Ensuring Diversity in your Library Program

Deborah B. Ford, Director of Library Outreach @ Junior Library Guild
dford@juniorlibraryguild.com  Twitter @jlgdeborahford
Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest: Junior Library Guild

1. Do your research.
2. Evaluate your collection and book orders.
3. Diversify your reading.
4. Shake up your programming.
5. Evaluate your invitation list.
7. Offer multiple translations and formats.
8. Create booklists and displays.
9. Toot your own horn and resources.
10. Remember: It’s about them.

How do we improve diversity in our library programs?

The issue of diversity is complex. What is diversity? Is it race, gender, ethnicity, ability, or culture? If we work with diverse students and patrons, shouldn’t our teaching strategies, programs, and literature collection be a reflection of our community and beyond? Educators are faced with the challenge of linking these students and arming them with tools for life beyond academia. By ensuring that they have a welcoming place, devoted to the way they learn, with resources and tools that accommodate their needs and those they will meet, teachers and librarians can build a positive environment that will affect their literacy development.
Strengthen Diversity Every Day

Do your research. From movies to books, the statistics gathered (in particular from Lee and Low Books), indicate there is much work to be done in establishing a diversity balance. Publishers themselves will be the first to tell you that if no one will buy a book, they won’t publish it. Do some research in your community. What’s the population? If you aren’t diverse, how difficult will it be to bring diversity into your library? Who are your resources? Why does it even matter? Read ALA’s Study.

Evaluate your collection and book orders. When we strive for diversity in our libraries, we want to make sure our materials provide a global view of our world. Not only do our patrons like to see themselves in what they read, it’s important for understanding other cultures. Look at your collection. Do you have books that feature people of color or disabilities, as well as characters with different ethnic, cultural, and religious differences? Check your book orders. Are they diversified? Be sure to include ALSC award-winning selections such as the Schneider Family Book Award. To assist you, we are now maintaining diverse topical lists of great selections on our website. JLG also has a We Need Diversity Pinterest board you can follow.

Diversify your reading. Look at what you read for yourself. Do you read outside of your own culture? What about what you read aloud to your kids? How diverse are your booktalks? Sometimes just being aware of your selections takes you one step closer to creating change. Make an effort to incorporate variety.

Shake up your programming. Do you only read books about black history during February? Is March the only month when you share women’s history? Sprinkle those books throughout the year in your lesson plans, storytimes, and displays. Participate in reading challenges, such as “Diversity on the Shelf,” “Latin@ in KidLit,” or “Africa Reading Challenge.”

Evaluate your invitation list. Are you inviting a diverse group of readers or speakers to your library? In addition to culture, look at the balance of women to men. Develop local connections in your community. Your Chamber of Commerce is a good place to start.

Evaluate your teaching and speaking strategies. Children learn in a variety of ways. Provide audio and video to your presentations which assists even undiagnosed issues. Show captions
when available. Publish materials in more than one language which bridges communication gaps and validates cultural differences.

**Offer multiple translation and formats.** Ask a volunteer to translate common library phrases into various languages. Imagine what happens when you are able to welcome a new child in his own language. Whether it’s in print or face-to-face, your efforts will create an impact on everyone.

**Extend Your Resources**

**Booklists and articles abound.** [School Library Journal](https://www.slbj.com/) featured diversity in their April 2014 issue. Articles are archived online. They also have an article, [SLJ Resources for Diversity in Kid and YA Lit](https://www.slbj.com/). Feature and news articles, interviews, and other recommended sites are included. [We Need Diverse Books™](http://weneeddiversebooks.org/) has created an official campaign website devoted to promoting diversity in children’s literature. Under resources, you’ll find many book awards [http://weneeddiversebooks.org/where-to-find-diverse-books/] for collection development and programming purposes. ALA’s Office for Diversity [http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/] posts resources and events. ALSC released a white paper on [the importance of diversity in library programs and material collections for children](http://www.ala.org/alsc). 

**Create booklists and displays.** Use your library catalog resource list feature to create themed lists. Publicize them all year long. Prepare bookmarks with QR codes to other resources. Visually check your bulletin boards, end caps, and display windows for diversity. Ask your patrons to help you fill your cases with their culture’s treasures. You’ll find additional ideas on our [Displays Pinterest board](http://www.pinterest.com). 

**Utilize Marketing Techniques**

**Use social media.** Keep a constant eye on what you post. Are you including everyone in your messages? Follow diverse resources for ideas about events, articles, and programming ideas. If your population is language diverse, ask a parent or community member to assist you in reaching out.
Toot your own horn and resources. If you are celebrating a multicultural event, make sure you advertise. Expand your multicultural celebrations throughout the year. Promote the diversity features of your digital resources, such as language translation or audio readings.

Final Thoughts to Ponder

By planning for diversity of race, culture, ability, gender, and religion, you say to your guests that *they matter*. Remember that the library is one of the few places where everyone is welcome. Adding variety to your material selection, emphasizing culture throughout the year, and marketing your resources builds a trust that results in lifelong learners.

Additional Resources

- Visit We [Need Diverse Books website](#) for additional ideas.
- Search social media hashtags for ideas.
- Follow the [JLG Diversity Pinterest](#) board.

About the presenter:

Deborah B. Ford, JLG’s Director of Library Outreach, is an award-winning library media specialist and international speaker with almost thirty years of experience as a classroom teacher and librarian in K–12 schools. Traveling across North America, she does workshops, library coaching, and professional development for school and public libraries. Deborah is the author of *JLG’s Booktalks to Go* and *Everyday Librarian* @ [School Library Journal](#). She also maintains an award-winning coordinating online resource at LiveBinders.com. Contact her at dford@juniorlibraryguild.com. Follow her on Twitter @jlgdeborahford.
To Do List: Ensuring Diversity in your School Library Program

What’s your take-away for this session? Name three strategies you want to improve or try when you return to your library.

1.

2.

3.

Aha Moment:

Affirmation Moment:

Inspiration Moment:
Suggested New Titles for Diversity 2016, PreK-12


