. Do you use multicultural/Asian-American children's literature in your classroom? If so, how? How many books do you have in your classroom library?
11. What Asian-American books do you select for your students to read? Why these? How do you hear about these books? Have you ever rejected the use of any Asian-American books? Why?
12. How do you define cultural authenticity?
13. What steps (if any) do you take in selecting and using culturally authentic texts?

*MAIN PURPOSE: To find out the role that race and ethnicity plays in assessing cultural authenticity as perceived by the participants.*

14. To what extent (if any) do you think one's racial/ethnic identity plays in regard to cultural authenticity? In regard to writing and using multicultural trade books?
15. Do you think nonmembers can authentically represent the Asian-American experience? Why or why not?
16. Which do you think is more authentic: an Asian-American text written by an Asian-American author or one written by a nonmember? Why?

**APPENDIX E****COPY OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

## **COPY OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Virginia Loh and I am a student in the San Diego State University (SDSU) and University San Diego (USD) Doctoral Program in Education. I am conducting a study to systematically analyze Asian-American children's trade books in terms of their cultural authenticity and to examine the perceptions of authors and teachers as related to the cultural authenticity of these. In conducting this study, I hope to contribute to and inspire further additions to a body of research on Asian-American children's literature.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the attached 7-item questionnaire which I will mainly use to determine eligibility for subject participation and to collect demographic data. The questionnaire asks questions about your ethnic background, your position, your age, and your perceived socio-economic level. I am asking teachers and authors who are familiar with Asian-American children's texts to participate in this study. Depending on your responses, you may or may not be asked to participate in the rest of the study. If you are not eligible, all correspondence including the questionnaire will be destroyed.

If you are eligible, I will ask you to participate in an in-depth interview session which will be audio-taped for transcription purposes. During the in-depth interview, I will be asking you questions about your cultural and educational background, your position, your preconceptions about Asian-Americans, and your experiences with Asian-American children's literature. In addition, the teachers will be asked to participate in a book club session, a follow-up interview about the book club and produce a writing response to the reading. For authors, the whole process should take about 2-4 hours. For teachers, the process should take about 4-6 hours

After completion of the study, the audiotapes will be erased/destroyed. In addition, any identifying information (such as names, places, ages, etc.) on all the study materials (such as the email correspondence, questionnaires, etc) will be blacked out. Each participant will be given a letter code known only to the researcher; this code will be the only identifying marker on the study materials. Furthermore, the study materials will be kept in my personal home office and no one will have access to them without your written permission. Email correspondence will be printed out and coded and then permanently deleted from my account. No one except for me has access to my personal email account. I take personal responsibility in respecting your confidentiality.

Please accept a gift book as a token of my appreciation. The results will be used for my dissertation which I hope to submit for publication.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you would be willing to participate in this study or if you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at: [virginialoh@cs.com](mailto:virginialoh@cs.com).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, or to report research-related problems, you may contact the following offices:

Institutional Review Board  
San Diego State University  
(619) 594-6622  
[irb@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:irb@mail.sdsu.edu)

University of San Diego  
Office of the Vice President and the Provost  
5998 Alcala Park  
San Diego, CA 92110  
(619) 260-4553

Thanks for your consideration and time,

Virginia Loh

**APPENDIX F**

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please check or fill in the correct answers.

1. What is your gender: \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female
  
2. What is your ethnic background: \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. If you are Asian-American, what is your specific ethnicity?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. If you are Asian-American, which generation do you identify with?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is your current position:
 

\_\_\_ Teacher:

Grade/Subjects \_\_\_\_\_

How many years of teaching have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Author:

How many books do you have published: \_\_\_\_\_

Of these books, how many would you identify as Asian-American children's literature? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How old are you? \_\_\_ 20-29 \_\_\_ 30-39 \_\_\_ 40-49 \_\_\_ 50-59 \_\_\_ 60-69
  
5. How do you perceive your SES level:
 

\_\_\_ Low \_\_\_ Middle \_\_\_ Upper Middle \_\_\_ High
  
6. What degrees/credentials do you have:
 

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your continuing cooperation and assistance.*

Virginia

## **APPENDIX G**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PILOT STUDY**



## **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PILOT STUDY**

With this protocol, I seek to understand the phenomenon of nonmembers producing culturally-authentic texts. I seek to answer two main questions: What are the motivations of nonmembers who write Asian-American children's literature? And how do they authenticate their work?

### **Questions for Interviewees:**

- 1. Describe your educational training.**
- 2. Describe your employment history.**
- 3. Describe your writing accomplishments. (List book titles.)**
- 4. Describe the journey that led you to write Asian-American children's literature.**
- 5. Why did you choose to write about Asian-Americans?**
- 6. Do you worry about nonmembership when writing about Asian-Americans and their experiences? If so, why and what are some of your concerns?**
- 7. What steps (if any) do you take in authenticating your work?**
- 8. Would you describe yourself as a writer of multicultural texts? Why or why not?**

This is the main instrument I used: a questionnaire of eight questions. It was developed during a pilot study conducted in the fall of 2003. At that time, one question was stricken (Who are your mentors and why) and one was added (Would you describe yourself as a writer of multicultural texts? Why or why not?). The questionnaire was used to guide the interview and as a springboard for discussion. All tangential conversations were considered to be valuable data and were coded and categorized as well.