Making “Tough” Stuff Typical:
Using children’s literature to navigate the realities of modern life

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Welcome to America, 2016

Compared to when many teachers were in school, more and more young children…

• embrace a variety of cultural traditions and speak more than one language.
• were born to parents who recently immigrated to or sought refuge in the United States.
• are cared for in multigenerational families, or in adoptive, blended, or foster families.
• split time with parents who have divorced, have parents who are single, or have two moms or two dads
• experience poverty, food insecurity, and uncertain living situations or homelessness at various points in their lives due to the growing class divide
Dedicated to the literacy learning of children in city schools

Research • Professional Development • Advocacy

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The KIDS LIKE US Collection

High Quality Urban Children’s Literature

- Set in the city
- Urban landscape/cityscapes
- Multicultural communities
- Language and dialect variation
- Urban ecology and architecture
- Familiar contexts and experiences for children in the city

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Books as “mirrors” and “windows”  
(Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990)
Cultural relevance
Think broadly.

INCLUDES - Race, ethnicity, SES, language, gender, religion

BUT ALSO …
- Where children live
- What their neighborhoods are like
- Who they spend time with
- What their families are like
- Where they go to school
- What contemporary kids are up to

Artwork by E.B. Lewis.

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
What’s the big deal?
Imagine that you are 4 years old...
KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Why might “mirrors” matter for language and literacy development?
KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Culturally relevant literature matters for Emergent Literacy

Oral language ↔ Literacy

Listening → oral retellings → relating speech to print

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
“Out on the street, the buses are huffin’ out dragon-hot smoke.” (Joosse, 2004)
Culturally relevant literature matters for Interest and Engagement (Wigfield, Guthrie, Eccles; Rueda 2011)

interest ➔ motivation ➔ frequency

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Culturally relevant literature matters for
Family engagement

(Larrota & Gainer, 2008; Ortiz & Ordonex-Jasis, 2005)

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Culturally relevant literature matters for Academic self-concept → achievement

Brown and Chu 2012; Cummins 2001; García Coll and Marks 2009; Hawley and Nieto, 2010

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Culturally relevant literature matters for reading comprehension

(Rueda, 2011)

Activation of prior knowledge, using schema to support accuracy, fluency, comprehension

KIDS LIKE US, More Mirrors, 2016
Promoting social and emotional development

- Literature provides opportunities for children to discuss the causes and consequences of emotions
  (McCoy and McKay 2007; Santos, Fettig, & Schafer, 2012)

- As they read about characters going through challenges, children can discuss and debate a range of problem solving strategies and weigh the outcomes and potential consequences of characters’ decisions
  (Prater, Johnstun, Dyches, and Johnstun, 2006)
Books can reduce apprehension

- Children tend to experience less apprehension when discussing situations involving storybook characters versus their own situations.
- When shared in a trusting, caring environment, children’s literature may encourage some students to more openly discuss issues they might not have shared otherwise.
Supporting newcomers

Children’s literature may be an especially useful tool in empowering immigrant children as they adjust to the many changes that come with moving to a new country (Baghban, 2007)
Sometimes culturally relevant literature comes with tough stuff
Using books for various purposes
BOOK BROWSING
Diversity in family structure
Economic challenges
Urban “grittiness”
Separation or loss
Transitions for newcomer families
Something Beautiful

Kindergarten
“Kids who sometimes would tune out seemed more focused. Even some of my squirmier ones would stay still and be listening. The kids were super-engaged in the discussion…There were kids who normally would not participate and just kinda sit back and listen, who were speaking up and participating. It was really cool for them to see their neighborhood in a book. Growing up in the Austin neighborhood, you don’t see that represented, so it was, like, very real to them, which was very cool for me.”
“Even five year olds can make pretty profound connections”

“There are a lot of complex things going on in that book, but the connections that they were able to make, and how they responded to what was happening in that story, was just like, baffling to me…It was really cool for me to see how even these five year olds can make pretty profound connections with a text like that.”
“They really rise to the challenge”

“I try not to, but I think that sometimes I put some kinds of limitations on the kids. It’s easy to say, oh they’re five, they can’t do that. It made me realize that when given the opportunity, they really rise to the challenge.”