



Choosing Quality Diverse Literature

by JULIA LÓPEZ-ROBERTSON

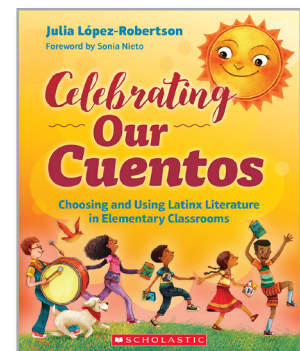
All children deserve to see their language, culture, traditions, and worlds in which they live positively reflected in books in their classrooms, libraries, and communities.



LITERACY CHAMPION: JULIA LÓPEZ -ROBERTSON

Julia López-Robertson is a Professor in the Department of Instruction and Teacher Education at the University of South Carolina. She completed her Ph.D. in Language, Reading, and Culture at the University of Arizona. A former early childhood bilingual classroom teacher, her research focuses on the intersections among language, race, ethnicity, and culture as they relate to the teaching and learning of English Learners and their families, and in preparing teachers for diverse classrooms. Julia's scholarly agenda is built on a commitment to working with children, families, teachers, and pre-service teachers in public schools, universities, and communities for the purpose of advancing understandings about emerging bilingual/multilingual students and their families, and on the transformation of teacher education to support equitable teaching for all children, particularly English Learners.

Julia's research has been published in leading national and international journals: *Language Arts*, *Bilingual Research Journal*, *The Dragon Lode*, and the *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* among others. Her recent book *Celebrating Our Cuentos: Choosing and Using Latinx Literature in Elementary Classrooms* highlights the importance of infusing our classrooms with literature by a range of Latinx authors and illustrators—voices that reflect our students' experiences and provide a window into the cultures of people from Spanish-speaking countries and communities.



One to Know: Expose all Children to Diverse Cultures and Literature

All children enter school with the ability to “read the world.” We want to build on the strength and knowledge that Latinx children bring to school; they have spent their lives in their communities, learning the language and the ways of being members in their community. These ways of knowing should be used as the foundation upon which to build their learning experiences.

Latinx literature is not just for classrooms and schools with Latinx children. It should be available to all children in all communities. The books in our schools and classrooms should reflect our students’ lives and expose them to diverse cultures, languages, and ways of being. Exposure to a wide variety of books also sparks children’s curiosity and builds their awareness of the global nature of our world.

What to Do: Choose Quality Diverse Literature

Engaging children with diverse literature helps them understand that everyone has a story to tell and that those stories need to be valued and appreciated. Stories help children connect home and school, connect real-life experiences to those in books, and to see that they are a part of a world that is larger than their immediate one. Stories help children make sense of their lives.

We want children to connect with texts depicting a variety of cultures, languages, and ways of being in the world and want them to have access to accurate and authentic texts. It is imperative that we make very careful book selections, as we do not want to reinforce stereotypes. Book selection matters. But how do you make book selections when you may not be familiar with the culture? How do you select authentic books? Below are some questions to consider when selecting Latinx literature.

How to choose quality Latinx Children’s Literature

Representation of Culture

- There is not one Latinx culture. Does the book depict just one image of all Latinx people?

Use of Spanish Language

- Demonstrates overall respect for the Spanish language.
- Includes no fake Spanish or mock Spanish such as words ending in the letter *o* to suggest Spanish.
- Includes consistent and correct use of written and conversational Spanish.
- Incorporates Spanish dialogue that flows naturally and is error-free.

Characters That Are Multidimensional

- Are the Latinx characters unnecessarily loud or boisterous?
- Are they working only in stereotypical roles, such as housekeepers, construction workers, or wait staff?
- Are any depicted as professionals?
- Are they presented as subservient or passive?

Knowledge of English

- Do the characters not know English?
- When a character is learning English, are the people around him or her helpful and kind, or do they mock his or her attempts at English?

Educational Level of Adults

- Have the adult characters been formally schooled?
- Are they portrayed as simple-minded or ignorant?

Storyline

- Are the books with Latino characters, only about immigration?
- Are the characters fleeing something? Are they running away? Being chased?

More to Know and Do

Latinx children's literature can serve as the foundation for a curriculum in which all students are seen, heard, represented, and included. Engage students in text sets; text sets are a collection of resources grouped together by a theme or topic. Text sets allow for deep exploration of a theme or topic, and allow students to explore their own curiosity about that theme or topic. Some text sets I have created include: *Lucha Libre/Wrestling*; Important Latinx women; *Abuelos/Grandparents*; *Cuentos de Ada/Fairytales*.

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