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Representations of Racial Diversity Through Eco-criticism In Contemporary Picturebooks

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Abstract

There is a long history of marginalized groups of people being ignored and misrepresented in children's literature and media, for instance Black people being portrayed in a stereotypical way in roles such as servants or slaves, often subservient or secondary to leading white characters. The lack of authentic representation in children's literature can potentially, in an educational context, harm students' self-image. This study examines contemporary picturebooks that feature young female protagonists of color. Over fifty texts from various online lists on diverse children's literature were assessed based on certain criteria, before four picturebooks were selected for a further analysis of the whole narrative. All texts present a central character from a marginalized group of people, and the stories are told from an ecocritical perspective. A close analytical reading based on Gillian Rose's (2012) four sites of a critical visual methodology revealed that the picturebooks depicted empowering representations of Black and Indigenous girls. Additionally, the analysis of the relationship between child and nature indicates that ecocritical literature provokes children to develop their critical thinking abilities, as well as encourage positive environmental attitudes and values. Previous research confirms that exposure to multicultural children's literature and specifically racially diverse picturebooks can help expand students' perception of cultural diversity. However, several studies have highlighted a lack of authentic representation of race in school libraries.

Sammendrag

Historisk ser vi at marginaliserte grupper av mennesker har blitt ignorert og feilrepresentert i barnelitteratur og media, eksempelvis har mange bøker og filmer portrettert afroamerikanere stereotypisk i roller som tjenere eller slaver, og underdanige eller sekundære til ledende hvite karakterer. I en pedagogisk sammenheng kan denne problemstillingen muligens skade elevens selvbylde på grunn av at de ikke blir eksponert for karakterer de kan identifisere seg med. Denne studien analyserer moderne bildebøker som inneholder unge, mørkhudede, kvinnelige hovedpersoner. Over femti tekster fra ulike topplister på nett om barnelitteratur med kulturelt mangfold ble vurdert ut fra visse kriterier, og fire bildebøker ble valgt ut for en videre analyse. De valgte tekstene presenterer en sentral karakter fra en marginalisert gruppe mennesker, og involverer bevisst natur og en eller annen form for økokritikk. En nøyaktig analytisk lesning basert på Gillian Roses (2012) fire sider av en kritisk visuell metodikk viste at de utvalgte bildebøkene skildret autentiske og mektige representasjoner av mørkhudede jenter. I tillegg indikerer analysen av forholdet mellom barn og natur at økokritisk litteratur hjelper barn til å utvikle sine evner for kritisk tenkning og oppmuntrer til positive holdninger mot miljø og natur. Tidligere forskning bekrefter at eksponering for flerkulturell barnelitteratur og spesifikt rasemangfoldige bildebøker kan bidra til å utvide elevenes oppfatning av kulturelt mangfold. Imidlertid har flere studier fremhevet en stor mangel på autentisk representasjon av rase i skolebibliotekene.

Preface

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor, Jade Dillon, for her support, knowledge and encouraging words. With her guidance, constructive advice, and creative freedom I was able to shape my master's thesis in the way I intended to. Thank you for believing in me and for sharing the excitement I have had for this project.

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Dedication

To my family and my children, who have stood by my side and supported me on this journey. I would not have made it here without your love and support.

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List of Abbreviations

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous and People of Color
CCBC	Cooperative Children's Book Center
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DAPL	Dakota Access Pipeline
LK20	Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020
NTNU	The Norwegian University of Science and Technology
SRST	Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
YA	Young Adult [Literature]

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1 Introduction

1.1 Topic and Background

Indigenous Peoples globally have been among the most strongly impacted and the most vulnerable in face of the increasingly changing climate, whose repercussions, according to scientists, will only become more catastrophic. Yet at the same time, Indigenous Peoples are among the groups who have contributed the least to the roots of the catastrophe. Although Indigenous communities are deeply affected by the climate crisis, they are often excluded from the discussion, leaving out both their concerns and expertise.

Juárez López & Cherofsky (2021, October 27).

While Indigenous communities are at the forefront of environmental issues, their voices and perspectives are commonly excluded. In this regard, including authentic diverse literature in education is crucial. Not only can it provide an inclusive environment for children from other cultures and ethnicities, the exposure of multicultural picturebooks can offer all children the ability to understand various cultures, heighten their respect for individuals and adapt more easily to our increasingly multicultural society. Bringing Indigenous perspectives into schools at a young age through children's literature can allow children to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Educators and parents can minimize the loss of these cultures by advocating authentic literature that celebrates Indigenous cultures and shows a diversity of race representations. Additionally, and even more importantly; the role of characters who are similar to children themselves is crucial to the reading experience and interaction with cultural artifacts. Every child deserves to feel a sense of ownership to the world that they are in while reading a story. Children may internalize the idea that only white people should appear in books, preventing them from feeling comfortable representing their own communities.

"Literature does not just represent the world, but also constructs the world; it depicts the world not only as it is, but also as it might be" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 37). As Hintz and Tribunella convey, literature can offer readers new perspectives to the world, and help them envision alternatives to current or dominant beliefs and ways of living. According to Kathleen T. Horning, director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Cooperative Children's Book Center, racial diversity in children's books has been picking up since 2014, reversing a 25-year plateau. Even so, progress has been slow. Children's books written by authors of color in 2020 increased by 3% to 26.8% compared with 2019. Comparatively, children's books about racially diverse characters only grew by 1% to 30%, according to preliminary data provided to The Associated Press by the CCBC, which has been tracking statistics on children's book representation since 1985. The fact that books written by and about people of color, like *We Are Water Protectors* (Lindstrom, 2020) have made it on the New York Times' bestsellers' list, is hopefully an indicator that parents, and educators are embracing diverse children's literature.

By conducting a visual close reading of four picturebooks, this study reveals how young females of color are portrayed in picturebooks centered on human-earth relationships and environmental issues. Advocating books that represent diversity of

culture and characters of all colors and ethnicities can help students feel more included and support the preservation of their identity and culture. By doing a close analytical reading based on Gillian Rose's four sites of a critical visual methodology from *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (2012), the aim is to (1) describe how young females of color are represented in contemporary picturebooks. Furthermore, I will provide an overview of (2) how the environment is portrayed in the texts and explain the character's physical and spiritual closeness to nature using ecocritical theory. This paper's final objective is to rely on critical race theory and existing research to investigate (3) how racially diverse picturebooks can increase students' knowledge of multiculturalism and help improve the self-image of children from marginalized groups.

1.2 Motivation and Purpose of This Study

The initial inspiration for this thesis was obtained from the picturebook *We Are Water Protectors* (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020), which features beautiful illustrations and a captivating tale about a girl growing up in an Ojibwe culture where women are considered protectors of water. The girl and her tribe stand up against the oil pipeline crossing their lands and waterways, known as "the Black Snake". Both author and illustrator of the book are American Indians, providing the story with a rare authenticity, and I was curious to see if I could find more picturebooks that provided genuine portrayals of Indigenous cultures. From my experience as a student and substitute at various Norwegian elementary schools, I discovered that picturebooks in English were in short supply, and multicultural books were virtually nonexistent. I sought to gain a deeper understanding of this field so that I could use it in my own classroom and workspace to inspire and facilitate ethical discussions. I hope to contribute to the protection of children's identities and self-images.

1.3 Diversity in The Norwegian Curriculum

Considering my position as a pre-service teacher of Norwegian origin and residence, this subchapter sheds light on parts of the Norwegian Curriculum that address cultural diversity. In the Core values of the education and training (LK20), it is stated that "The experiences the pupils gain in the encounter with different cultural expressions and traditions help them to form their identity. A good society is founded on the ideals of inclusiveness and diversity." (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 5-6). Among the learning outcomes in relation to core values, students are expected to

- listen to, read, and talk about the content of simple texts, including picturebooks (After Year 2).
- learn words and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature for children (After Year 2)
- read and talk about the content of various types of texts, including picture books (After Year 4)
- talk about some aspects of different ways of living, traditions, and customs in the English-speaking world and in Norway (After Year 4)
- learn words and phrases and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature (After Year 4).

- investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world and in Norway and reflect on identity and cultural belonging (After Year 7).

The terms "race" or "ethnicity" are left out of the learning outcomes, in favor of "cultural knowledge" and "cultural belonging". The generalizing of the curricula is designed to provide room for action to meet the diversity of the student groups within a community, giving teachers more freedom to find the best way for their students to learn about the similarities and differences between different cultures, races, and ethnicities. The English subject shall "give the pupils the foundation for communicating with others, both locally and globally, regardless of cultural or linguistic background" as well as "help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 2).

At the beginning of 2022, there were 819 356 immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents in Norway, which make up 18.9% of the total population. The five largest country groups of immigrants are from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Syria and Somalia. The classroom is a place for individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures to interact, and as long as ethnic and religious boundaries exist in the larger society and are expressed by students in the classroom, teachers have the responsibility to deal with these. Among the most challenging aspects for teachers is how to manage sensitive issues in which such boundaries are activated while being inclusive of all students (Andresen, 2020). Andresen spent over three months observing students and conducting in-depth interviews at two upper-secondary schools in Oslo, Norway, and found that teachers had a challenging time navigating the ethnicity and Whiteness discourse without exposing students who looked different to an uncomfortable spotlight (Andresen, 2020).

1.4 Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into six chapters: Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Analysis, Discussion and Research Findings, and at last the Conclusion. Initially, the background for the topic choice was described in the Introduction (1.0 Introduction), as well as introducing key elements regarding cultural knowledge that one can find in the Norwegian Core Curriculum. The theoretical framework (2.0 Theoretical Framework) introduces Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Ecocriticism. The methodology chapter (3.0. Methodology) describes and justifies the methods and research choices for this study, including visual methodologies, and describes how primary and secondary data was collected. The next chapter (4.0 Analysis) features an individual analysis of four contemporary picturebooks, used as tools to discuss findings and answer the research questions in chapter 5 (5.0 Discussion and Research Findings). Finally, concluding remarks are made in the last chapter (6.0 Conclusion), as are proposals for further research on the topic.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the study's theoretical framework, which will be the basis for the analysis of the picturebooks. The theoretical framework is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on Critical Race Theory (CRT), going into detail on racial and ethnic terminology, cultural authenticity, and a historical and contemporary view on representation of race and ethnicity in children's literature. To be able to conduct a worthy analysis of racial representation, this part of the framework is essential. The second part of the framework describes ecocriticism, the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, incorporating how Indigenous youth and youth of color are at the forefront of climate justice initiatives due to their relationship with the environment.

2.1 Critical Race Theory

2.1.1 Addressing Racial and Ethnic Terminology

People sometimes use race and ethnicity interchangeably, but race and ethnicity are not synonymous. Whereas "race" implies some natural or essential differences between groups, the concept of "ethnicity" foregrounds the ways these differences are cultural, historical, and constructed (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 399). According to Hintz and Tribunella, the term "ethnicity" has application not only to minorities, as for example people of European descent can be understood to have a distinct ethnic and cultural identity. Because ethnicity is determined by learned behaviors rather than biological factors, it can be considered an anthropological term. People can share ethnicities, regardless of their race. This thesis looks at representation of racial diversity, as it is important to not hide behind a term's lack of specificity. The Norwegian Curriculum consistently make use of "cultural diversity", and while it's important to practice cultural sensitivity and to incorporate cultural awareness in lesson plans, we must also ensure that we acknowledge the historical roots of all races and minority groups in order to replace prejudice and discrimination with mutual respect and understanding. The concept of race is consequential, and by breaking the silence and learning about race we can help students to better understand how race affects them.

Racial and ethnic terminology can be seen as a form of representation, where meanings are created by various social categorizers in settings including popular culture, political discourse, and statistical governmentality. Social categorization can be influenced, with varying effectiveness, by actors including institutions, media, society, and members of an ethnic group. In time, the terminology changes in response to changing racialization patterns and shifting preferences in the wider society, and most of racial and ethnic terms in use are the outcome of long-term processes (Aspinall, 2020). While certain terms may be acceptable to some, these words might come across as inappropriate, demeaning, or hurtful to others. The usage of certain terms can be more accurate and appropriate depending on the context, according to Gilio-Whitaker (2019). While some of these matters are purely personal, others are more legally mandated. 'Non-white' is an example of a term that defines groups in relation to the white majority, and it devalues ethnic minorities by setting 'white' as the standard. When it comes to

describing American Indian people, the most appropriate terms are specific Native nation names, such as Lakota or Anishinaabe (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019, p. x-xi).

A term such as 'women of color' is not just a descriptive term, but also has a political and ideological background and current meaning. Loretta Ross, co-founder of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, explained in 2011 that when the term 'women of color' was created by colored women at the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston it was "a solidarity definition, a commitment to work in collaboration with other oppressed women of color who have been minoritized". Ross went on to explain that over the decades since these women's groups formed their alliance, the term "women of color" has been flattened out and lost its political meaning (Grady, 2020). Therefore, the term 'people of color' has its benefits and drawbacks. It is argued by advocates of racial justice that these terms can be useful in addressing racial inequalities since they provide an inclusive and unifying frame of reference. Moreover, the term does not include the word minority, which implies subordinate status for those who are not White. Critics point out, however, that as collective terms, these terms suggest minority ethnic groups are a homogeneous group, while analysts stress the importance of exploring the identity of people within their own racial and ethnic groups. (Aspinall, 2020, p. 8).

2.1.2 Culture and Cultural Authenticity

Social scientists today are often interested in the ways in which social life is constructed through the beliefs and feelings that people have about it, and the practices that result from those beliefs and feelings. Culture is a complex concept, but, in very broad terms, its application has forwarded the growing interest of social scientists in the structures of social life and the practices that arise from it (Rose, 2012). Shortened, culture is a process, a set of practices (Hall, 1997; Rose, 2012). Authenticity, when used in reference to historical fiction, refers to "the plausible representation of details in a literary text that are missing or vague in the historical record" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019 p. 552). The authenticity of a text refers to its accuracy in details as well as its capturing of intangible characteristics that cultural insiders consider integral or faithful to the culture it represents (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 415). Maria Nikolajeva points out that we usually put higher demands on authenticity if we know that the subject matter of a literary work is based on the author's experience (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 4). Nikolajeva also states that the act of "Lending a voice" to an oppressed minority is undesirable, because the author is writing from a position of superiority and is incapable of assuming the minority's point of view (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 15). Based on these statements, the author and illustrator's authentic backgrounds were carefully considered when collecting data for this thesis.

Cultural authenticity is the extent to which a book reflects the worldview of beliefs and values and depicts the accurate details of everyday life and language for a specific cultural group. Readers from the culture of a book need to be able to identify and feel affirmed that what they are reading rings true in their lives, and readers from another culture need to be able to identify and learn something of value about cultural similarities and differences (Short, Day & Schroeder, 2016). The most common understanding of cultural authenticity is that it is the reader's sense of truth in how a specific cultural experience has been represented within a book, particularly when the reader is an insider to the culture portrayed in that book (Howard, 1991; Fox & Short, 2003, p. 5). To portray truthful portrayals, it is necessary that the author's perspective of the culture (e.g. Native American culture) is built on their knowledge and thorough understanding of

the history of Indigenous peoples in North America. Fox & Short claims that there is no easy answer to the questions of cultural authenticity in children's literature, but that children have a need for stories in their lives that authentically convey their own and other's cultures (Fox & Short, 2003, p. 7). Children's stories influence how children view themselves and their place in the world, as well as how they perceive people of other cultures. Children learn about themselves and other people through literary images, and we must ensure that young people have regular and meaningful engagements with books that are culturally authentic and accurate (Fox & Short, 2003).

2.1.3 Main Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is based on the work of the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973), and his belief that schools either function to maintain and reproduce the existing social order or they exist to empower people to transform themselves, their community, and / or society (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). Freire's ontology states the ultimate goal of all people is to increase, not decrease, their humanity. In Freire's view, effective education is built upon a democratic relationship between equals who are open to learning from one another. As Compton-Lilly (2009) notes, CRT is not simply an issue of Black and white; it concerns anyone's position in relation to whiteness. It emphasizes the importance of literacy as a source of acknowledgment and value for cultures, languages, and abilities of students of color (Compton-Lilly, 2009, p. 3). CRT and Freire's pedagogy are forms of resistance to oppressive social relationships. Both frameworks recognize that understanding and analyzing issues pertaining to race and racism requires the experience of people of color (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 70-71).

Solorzano (1997) defines Critical Race Theory as "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of people of color" (p. 6). CRT considers the historical oppression of Black people and how it continues to oppress them today. In critical race theory, racial inequality is present in all aspects of social life (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 2013). We are urged by Delgado's epigraph to equalize the educational experience of students of color within and outside of the educational arena. CRT is composed of five major components or tenets: (1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (2) the idea of an interest convergence; (3) the social construction of race; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (5) the notion that whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (Hartlep, 2009; Delgado, 2001).

Scholars and jurists across the political spectrum have criticized CRT for its various facets. Critics and opponents of CRT complain it stigmatizes all white people to being oppressors, thereby relegating all black people to hopelessness. In response to these concerns, state legislatures and school boards from seven American states, and even more state jurisdictions are looking to end the practice of teaching critical race tenets (World Population Review, 2022). Gloria Ladson-Billings study links between political power and social organization. The 2005-2006 president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) examines the pedagogical practices of teachers who are successful with African American students and investigates Critical Race Theory applications to education (National Academy of Education, n.d.). According to Ladson-Billings, Critical Race Theory says that disparities are explained by a system. "CRT as it emerged in the 1980s, was a way to begin to make sense of the ongoing disparity, and no matter what we have tried in the nation we continue to have these disparate outcomes based on race". She uses *Huckleberry Finn* and *Robinson Crusoe* as examples

of literature that has made her feel bad about being Black, because they denigrated and derogated Black characters. Ladson-Billings emphasizes the need of putting the whole notion of CRT in a larger socio-political context (The Brainwaves Video Anthology, 2021).

2.1.4 Visual Representation of Racially Diverse Children's Literature

With a few exceptions from abolitionist narratives, children's books have generally treated BIPOC characters stereotypically, reinforcing racist thought and expectations of people of color. Representations of Native islanders have often been lawless and violent savages, tamed by European conquest. Among classic children's literature that dehumanize Black and Indigenous characters is *The Secret Garden* (1911), where one of the main characters, Mary, is defended because the maid imagined her to be colored and says: "You don't know anything about natives! They are not people—they're servants who must salaam to you" (Burnett, 2009, p. 40). Mary's family as well as their servants in India die of cholera, and as an orphan she is sent to live with her uncle in Yorkshire. Nikolajeva (2005:135) draws a link between the blooming of the garden to Mary's psychological development and maturation. In the *Little House on the Prairie* series, Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote "There were no people; only Indians lived there". Racist songs and blackface are among some of the appropriations included in these books. British literature continued to portray racialized "Others" in problematic ways well into the twentieth century, as evidenced by Hugh Lofting's *The Story of Dr. Dolittle* (1920) and *The Voyages of Dr. Dolittle* (1922) to Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), where the Oompa-Lompa's are African pygmies that Willy Wonka has saved from extinction and brought back to England to work for him at the factory. A study on the treatment of race in picturebooks for young children from 1986, found that Black people got more exposure than any other minority, but only 65 of 952 books examined were about Black culture (Edmonds, 1986, p. 34). By conveying that American Indians were presented as inept, silly savages, and Hispanics as poor, simple people, Edmond confirmed the view of picturebooks being stereotypical. Interestingly, Edmonds' study shows that Indigenous peoples lived peacefully with nature in picturebooks, which is in line with this thesis.

In contemporary Western societies, many writers argue that the visual is central to social construction. Visual technologies surround us almost constantly. They all offer a visual view of the world; they render it in visual form. Their images represent the world on a nontransparent level. They interpret the world, they display it in very specific ways, they represent it (Rose, 2012). Every spring since 1985, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) announces how many children's and YA books it received by and about BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) during the previous year. In 2019, only 14 percent of the 3,700 children's books published featured non-white protagonists, and less than one percent featured Native American protagonists. By 2020, the numbers of books CCBC received about BIPOC characters and by BIPOC authors and illustrators had tripled. CCBC has stated that "This is encouraging and, if this trend continues, we may soon see a world in which publishing for children and teens reflects the rich diversity of perspectives and experiences within and across race and culture." (CCBC, 2022). The perception of diversity in real life is directly influenced by children's books and popular culture, particularly those that have diverse representation. Both Indigenous peoples and non-Native children cannot develop essential cultural knowledge or empathetic skills if Indigenous media is not represented, or worse, is portrayed inaccurately (Robideau, 2021). Janey Robideau, who is a children's book illustrator and printmaker of Dakota Sioux descent, has discussed the low level of representation Native American cultures

receive and how we still have a long way to go to break down old stereotypes and to portray modern Native culture fairly and accurately. Stereotypes harm native youth not only because they damage their self-esteem and wellbeing, furthermore they maintain the colonization process (Keene, 2021, p. 81).

2.1.5 The Importance of Diversity in Children's Literature

Several researchers (see e.g., Bishop, 1990; Willett, 1995; Taylor, 2003) have reinforced the importance of children being able to see themselves reflected in literature. Willett (1995) argued that when children do not see themselves reflected in stories, it can have negative consequences and badly affect their image of self. Lack of representation of children's lives in literature can lead to them feeling marginalized and insignificant, not acknowledged as part of the world or a society. Representations of diversity in books included in early childhood classroom libraries were investigated by Crisp, Knezek, and Quinn (2016). Their findings revealed that only 2.6% of the books in classroom libraries were coded as culturally conscious literature. In light of this result, the authors stress the importance of media, literature specialists and school leaders considering racial diversity, voice, and representation at a schoolwide level (Crisp, Knezek, and Quinn, 2016, p. 39). In *Library Trends*, Cass Mabbott (2017) talks about the We Need Diverse Books Campaign and Critical Race Theory. Mabbott highlights essays by Walter Dean Myers, "Where Are the People of Color in Children's Books," and Christopher Myers' "The Apartheid of Children's Literature", both from 2014. The essays discussed how the number of diverse authors had not grown significantly enough, and how "kids of color deserve infinite choices, and not just the oppressive, repetitive slave/civil rights narrative that has consistently been published in the past" (Mabott, 2017, p. 510). Christopher Myer believes that the small growth of diverse authors is linked to three major issues. In an interview he described these issues in short: "We need to get more people in the industry as gatekeepers, we need to get more people writing these books, and we need to find ways to reach these communities" (Adomat, Lowery, & Fain, 2016, p. 59). As a result of seeing themselves portrayed in books, the Myers firmly states that children develop rich imaginations of what they might become when they see role models of color (Myers, 2014; Myers 2014).

Diverse children's literature includes not only racial and ethnic diversity, but diversity in gender, class, dis/abilities, chronic illnesses, sexual identity, religion, language, and more. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the racial and ethnic diversity found within picture books. In a content analysis on the representation of diversity in contemporary picturebooks by Melanie D. Koss (2015) it was apparent that there was a lack of character diversity, and that characters' ethnicities were used for descriptive purposes only, rather than functioning to depict insights about the culture or cultural practices (Koss, 2015, p. 35). This may indicate that BIPOC characters have been used mainly to fill a "diversity quota", not to educate about cultural differences or to address children of color directly. A comprehensive approach to including all children in books should include a consideration of the variety of their personal identities, their social contexts, the cultures they come from, and the environments they are placed in. Looking at Norway as an example, The Arts Council Norway now funds the purchase of translated children's literature, which should encourage publishers to acquire the publishing rights to children's literature with diverse characters, to serve the needs of minority children and reflect the Norwegian population (Mpike, 2020). Mpike stresses the urgency that Norwegian publishers and public institutions provide a space for minority artists to develop stories that majority authors may feel unqualified to write and

illustrate. In connection to Nikolajeva's statements of cultural authenticity and outsiders of superiority being incapable of assuming the minority's point of view, one could remark that today's Norwegian textbooks should be revised instantaneously. This subsection of the theoretical framework is significant in the matter of discussing the third research question, which focuses on the benefits of racially diverse picturebooks and their ability to improve the self-image of marginalized children.

2.2 Ecocriticism

2.2.1 Roots of Ecocriticism

In 1978, William Rueckert first used the term *ecocriticism* in his writing entitled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", his definition of Ecocriticism being "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Rueckert, 1978). After Glotfelty published *The Ecocriticism Reader* in the 1990s, ecocriticism became a major theoretical movement. Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, and it takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty, 1996). In a new age of environmental crisis, Glotfelty urged literary critics to take an ecological approach to literature, emphasizing humans' relationship to the environment from a cultural perspective (Johnson, 2009). Adamson & Slovic (2009) mention Glotfelty's 1996 statement that ecocriticism was at that time "predominantly a white movement," (p. 8) but that ethnic groups are globally increasingly engaging in the conversation about ecocriticism on their own terms through their artistic responses to nature (p. 10). Since the 1990s, ecocriticism has also grown exponentially as an organized initiative; The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). ASLE seeks to "inspire and promote intellectual work in the environmental humanities and arts" (ASLE, 2022).

2.2.2 Environmental Literacy to Promote Environmental Awareness

Ecocriticism is a process of self-realization of who we are, where we stand, and how we should treat our habitat. It is an approach to literary criticism that focuses on the interaction of humans and nonhumans (Mishra, 2016, p. 92). Mishra argues that picturebooks serve as an effective tool of promoting environmental literacy, as children of all ages will be able to learn about the many aspects of their environment and better understand the inter-relatedness of their surroundings using related pictures in books. Tamrin (2018) examined the representation of ecocriticism in children's literature and found that through seeing the relationship between people and their surroundings, in the role of nature in the story and the preservation of nature, the children's literature can be used for raising environmental awareness. Gaard (2008) questions how human self-identity in text is constructed in relation or in opposition to nature, animals, and diverse human cultures and identities. Due to its ability to appeal to children's emotions and intellect, the environmental literature for children can have a profound impact on them. Examples of children's environmental literature show that picturebook narratives have the capacity to build cultural literacy as well, encouraging children to make connections across cultures and across differences (Gaard, 2008, p. 20). According to Deming & Savoy (2011) environmental literacy has over the last decades extended beyond narratives of solitary encounters and celebrations of pure wilderness in recent decades to address habitat degradation, species extinction, and climate change. "This more contemporary sensibility understands that nature has been wounded and degraded

throughout human history, that such wounding diminishes all of us, and that the wound must somehow be healed" (Deming & Savoy, 2011, p. 6).

2.2.3 Ecological Settings in Texts and Pictures

Looking at ecological settings in text and pictures, nature has mainly been pictured as a resource for joy and happiness, while cities and their crowded centers have been presented as something to avoid (Goga et al, 2018, Laakso et al. 2011; Lehtonen 2002, pp. 297-323). Nina Goga et al. points out that "representations of nature in children's text and cultures tend to be filled with flowering gardens, exciting woods, fresh mountain air, vulnerable and courageous animals, plants, and beings that are made of flesh and blood, wood, metal, and different fabrics (2018, p. 1). Making nature a character and not just a backdrop gives a sense of equality between human and nature that can construct an emphasis for the environment in the reader. The settings of picturebooks can also enhance characterization. For instance, a character may be depicted in a setting that is always indoors or always outdoors. Setting contrasts may not only indicate the evolution of events but may also indicate the effect of genre expectations and clarify the central conflict of the book (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 90-92). Given that the setting can function as a key component of plot development, the analysis of this thesis further explores the settings of the selected picturebooks and how it affects the protagonists.

Nature, as it is presented to children in literature (and in other media) may influence the way young people understand and cope with the actual environmental challenges and concerns in their immediate surroundings (Massey & Bradford, 2011; Goga et al, 2018). Nordic countries are blessed with large areas of untouched nature, and in education, contact with nature is regarded as an ideal. However, as nature is "not only a physical entity but also a cultural concept" (Williams, 1976, p. 184; Goga et al, 2018, p. 4), looking at ecological settings of other parts of the world in environmental children's literature can emphasize sustainable ways of living and engage young readers in environmental issues by exploring their connections to nature. In *Environmental crisis in young adult fiction: A poetics of earth* (2013), Alice Curry describes the sense of attachment to place as "phenomenal belonging". A narrative that models phenomenal belonging often focuses on the protagonist's relationship with the surroundings through a small-scale action that unfolds within a limited geographical environment. It's worth mentioning Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1994) for developmental psychology, and argues that the environment around you affects every facet of your life. Bronfenbrenner's nested structure of the ecological environment consists of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and the macrosystem. Kaisu Rättyä presents the settings in a table (see Appendix 3), dividing settings into social settings, physical settings and temporal settings. The physical surroundings include the ecological settings and animal life.

2.2.4 The Child-Nature Relationship

The relationship between humans and the rest of nature has been studied from many angles. "Nature" is a complex word, as it's not only a physical entity but also a cultural concept (Williams, 1976, p. 184). It can refer to the phenomena of the physical world, and the meaning of the word "nature" is derived from the Latin *nascor*, to be born (Deming & Savoy, 2011, p. 8). Our immediate surroundings, such as the air, water and animals are natural entities (Goga et al, 2018, p. 261). According to Goga et al, few ideas in Western culture appear as intimately connected and intertwined as "nature" and

"child" (2018, p. 4), and a recurring feature of Western's children's literature is that the child protagonist often has a companionship with an animal (Goga et al, 2018, p. 228-229) that follows them through thick and thin. Nevertheless, the relations between animals and humans are not always equal. As Goga et al note;

Children's literature has evolved alongside an enduring humanist tradition which places the human subject, often a child or young adult, at the very centre of the story world. The young protagonist is most commonly distinguished from machines, animals and other non-human entities by being considered more superior.

Goga, Guanio-Uluru, Hallås & Nyrnes (2018, p. 228)

Often, the relationship between humans and animals is hierarchical or exploitative, rather than equal, a similar power relation to the one that can occur between humans based on differences or otherness according to race, class, ethnicity, and other social and cultural characteristics - both in fiction and in real life (Goga et al, 2018, p. 229).

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to nonhuman entities, as for instance animals, water, and trees. Anthropomorphism has a long and lively presence in children's literature and can also be referred to as "childhood animism," rooted in cognitive theory of cultural representations (Bullock, 1985; Sotirovska, 2020). It is one way for children to learn about everyday phenomena through picture books (Arnold et al., 1994; Ganea et al., 2014; Sotirovska), and to an extent, anthropomorphism can free characters from cultural biases and address them from a "safe distance" through animal characters as their alter egos. Ryan (2016) discusses plant agency in *The Lord of the Rings* (2005), and notes that trees may be portrayed as both agents and as acted upon within the same narrative. Markowsky (1975, p. 460-462) provides four reasons why authors attributes animals with human characteristics:

- The first reason is to enable young readers to relate to the animals
- The second reason is for the flight of fantasy itself
- The third reason is for variety
- The fourth reason is for humor

The third and fourth reason is especially important in picturebooks, where authors can develop a great variety of characters in a short book with few words or need of character buildup. As humor is often based on the character's picture and not as much on its verbal descriptions, the humor in anthropomorphism may be grasped by the youngest of readers of picturebooks. (Markowsky, 1975, p. 461). While many anthropomorphic characters in children's literature hold verbal conversations with the human protagonists, non-verbal relationships are also possible. In the selection of picturebooks analyzed in this thesis, anthropomorphic characters are without human voice, but some of the animals and nature elements maintain an emotional connection to the human protagonist.

2.2.5 Indigenous Youth and Youth of Color at The Forefront of Climate Justice Initiatives

In *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (2001), Joni Adamson explores how Native American authors address environmental and ecological concerns. Performing an ecocritical study of both past and present Native American culture, she documents problems in identity, alienation, and ecological landscapes (Johnson, 2009, p. 10). According to Adamson (2001) Native American literatures and cultures offer an important contribution to the growing field of

ecocriticism and to the development of environmental concerns. One of these important contributions is the essay-collection *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* (Deming & Savoy, 2011), seventeen multi-ethnic American writers describe how connections to the physical world influenced their identities. As previously mentioned, Indigenous Peoples are among the groups who have contributed the least to the increasingly changing climate and environmental issues, yet they are deeply affected by the consequences of it (López & Cherofsky, 2021). Like many other challenges in society, climate change is hurting communities of color the most. Thus, Indigenous Peoples can contribute with authentic perspectives on the environmental crisis and portray a problematic side of how technological advancements are causing damage to plants, wildlife, and water across the globe. This will be demonstrated through a close reading of selected picturebooks by Indigenous authors in chapter 4 (4.0 Analysis).

3 Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

This study examines young female protagonists of color who are featured in children's contemporary picturebooks through an ecocritical lens. Study objectives include describing the representations of racial diversity, in addition to determining the extent to which exposure to multicultural picturebooks at a young age affects children's perception of diversity as well as their self-image. Four carefully selected picturebooks were visually and textually analyzed through close reading. In order to gain a better understanding of how authentic texts portray the environment in relation to young girls and their culture, we take a look at how these texts represent human-nature relationships. The secondary data, the theoretical framework, was developed to explain the impact of racial representations and ecocritical literature, and the analysis and discussion chapter relies on this framework as well as the authors perception of the whole narrative of the literature. This study uses qualitative research methodology. Qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 179).

3.2 Visual Reading

3.2.1 Visual Methodologies

Rose (2012) suggests five perspectives on visual culture found in recent literature that are relevant to contemplating the social effects of images. (1) *Visualizing social difference*, concern for the way in which images visualize (or render invisible) social difference. (2) *How images are looked at*. (3) *Differentiating visual cultures*. We have to think carefully about just who is able to see what and how, where and with what effects. Every place has its own economy and its own disciplines, as well as its own rules for how spectators are expected to behave, including whether and how they should look, and all of this impacts the perception of an image. (4) *The circulation of images*. It has always been the case that visual objects have been circulated between different places, and the invention of a mass reproduction technology has allowed images of those visual objects to be made and circulated as well. (5) *The agency of images*. As an image has its own materiality, and when trying to understand its meaning, it is important not to assume that it simply reflects meanings found elsewhere - in newspapers, or in gallery catalogues, for example.

3.2.2 Four Sites of A Critical Visual Methodology

Visual images are interpreted broadly in four sites that produce their meanings. In *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretations of Visual Materials* (2012), Rose introduces a framework based on thinking about visual materials in terms of four sites: The site of *production* (where an image is made), the site of the *image* itself (its visual content), the site(s) of its *circulation* (where it travels) and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users, or *audiencing*. In addition, each of these sites has three different aspects. Rose calls these different aspects modalities, and suggests that there are three of these that can contribute to a critical understanding of images;

(1) *technological* (how an image is made, how it travels and how it is displayed), (2) *compositional* (the specific material qualities of the image/visual object) and (3) *social* (refer to the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used).

The Site of Production

The Site of the Image Itself

The Site of Circulation

The Site of Audiencing

All visual representations are made in one way or another, and the circumstances of their production may contribute towards the effect they have. The sites have three modalities, *technology*, *compositionality*, and *social* modality.

3.3 Close Reading: Picturebooks

The purpose of close reading is to engage in critical thinking about a text and its ideas. To read a picturebook critically means to examine not just each element individually, but also to analyze how they affect each other. To understand picturebooks, it is important to focus on the interrelation of word and image to see if the interaction is symmetrical, complementary, or contradictory. A close reading should also consider artistic decisions made in the production, including book size, picture size, compositions of objects, setting, and the choice of medium (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019).

The analysis of literature—or reading critically—involves understanding the relationships between texts and significant ideologies or social systems and experiences such as gender or race, placing texts within literary or cultural histories, and examining specific elements such as a text's themes, literary devices, production, structure, language, uses, or reception.

Hintz & Tribunella (2019, p. 29)

3.3.1 The Contemporary Picturebook

The contemporary picturebook is «defined by its particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words, to convey meaning» (Bird & Yakota, 2018, p. 281). The visual text is imperative to the reader's comprehension of the message as it provides clarification, and sometimes even replaces parts of the verbal text entirely. Initially, picturebooks may appear simple, but on reflection they can reveal a greater level of complexity. Through picturebooks, readers gain the opportunity to see their own worlds reflected and to discover new worlds, both real and imagined.

We can say that picturebooks communicate by means of two separate sets of signs, the iconic and the conventional. The pictures are complex iconic signs with the function to describe or represent. The words are complex conventional signs, primarily to narrate. To signify that text and image are combined into a unified form, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2000) established the spelling “picturebook” combined instead of two words, which will serve as the preferred spelling throughout this thesis. Picturebooks create unlimited opportunities for interaction between the words and images due to the tension between the two functions. Both words and images can stimulate readers to activate their previous knowledge, experience and expectations (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 85-86). A close reading of the relationship between words and

images allows for a whole understanding of the contextual and didactic meanings of the text itself.

3.3.2 Setting and Creative Space

The setting of a picturebook establishes the situation and the nature of the world in which the events of the story take place (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013, p. 61). Setting can establish a particular emotional register in a reader by creating a pervasive affective climate. This thesis performs a close reading of the natural setting in a selection of picturebooks to analyze the affective space associated with the female protagonists. Correct and specific delineation of setting is necessary and educational for many stories with a historical dimension. Visual treatment of the setting plays an important role in picturebooks with ethnic content, enabling readers to understand the culture from which the story is presented. The settings of picturebooks can also enhance characterization. For instance, a character may be depicted in a setting that is continuously indoors or permanently outdoors. Furthermore, the setting can be a key component of plot development. Setting contrasts may not only indicate the evolution of events but may also indicate the effect of genre expectations and clarify the central conflict of the book (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 90-92).

No denominative function can be attributed to pictures - they can neither tell us the name of the character, nor can they indicate concrete facts about them, such as their exact age, or their family relations. Gender can be visualized through clothes, haircuts, and other means, but in some cases, they may have to be identified verbally by using gendered pronouns and gender-specific names. One of the unique aspects of picturebook communication is that pictures can show characters that are not actually mentioned in the words. These characters can enhance our understanding of the protagonist and provide a credible sense of their background (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 93).

In contemporary picturebook studies, gaps are both a descriptive and a normative feature. Gaps are particularly seen as at least somewhat sheltered from adult influence. In fact, both empirical research on picture book reading among children and theoretical picture book studies support the assertion that children are better gap fillers than adults (Beauvais, 2015). As Beauvais points out, however, many of these gaps are controlled and accompanied by an adult injunction. Styles & Watson (1996) called the gaps "imaginative spaces that lies hidden somewhere between the words and the pictures", and researchers declares that children need space and freedom from our [adults] expectations (Fremantle, 1993; Arizpe and Styles, 2003). Adults cannot predict what can be found in gaps, but the gaps serve a didactic purpose and there is a normative interpretation of them. Gaps do contain adult knowledge and authority and the possibility for full didactic pedagogical explorations (Beauvais, 2015).

3.4 Criteria for Selecting Primary Sources

The first part of the process involved setting certain criteria for the texts that would be used in the visual analytical reading. The chosen texts are contemporary picturebooks published within 2019-2021, all with an appropriate reading level for EFL learners in primary school grades 4-6¹. Each picturebook has a central child protagonist

¹ The texts can also be read by/with students of lower grades, although it is recommended that adults and educators that introduce texts involving topics such as race and significant cultural differences are prepared to discuss these sensitive topics and being hands-on to establish an inclusive classroom environment from an early stage. While the pedagogical aspect is of significance, it is not the focus of this specific study.

of color or of a marginalized group, and deliberately involves nature and some form of ecocriticism. At first, gender was not a determining factor, but as the research progressed it became clear that the majority of the environmental picturebooks had female lead characters, so the focus shifted to females only. In order to identify books that conveyed the truth of their experiences rather than stereotypes or misrepresentations, authentic authors were favored. Evaluating authenticity involves considering complex issues, for instance authorship, believability, whose perspectives are portrayed, accuracy of details and authenticity of values (Short, Day & Schroeder, 2016).

3.5 Data Collection Process

The procedure of selecting picturebooks started online. More than 100 books from various online top lists of diverse children's literature were evaluated by cover design and description, and some books were found by looking at suggestions from the online stores that shared similarities with my criteria. To determine whether the content was suitable for the set criteria, approximately fifty picturebooks were assessed briefly and five were selected for close analysis. Appendix 2 provides an overview of contemporary multicultural picturebooks that did not meet all the criteria but can still be utilized in the classroom to advocate racial diversity. At the time this study was conducted, the lack of racially diverse literature in Norwegian libraries and bookstores resulted in ordering the selected picturebooks online. After reading them independently and taking notes, I spent time developing the theoretical framework and gaining a greater understanding of visual methodology, ecocriticism, and critical race theory. During the review and building of the theoretical framework of the thesis, it was established how the cultural authenticity of author and illustrator was highly important to create truthful portrayals of children from oppressed minorities (Fox & Short, 2003; Nikolajeva, 2005; Short, Day & Schroeder, 2016; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019), which led to replacing or eliminating some of the originally chosen picturebooks. Finally, a total of four picturebooks were included in the study for further analysis, as seen in Appendix 1. With the theoretical framework in mind, a close reading of visual and verbal text was conducted, focusing on representation of race and nature.

3.6 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

While reading this paper, there are some ethical considerations to keep in mind. Positionality of the author can affect a picturebook's analysis, and one person's interpretation is only one point of view. Since I am a non-native woman from a white Norwegian background, I cannot put myself in the position of a child of color or Indigenous background. I hope, however, that my perspective as a pre-service teacher can be one to promote the importance of racial diversity in children's literature. This thesis provides a critical overview and analysis on key areas of ethnic representation in contemporary picturebooks. Drawing on the Norwegian educational curriculum, "Education and training shall provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual's convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking," and that "The pupils and apprentices shall learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 3). Thus, it is my hope that this study can contribute to this representation and future implementation of diverse picturebooks in the EFL classroom in a Norwegian context.

As previously described in chapter 2.1.1, the usage of words and terminology such as people of color and BIPOC, are a complicated matter, as there is no single

language that fits all when it comes to talking about race. It is advocated that the reader has great interest in learning the history of the various terms, or the context in which it's appropriate or not.

4 Analysis

The annual Jane Addams Children’s Book Awards (Jane Addams Children’s Book Association) and the Randolph Caldecott Medal (American Library Association) are two honorable awards that help promote diverse Children’s literature and aim to connect the world and young people with books. The first mentioned “recognizes children’s books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people” (Jane Addams Peace Association, n.d.). The Caldecott is awarded to the artist of the most distinguished American Picture Book for Children during the preceding year. *We Are Water Protectors* (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020) won both of these awards in its publication year, due to its reflection of the rich identity of Native Americans and its ability to empower the reader to stand up for environmental justice. This book was the initial inspiration for conducting a further analysis of racially and ethnically diverse picturebooks. During the data collection process, the three following texts were added: *Earthbred: The Light of Mine* (Drummond & Cloud, 2020), *Oona* (Dipucchio & Figueroa, 2021), and *Zonia’s Rain Forest* (Martinez-Neal, 2021). In this chapter, a multimodal narrative approach was applied to individually analyze the visual images and written language in these picturebooks.

4.1 We Are Water Protectors

“Humans have been mistreating Mother Earth for millennia, and Indigenous Peoples have long acted as stewards of the planet, giving a voice to our silent home.” These are the words of Carole Lindstrom, who is an Anishinaabe/Métis author and tribally enrolled with the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. In her picturebook, Lindstrom writes about how the land is connected to her culture, advocating for the voices who cannot speak for themselves. She describes two roads described by the Anishinaabe² prophecy; the first one leads to global peace and unity that embraces the sacred relationship between humanity and all living things. The other path, symbolized by the oil pipelines known as the “black snakes”, is seen by many native nations as destructive and harmful, causing devastation to our planet (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020, p. 39). As Lindstrom became increasingly aware of the many tribal nations fighting oil pipelines through their lands and waterways, the author created *Water Protectors* (2020).

The oil industry’s Pipeline101.org claims that pipelines are an “extremely safe way to transport energy across the country”, however hundreds of ruptures and leaks occur each year, with a range of consequential outcomes (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019, p.1). The leaks cause tremendous damage and destruction to plants, wildlife, and water. In April 2016 a small group of women from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST) stood up against titans of industry to protect their region’s water and sacred burial grounds from one of these oil pipelines, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020). Prior to this, the tribal council expressed concern that the pipeline rupture could damage sacred sites and contaminate the community’s water supply. By late August, thousands of people

² Anishinaabe refers to the three tribes of the Council Fires, or the People of Three Fires—Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa people. It may also include the Cree, in that the Cree are related to the Council Fires people, although they are not technically Anishinaabe. (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020, p. 40).

were camping at what was being referred to generally as “Standing Rock”, a demonstration initiated by a group of Indigenous women. Hundreds of tribal nations in the United States sent their support, financial and otherwise, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities around the world sent messages of encouragement. The demonstrators referred to themselves as “water protectors”. In September 2016 Energy Transfer Partners (EPT) brought in a private security firm armed with attack dogs and mace. Images and videos of water protectors being viciously attacked went viral on social media and were viewed by millions of people, and in the aftermath of that day, the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock gained international attention (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019, p. 3-5). Militarized police conducted two more violent sweeps of the camp, in October/November 2016, and again videos went viral, further galvanizing the world’s attention and support for Standing Rock’s cause. After Donald Trump was elected president in November 2016, he authorized both the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone XL Pipeline. Nevertheless, the #NoDAPL movement was a major victory on a number of fronts (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019, p. 7-10), for instance it illustrates how environmental movements have joined forces with Indigenous movements around the globe over the past couple of decades.

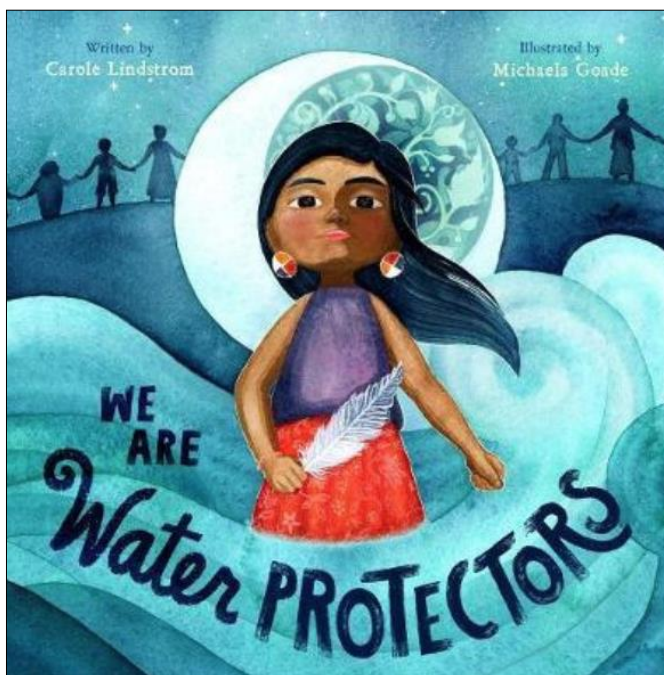


Figure 1: We Are Water Protectors

The main character of *We Are Water Protectors* is a Native American girl with brown skin, long black hair, and dark brown eyes. The cover illustration of the book clearly shows that this is an Indigenous girl, as she is holding a white feather and wearing earrings of the four directions, called the Medicine Wheel or a Sacred Hoop. This is an important Indigenous symbol used by Anishinaabe and other Native American tribes to represent the core of their world views. Native American tribes have been using it for health and healing for generations, and different tribes interpret the Medicine Wheel differently. In Ojibwe teaching, The Four Cardinal points on the Medicine Wheel are the Four Sacred Directions, represented by the colors yellow, red, black, and white. “The four directions of the Medicine Wheel remind us of many things, such as the need for balance

in the world, and the balance we must strive for everyday within ourselves” (Pitawanakwat, n.d.). The girl on the cover of *We Are Water Protectors* stands proud and powerful, looking straight forward with her chin up. She stands in front of her people who hold hands in unity, protecting the water, and striving for the need of balance in the world. There is no doubt that the young girl is the main character. The title and illustration both tell the audience that this book is about humans protecting water, indicating that this is an ecocritical book.



Figure 2: Water Is Alive

Inside the picturebook, the first meeting with the girl is her gathering water with her *Nokomis* - her grandmother. The girl's hair grows into different shades of blue colored rivers, filled with swimming fish and pink lotus flowers. The girl is in unity with the water, they are one. *Nokomis* says, "We come from water". In the Ojibwe culture, women are the protectors of the water. Water is sacred; water is alive. The water plays a main part in this story, and the protagonist brings her people together to stand for the water, "to stand as ONE. Against the black snake". At this turning point of the story, the young girl suddenly changes her entire into her native clothing and raises her white feather up in the air. The feather can be seen as a symbol of the Indigenous Peoples, and Native American warriors were awarded a feather when they won a battle or were particularly brave in war. This girl is the symbol of bravery, as she stands up for her people and mother Earth. She will fight for those who cannot fight for themselves, the animals, and all living things. After the spread where we see the Earth and the animals around it, saying "We are all related", the girl is being embraced by her *Nokomis*, crying tears like waterfalls. All the women are in one with the water, the same color. The girl lets the water run through her hands as she sees her ancestors in the water's reflection. The sobbing women can also be seen as the girl's ancestors, crying over what is happening to the land they once walked on and protected themselves.



Figure 3: The Black Snake

The black snake represents the 2.7 million miles of oil pipelines across the United States that the Water Protectors of Standing Rock were protesting against. In the vicinity of the pipeline, the flowers wither and the animals die. Death surrounds the black snake. When the black snake first appears in the picturebook, it emerges from the red sun rising, suggesting that danger lies ahead. When the black snake appears, the color scheme switches from earth tones like blue and green to red tones that can often symbolize violence and aggression. As the full snake approaches, it burns the land and makes the flowers appear red as if they are bleeding. The large snake snarls at the women as it hovers above them, encroaching on their land. This image illustrates how politicians and other superior people at the top of society's hierarchy are dominating inferiors like minorities and Native Nations, and how the Water Protectors are forcefully moved to make way for the Dakota Access Pipeline.

We Are Water Protectors is an important story because it can teach us about tribal land preservation and the struggles that Indigenous peoples are having to protect their sacred lands. The book contains a pledge for the children to sign, which is a promise to Mother Earth that they will do their best to honor it and treat it with kindness and respect. This could be part of a bigger project, where children learn about environmental justice and effective strategies to help keep water clean. The cultural aspect of the book can help children learn about humanitarian issues and how we can stand together to make a difference. The book does not tell the full story of the Water Protectors, leaving out the most violent parts - which is understandable because it is a children's book. The teacher or adults that interact with children that read this book has the opportunity to further explicate the story behind the book and to clarify the risks Indigenous peoples are putting themselves into by protesting the government. The story is a good conversation starter for many subjects, including activism, environmental justice, and Indigenous cultures.



Figure 4: We Are Still Here

Figure 4 shows how the image of people standing together with their drums are repeated three times throughout the picturebook. The first image shows five women standing together, the second time one person is added. In the last image of the people drumming, there are a total of eight women standing together to protect the water and raise awareness. The last spread of *We Are Water Protectors* shows a diverse spectrum of people standing together to fight the black snake. Indigenous Nations and their allies of all ages stand together, women wearing rich colored dresses and skirts with feathers and beads, but also women in modern clothing such as hoodies and pants. These are the same women that stand together in unity with their drums throughout the book, holding hands and peacefully showing they are still here.

Both author Carole Lindstrom and illustrator Michaela Goade was deeply inspired by the solidarity for Mother Earth at Standing Rock, and Goade's note she writes that she wanted the illustrations to "convey kinship and unity while also representing a diverse group of Indigenous Nations and allies" (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020, p. 40). With her illustrations in *We Are Water Protectors*, Goade made history becoming the first Indigenous illustrator to win the prestigious Caldecott award for her illustrations and the seamless connection between story and image. Goade's illustrations reflect her careful attention to authenticity as she draws from her own personal and cultural experiences as well as honoring the Ojibwe culture by using repeated floral designs inspired by traditional Anishinaabe woodland floral motifs and animals of traditional teachings. The book features vibrant watercolor illustrations, a clever choice given that water is a main character of the story.

4.2 Zonia's Rain Forest

In *Zonia's Rain Forest* (Martinez-Neal, 2021), we meet Zonia, a young Asháninka girl living in the Amazon rainforest with her family that starts her days with a walk through the idyllic forest, playing with all her animal friends. On her way home, her path leads her through a section of clear-cut forest. Seeing the forest in need of help, she runs home and tells her mother.



Figure 5: Zonia's Face Paint and Kushma

Zonia's Rain Forest represents the Indigenous people of the Amazon, more specifically The Asháninka. A personal dedication from the author "to the Indigenous people of the Amazon and to Ruth Buendía" shows appreciation to the Indigenous peoples as well as bringing an authenticity to the introduction. This book is written for the Asháninka, who are members of the Arawak linguistic group, inhabit the Peruvian Amazonian rainforests (Martinez-Neal, 2021).

The book's cover features a smiling Zonia, a Peruvian girl with dark hair and red markings on her face. These marks are plant-based paint that the Asháninka use to complement their actions or abilities. According to the author, these designs vary from family to family and can be understood as empowering. The tradition is captured in *Zonia's Rain Forest* when the final spread features her tribal face paint, which signifies her strength and determination to help the rain forest. In addition, Zonia's attire changes. Her dress, previously plain orange, is now embellished with a tribal pattern. The Asháninka traditional dress, commonly known as a Kushma, is a robe made from cotton that is collected, spun, dyed, and woven by women on looms (Minority Rights Group, 2021). There is a striking similarity to the transformation of the girl in *We Are Water Protectors*. Symbolically, the girls are becoming fierce protectors of Mother Earth.

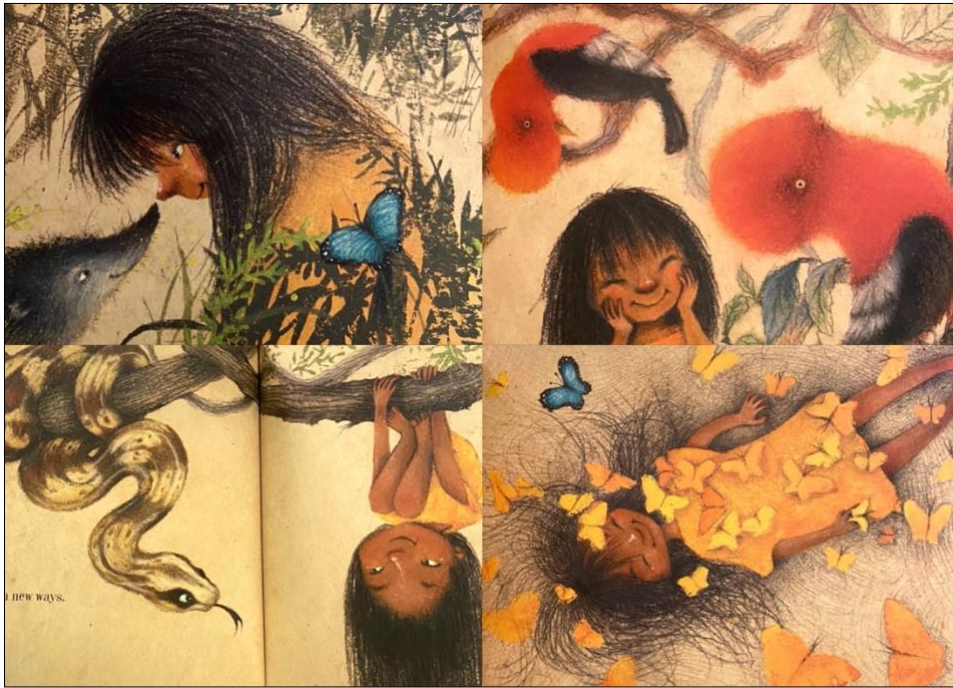


Figure 6: Animals of The Amazon

Zonia loves to play with her friends, the animals. The blue morpho butterfly follows her through the whole story, and it symbolizes the voice of the rain forest. "Every morning, the rain forest calls to Zonia. Every morning, Zonia answers", and she follows the butterfly. According to the Rainforest Alliance (2021), blue morphos are severely threatened by deforestation of tropical forests and habitat fragmentation. This spectacular creature is imperiled by humans because their beauty attracts artists and collectors from all over the world who seek to capture and display them. She visits old friends and meets new ones. She meets the sloths, the Andean cock-of-the-rock birds, the South American coatis, the jaguar, the dolphins of the Amazon River, the anteaters, the spectacled caiman, the turtles, and the red-tailed boa.

The snake in *Zonia's Rain Forest* is presented as the protagonist's friend, which challenges the presumed identity of the snake as villain. Serpents are often portrayed as villains in books and films, for example in *Harry Potter* where the snake represent death, destruction and evil. Snakes are the symbol of the Slytherin house that the dark wizards and witches belonged to, including lord Voldemort, the main villain of the series. He has a snake companion called Nagini. Another example would be the Disney film adaptation of *Robin Hood*, where Prince John has a snake advisor and assistant called Sir Hiss. Sir Hiss has been compared to Kaa from *The Jungle Book*, who has a similar appearance. Kaa's hypnotic eyes are his most dangerous feature, as he uses them to manipulate and attract unsuspecting prey. The snake in *Zonia's Rain Forest* is represented contrarily, as a friend who helps Zonia to see the world in "different ways", as in upside down. It's a Red-tailed boa constrictor, a non-venomous snake species that are recognized as natives of the Caribbean Islands and tropical South America. The animals are seen as equals to Zonia, because they have the same position and size in the book. Even the Giant Amazon water lily is listed as one of Zonia's friends in the book, because the flora and fauna is part of the living things.

Zonia's happiness and witty smile continues throughout the story, only to end up shocked and upset when she sees the destroyed rain forest, as shown in Figure 7. She is

frightened by what has happened to the landscape, an issue Martinez-Neal describes as illegal logging; where the prized mahogany tree, for example, has been harvested so severely that it is in danger of disappearing altogether. Forests are also being burned down and cleared to make room for pastureland on which to graze commercial livestock. Destroying the rain forest destroys a key source of oxygen, but forests are also a source of air, water, food, shelter, medicine. They are critical to the survival of every living thing on Earth.

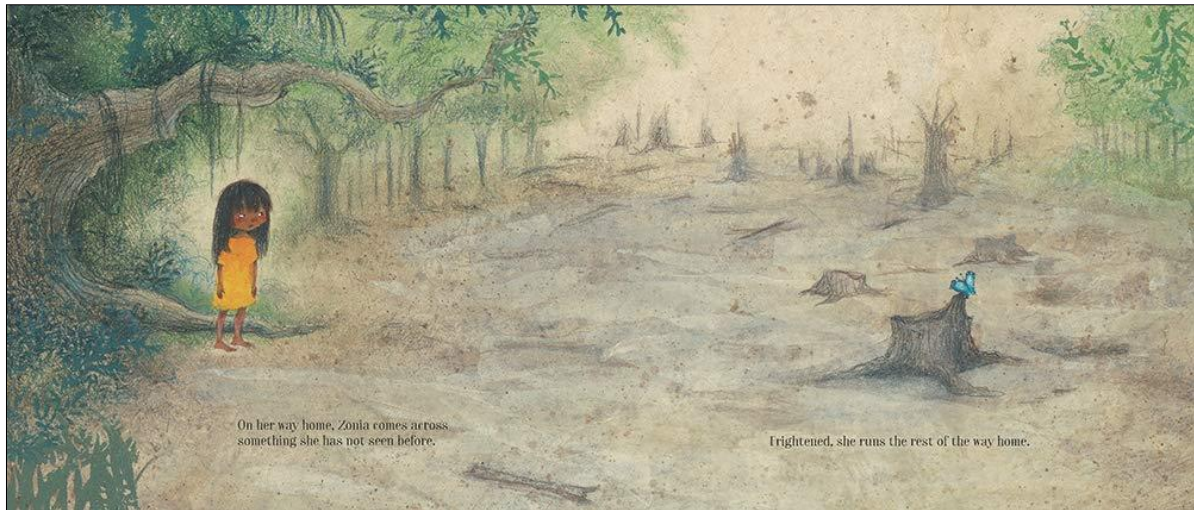


Figure 7: Destruction of The Rain Forest

As Zonia heads home, she comes across an area where the trees have all been cut down, and the green has turned brown. The wildlife has been replaced by dust. The setting contrast from rich, green wildlife to a drained atmosphere works as an effect to clarify the central conflict of the book, just as described by Nikolajeva (2002). Color plays a significant part in setting the emotional tone for the reader and viewer, and Zonia's facial expression enhances this effect. In the last spread of *Zonia's Rain Forest*, readers are left to fill in a gap. The last page consists only of the text "We must all answer." with a few framing plants and the blue butterfly that has followed Zonia throughout the book. Neither the visual images nor verbal text tells the reader what *we all* must do, it is up to interpretation. This gap is a central feature to define the reader's own creative space (Beauvais, 2015). Despite being the most interesting part of the story, the story abruptly ends here. The back matter includes interesting information about the Asháninka and the deforestation of the Amazon, yet this text is not part of the story. In cases where the children are unaccompanied by adults, they will in many cases skip this information.

The whole plot takes place outdoors, and as the environment around Zonia is significantly different from a western one, it is apparent from the very beginning of the book that we are about to venture into a world that is quite distinct from our own. It visualizes social difference, one of five perspectives on visual culture, as well as referring to the economic and political relations (Rose, 2012). The fact that Zonia walks around bare feet tells us something about the culture of the Asháninka and the environment and climate they live in. These characteristics are not mentioned in the text, but as emphasized by Nikolajeva (2002), the setting and the pictures can enhance characterization and our understanding of the protagonist. A change in emotions is evoked in the reader by the visual contrasts of nature in Figure 7, which provide clarity and clarification to the central theme of the book. By presenting an image of deforestation and how close it is to Zonia and her family, the reader's sensibility

understands that nature has been wounded and that “the wound must somehow be healed”. This is the powerful embodiment of contemporary environmental literacy (Deming & Savoy, 2011), evoking development of the reader's critical thinking skills.

Subsequently to the story, the picturebook provides information about The Asháninka People, facts about the Amazon and the threats against it, and animals that live there. Juana Martinez-Neal is Peruvian-born and prior to writing this story she went on a research trip in the Amazon rain forest to learn more about the Indigenous communities and the wildlife around them. The author wanted to break the stereotype of Peru with her work, and for her readers to see the world from the perspective of this little girl, Zonia, who lives through the destruction of nature around her. This picturebook provides an opportunity to learn more about the Peruvian rain forest and how the Indigenous communities live naturally in balance with the wildlife of nature. The author wanted to share the idea of *home*, and how different people can understand *home* in different ways. The book is intended for children aged 4-8 years old, which is reflected by the short sentences and easy language. *Zonia's Rain Forest* was created in America, drawn on paper made of banana bark by women of the Amazon, an intentional decision to make the book become a living thing. The book exists in both English and Spanish editions, and the Asháninka translation is included with both texts, which adds to the representation of the Asháninka culture, as language describes cultural attachment to place, cultural heritage items, and puts meaning within the many cultural activities that people do.

4.3 Earthbred

Earthbred: The Light of Mine (Drummond & Cloud, 2020) is a book made to remind children to be true to themselves regardless of how others view them and celebrating uniqueness. From here on out, *Earthbred: The Light of Mine* will be shortened to *Earthbred*. Emi has a special connection to earth. She is Earthbred, which means that Emi has extraordinary powers to make the flowers bloom and crops to grow new vines. From the very beginning of *Earthbred*, nature is presented as a peaceful place where vegetables grow and flowers bloom even bigger than Emi herself. At first, nature is viewed from an ecocentric perspective. Emi addresses nature as a friend; “Thank you for all that you do, Blessed Earth,” she says to Earth. The sun is presented as the character “Sunshine” and the big willow tree is named “Dancing Willow”. Because of its ability to grow and survive through challenging conditions, the willow tree can represent balance and a sense of belonging. It is the last thing Emi sees through the car window when she leaves the village (see Figure 8), before making new connections in the new urban setting. At school, we are introduced to new characters through the visual images. Two of the other students acts like bullies, and mocks another student, Terran, for his interests in nature and how things grow. Observing the degrading behavior towards Terran, Emi stops sharing her cultural traits and beliefs with her social settings, and she grows more and more hesitant to share her identity as an Earthbred. After maturing into adulthood and reconnecting with Terran, Emi has found someone to share her love for flowers with. Suspecting that their children might be Earthbred like herself, Emi decides to take them back to the village and her garden. As they return to her “roots”, they discover that the flowers have withered and big concrete gray factories are spouting clogs of smoke in the air over the village. The willow tree has a long history of symbolism rooted in spirituality and cultural traditions, and its stability & strength helps Emi recognize the beauty of her true self.



Figure 8: Emi is Earthbred

Cindy Stater-Drummond, a Black Canadian woman based in Ontario with her husband and three children wrote *Earthbred* trying to inspire girls to better connect with themselves and the world around them. Her own family has inspired her to write this story, and she included all her three kids in the story. Through a closer view at the different sites and modalities of the text contributes to a critical understanding of the images (Rose, 2012). The site of production explores where an image is made. *Earthbred* is self-published through "Own My Canvas", a trauma-informed yoga company for Black women and women of color launched by Drummond herself. The site of image itself explores the visual content, the colorful and vibrant illustrations of drawn by Sawyer Cloud, a self-taught artist and Malagasy woman living in the island nation of Madagascar. Cloud uses Procreate to make vibrant digital paintings, where flowers and plants decorate the pages bringing nature to life. While Emi is still a child, the illustrations show flowers that grow massive and even bigger than the humans (see Figure 9). The text is presented in two fonts, one of them resembles twigs of wood. The site of its circulation refer to where the text travels. In this case, a Canadian picturebook has travelled across the world to end up in the hands of a pre-school teacher in Norway, where the climate and nature is differs from nature in Canadian and Madagascar. Thus, there is a great potential for the audience, the fourth site, to learn about ecological settings and cultural traits of a different culture.

The author anthropomorphizes earth, the sun, and the willow tree by giving them names. Although they don't speak, their characteristics are shown through the narrating voice shown in these three quotes:

She [Emi] rested her hands on her heart and bowed. "Good morning, Sunshine!"

"Thank you for all that you do, Blessed Earth," she giggled.

Blessed Earth gathered all the living creatures and Dancing Willow swayed her branches.

Drummond & Cloud, 2020

All living things on Earth are connected to Emi in an unbreakable bond. Emi's perspective becomes more anthropocentric as she grows older, and she is increasingly reluctant to share her special connection to the earth with others for fear of what others may thin



Figure 9: A Strong Connection to Nature and Animals

As Emi matures and has children of her own, she realizes that her children may also be Earthbred, which gives her the courage to tell them her secret. As outlined in the theoretical framework of this thesis, ecocriticism is a process of self-realization, which is what happens to Emi when she embraces her true identity and reconnects with nature.

The setting of the scene has a great impact on the readers feelings, and in *Earthbred*, the most frequently appeared setting is vibrant nature. As a young child, Emi lives in a green village spending most of her time making the flowers bloom and feeling the warmth of the sun on her skin. Surrounded by nature, Emi always has a big grin on her face. In contrast to this, the adult version of Emi looks unhappy when she walks through the city, a more urban landscape. One of the unique strengths of picturebook communication, according to Nikolajeva (2002) is its ability to convey characters who aren't directly mentioned in the words, thus enhancing our understanding of the protagonist. In *Earthbred* we can see an example of this. In Figure 10 (bottom right corner) three persons are added to the illustration in addition to Emi, but they are never mentioned in the text. These people are using their cell phones, adding a visual effect that enhances the reader's conception of Emi missing her simple life in the village. Another image that reinforces this idea is the setting of Emi's new home where the sun is pictured in a frame on the wall and as a mirror, and there is no visible technology in her home.



Figure 10: Contrasts of Landscape

The landscape of Emi’s garden and the willow tree appears to be the specific place where Emi has a sense of “phenomenal belonging” (Curry, 2013), and the atmosphere is being set by Dancing Willow’s appearance. The willow tree appears a total of seven times throughout the book, with her leaves changing substance and color depending on Emi’s feelings and the mood of the story. Initially, her thick, luscious, green vines are dancing in the wind. When Emi returns to her garden as an adult, the vines are thinned out, hanging in despair. The flowers have withered, and the soil dried up to gray crumbles. In the next appearance, Dancing Willow’s vines have been transformed to black shadows. Following Emi and her family’s use of their Earthbred powers, the tree is back to its original form at the end of the story. Linking this to Ryan (2016), the tree works as an intelligent plant working as an agent and as acted upon. It’s multi-purpose as both material and as a life form provides the reader an extensive and nuanced understanding of the state of the landscape, and its transformation symbolizes Emi’s personal growth.

According to Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, “Freirean problem-posing methodology and CRT are about challenging the dominant mind-set of society and building shared understandings of the strengths within communities of color” (p. 72). In *Earthbred: The Light of Mine*, we are introduced to a marginalized community where humans have a close spiritual connection to nature, and we witness that society neglects Emi’s naturalistic intelligence. In *A Dictionary of English Synonymes and Synonymous or Parallel Expressions*, Earth-bred means “low, vile, abject, grovelling” (Soule, 1871, all negatively loaded words. Drummond takes ownership of the word and gives it power, being Earthbred is unique and wonderful. To be “Earthbred” can simply be comprehended as a child of the earth.



Figure 11: Representation of Race and Culture in Earthbred

After traveling back to her homeland with her new family, Emi discovers her hometown to be destroyed, which marks the turning point of the story. As the illustrations become darker, the vibrant greens, blues, and yellows are replaced with darker brown tones. The beautiful garden that Emi once made bloom has been replaced with a giant factory, and a once idyllic landscape is now more reminiscent of a dystopian one. Emi reconnects with the elders and nature who rely on her help, but she cries helpless when she fails to manage her powers. With the help of her family, she finds the strength to bring out the special light inside of her and they all stick their fingers into the dirt. Sunshine shines again, raindrops shower the garden and new flower buds begin to sprout. Some ethnic aspects represented in this book include the strong connection to home and one's people, a spiritual and equal relationship with nature, and some traditional cultural elements. In the bottom left illustration of Figure 11, Emi and two other black women touch the dark soil, while the elders are seen behind her beating the *bata* drums and echoing chants of old harvest songs. It is the words of "the elders" that trigger Emi's memory and prompt her to revert to her Earthbred abilities. Originally from Nigeria, bata drums are also known as the "talking drums" of the Yoruba and are used for spiritual purposes. Traditional Nigerian dress is also visible in the illustrations. The final spread of the book shows one of the elders wearing an *agbada*, a patterned tunic often worn on special occasions in Nigeria (the reason to celebrate is that Emi and her family brought back the wildlife of the garden and have made it flourish again).

4.4 Oona

Oona is the story about a mermaid and her best friend Otto, an otter she rescued from an oyster net when he was a pup. She is a brave and curious treasure hunter, a true adventurer who has an eye for sparkly things. Together with her best friend, the otter Otto, they look for “lost gold” nearly every day. Her heart is set on finding a fallen tiara that has sunk into a deep, murky rift at the bottom of the ocean floor.

In relation to the site of production (Rose, 2012), the artist Raissa Figueroa used Procreate to create the digital illustrations for the book, and the illustrations have the appearance of watercolors, which is fitting considering that the storyline takes place under water. The book is dominated by greens and blues, and with darker shades of black and purple when the viewpoint is lower in the sea or danger is approaching. The typography and lettering are playful and modern, yet readable. One of the two fonts used to express speech and onomatopoeia looks like paintbrush strokes, providing an ingenious literary effect. However, the text is not arranged in a static manner; instead, it is fragmented across the pages in a way that may be difficult to follow by untrained readers.

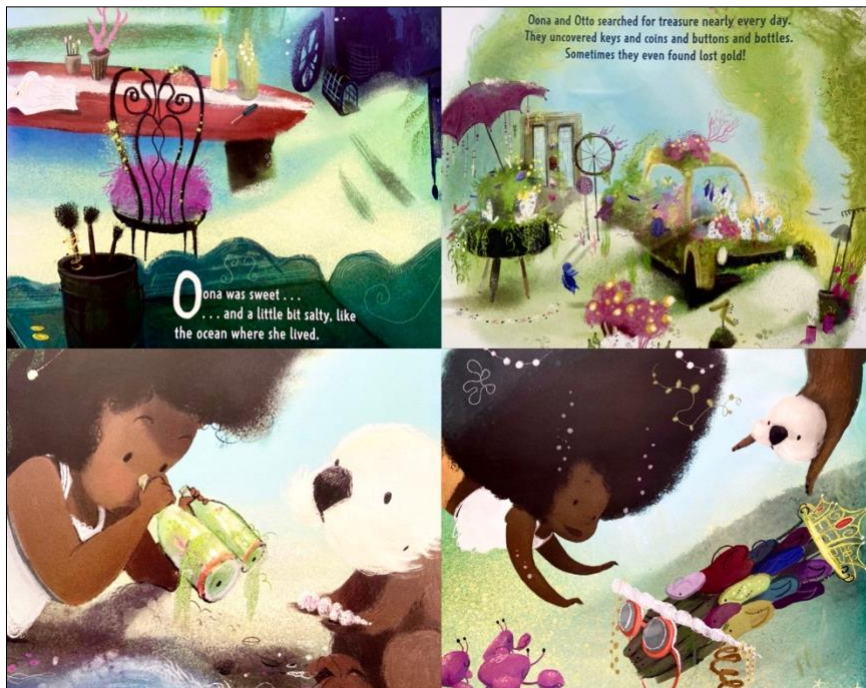


Figure 12: Human Litter - A Treasure?

The characters of *Oona* collect trash that they find in the ocean. They regard these items as prized possessions, unaware of what they are doing to sea. “They uncovered keys and coins and buttons and bottles. Sometimes they even found lost gold!”. *Oona* and *Otto* collect every human possession they can find, even a bunch of slippers becomes art. Figure 12 shows just a few examples of the human-created waste in the ocean displayed in this picturebook. *Oona* uses a surfboard as a dining table, and she collects tennis balls and old toothbrushes. In a way, marine litter is being glorified because the protagonist sees it as treasure, and the illustrator’s note says that she “loves walking the beaches in search of tiny treasures of her own”. It also shows how the curiosity and imagination of a child can result in new inventions. *Oona* experiments and she makes decorations and inventions out of the litter, for instance she makes

magnifying glasses of two bottles and uses a rake as a jewelry holder. A pair of lost goggles is what helps her find the treasure she passionately attempts to collect through the whole story. The author does not specifically express through text or image that the human litter is a danger to the sea and its living creatures, and neither the introduction nor author's note mention anything about environmental issues. Oona can nevertheless be read through an ecocritical lens by human eyes, considering the excessive amount of human waste in the illustrations.

By implementing *Ecological settings in texts and pictures* (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Rättyä, 2018, p. 162) to the story of Oona, the mesosystem consists of the ocean as a physical setting, and marine animals as her social connections. The enormous setting of the undersea and its many creatures and species are elements that provides a somewhat authentic image of the reality, although some fictional elements and anthropomorphism occurs. At one point in the story (as seen in Figure 13), Oona has occasional contact with human children or "land friends" when she visits the beach. The beach works as an immediate surrounding in a microsystem setting that is socially minimalistic, as we see no verbal interaction between the mermaid and the humans, and it only obtain one spread of the whole book. However, this short sequence makes the story more relatable to students because of the habitat, and it also presents an image of children of different skin colors being friends.



Figure 13: Black Character Representation

Oona is an African American mermaid with a wonderful afro and her dark brown skin that contrasts beautifully to the light blue and green tones of the picturebook. She is adventurous, brave and "a bit sassy". Oona's face conveys a good deal about her personality, despite her small face features. Similar to a human child, Oona gets upset when she can't have what she wants. Oona is determined to gain possession of the crown, a valuable treasure that has been discovered deep in the rift. In the process of getting her hands on the crown, we discover the more egocentric side of Oona which exploits some of the sea creatures for her own good. She ties a snail to a fishing line

trying to get it unstuck and tries to persuade the crabs to lure it out of the rift. When her plans fail, she angrily shouts “You can keep your dumb crown. I quit!”. In accordance with the theoretical framework, Oona has a privileged position among species, and the child-animal relationship is hierarchical or exploitative, rather than equal. Although she is the most human character, she takes the form of a mermaid.



Figure 14: Animal Friends

Goga et al (2018) mentions the recurring feature of Western’s children’s literature where child protagonist frequently develops a companionship with an animal. The otter Otto is Oona’s best friend and sidekick, who she rescued from an oyster net when he was just a pup. In many Indigenous tribes, the otter is a symbol of good luck, fortune, or wisdom. However, Otto primarily came to existence in *Oona* because as a little girl, author Kelly DiPucchio had always wanted a pet otter. In nature, there are two types of Otters, one in the sea and one who lives in rivers. Otto is an adventurous and playful sea otter, the perfect companionship of the brave Oona. She has taught Otto tricks just like a human child would teach a dog, and although they are described as best friends, Oona has somewhat an exploitative advantage over Otto. The same goes for the crabs she pushes into the deep rift to capture the crown for her, as seen in the bottom left illustration of Figure 14. The author and illustrator anthropomorphized the otter by, for instance, putting sunglasses on his face and attributing human behavior to him. Another example of Otto’s human traits is when he pretends to be a narwhal to make Oona laugh.

5 Discussion and Research Findings

5.1 Discussion

The following chapter presents the results from the analysis in relation to the research questions presented earlier as well as the theoretical background. The research questions were the following: Describe..

1. how young females of color are represented in contemporary picturebooks.
2. how the environment is portrayed in the texts and explain the character's physical and spiritual closeness to nature using ecocritical theory.
3. how racial diverse picturebooks can increase students' knowledge of multiculturalism and help improve the self-image of children from marginalized groups.

5.1.1 Representation of Young Females of Color in Contemporary Picturebooks

The four books analyzed in this thesis all have a complementary interaction between words and pictures, where the images advance the story. None of the texts explicitly describe in words the character's race or ethnicity, or even where they live. However, two of the books (*We Are Water Protectors* & *Zonia's Rain Forest*) contain information in the preface or back text that provide an insight to the Indigenous culture of Ojibwe and Asháninka. It gives the reader an opportunity to become part of another world and not just looking at it as unfamiliar. The illustrations (the visual text) and portrayals of the young girls in the books therefore work as complex iconic signs, functioning to represent race. By using traditional elements related to the character's ethnicity, it is possible to do a deeper analysis and learn more about their culture. Examples would be the elders *bata* drums *Earthbred*. The clothing of the people in all three books *We Are Water Protectors*, *Zonia's Rain Forest* & *Earthbred* are links to exploration of cultures.

The story of *Oona* is harder to connect to a specific culture, because the protagonist is only part human, and the author is white. If the protagonist had been presented with a different skin color, the story would still have conveyed the same message. In any case, this book is still an important contribution to children's contemporary literature because it represents Black girls with spectacular afro hair and shows children that mythical creatures can have a different skin color than white. By using a Black illustrator, the images still portray an authentic and truthful picture of a Black child and being a picturebook gives the opportunity to show racial diversity without having to state in the text that *Oona* is Black. It is just obvious and natural.

Among the cultural and ethnic elements presented in *Earthbred*, are the *bata* drums and Nigerian attire (*agbada* and head wraps). However, the main character, her husband and children wear clothing similar to modern western style clothing. *Emi* is seen moving to more urban settings, but longing to return to her roots. *Earthbred* is an example of how to show a more modern image of Black people. The traditional elements are still present, but they are not the main focus. Drummond's intention is to tell every single reader that what is unique about them is something to be proud of. As illustrated

in Figure 11, the light inside Emi can represent a passion, a trait, or a unique characteristic, which may vary from child to child. Like Myers states, by seeing themselves portrayed in picturebooks, children can develop rich imaginations of what they might become when they see role models of color. While the book is part fiction, most of the story can be linked to events that happen in every school. When Emi observes how the other students mock other students' interest in nature, it leads her down a condescending path of doubting her upbringing and beliefs; "Her friends thought he was strange, pointed, and laughed at him; this made Emi slump in sadness and wilt into the crowd. Emi was very afraid that if her friends knew she was Earthbred, they would think she was strange too". Many students can unfortunately relate to such an event, and the psychological effects of bullying are often self-loathing and other diseases of the mind. It is Emi's family and nature friends that helps her character development, leading her to realize that her true self, being Earthbred, is a gift worth embracing.

5.1.2 Child and Nature

For ecocritical literature to make readers understand the urgency of living responsibly in the world and caring for the environment, it is critical to acknowledge and reflect on the history of people of color and the ways in which our actions shape us. In the four picturebooks analyzed in this study, one can see the perspective of young girls of color who must take action to help their people and save Mother Earth. All books are a response to environmental issues and attempts (with varying effect) to enlist readers to reflect on the world as it is, and to imagine future scenarios if environmental degradation proceeds unabated (Mallan & Bradford, p. 110). The texts addresses deforestation, destruction of water reserves, ocean littering and urbanization, all realistic events that reflect what happens in local and global settings. As revealed in the beginning of this thesis, Indigenous Peoples globally have been among the most strongly impacted and the most vulnerable in face of the increasingly changing climate, although they are also among the groups who have contributed the least to the roots of the catastrophe (Juárez López & Cherofsky, 2021). In her work, Gillio-Whitaker (2019) argues that the underlying assumptions of environmental injustice as it is commonly understood and deployed are grounded in racial and economic terms. An authentic contribution of literature like *We Are Water Protectors* can help students and adults understand and comprehend how the promotion of new technologies force many Indigenous communities to resettle, often driving them out of income-earning and into poverty.

Out of the four analyzed picturebooks, *Earthbred: The Light Of Mine* stands out in regards to place-attachment and time perspective. *We Are Water Protectors*, *Zonia's Rain Forest* and *Oona* all take place in a fixed place. Except for mermaid Oona visiting her "land friends" at the beach, all characters remain close to home throughout the book. These three stories unfold over a short period of time, as the protagonists remain children from start to finish. Emi in *Earthbred* on the other hand, grows up in a village full of vibrant gardens and blooming flowers but must leave her home to go to a school far away from the village. With Emi's move into an urban setting, she becomes more reticent, fearing other people's opinions regarding her background. Growing into adolescence, Emi learns to hide a huge part of her identity because it is not seen as something normal. Other students make fun of a boy's interest in nature, leading Emi to holding back her similar interests and thinking less of herself. According to Short, Day & Schroeder (2016), it is important that readers of another culture than the one presented in the given story can identify and learn something of value about cultural similarities and differences. Even though Emi's story involves fictional, supernatural powers, the

lesson about learning to love your uniqueness can resonate to any child, and by seeing the mental burden bullying can have on the victims, children can learn more about mutual respect of cultural differences.

As all the included picturebooks illustrate, anthropomorphism comes in different forms or expressions. In *We Are Water Protectors*, the animals is presented realistically, they are not attributed human characteristics, but they are equal to human species, and the human characters are portrayed as protectors of those who cannot fight for themselves; “The winged ones, The crawling ones, The four-legged, The two-legged, The plants, trees, rivers, lakes, The Earth” (Lindstrom & Goade, 2020). The water however, is anthropomorphized, it is sacred and it is alive. It has its own spirit and remembers the ancestors. This spiritual relation and tie between Indigenous tribes and the water connects all living things, and Standing Rock is one of many powerful examples that can provide children with of other cultures an insight into what can be achieved if we together in solidarity stand up for Mother Earth and the many environmental crisis of the world. The animals of *Earthbred* (see figure 9) express their sadness and despair through emotions and offers hugs to the children after receiving their help. The forest in *Zonia’s Rain Forest* “calls to” Zonia, and wild animals that realistically are dangerous to humans befriends Zonia and live in harmony. This representation of wild animals offer the reader sympathy and compassion for the wilderness, that will amplify the sustainable development of each individuals character after being introduced to the topic of illegal logging and deforestation.

5.1.3 CRT and The Importance of Racially Diverse Picturebooks

In the very beginning of the data collection process in this study, it became clear that there is a severe lack of racially diverse books in Norwegian primary schools and libraries. Looking for English picturebooks with authentic portrayals of young females of color, it was surprisingly difficult to access physical copies. Mpike points out that “about one in twenty books has a main character with a clear multicultural background” (2020, p. 57). Studies do show a slight increase in numbers regarding BIPOC authors and racially diverse characters, and the attention these books have been getting by media and researchers the last few years is hopefully a trend that will push publishers and buyers to expand this progression even further. The specific picturebooks chosen for this study were only available digitally or in international webshops for literature. However, during the close reading and background research, it became clear that several of the books used in this thesis provide accurate representations of different ethnic and tribal cultures. The picturebooks *We Are Water Protectors* and *Zonia’s Rain Forest* are both written and illustrated by writers and artists of Indigenous heritage, which according to Fox & Short (2003) provides a cultural authenticity and accuracy that is significant for young learners. These texts give a realistic view on distinct social and Indigenous peoples through the perspective of the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe and the Asháninka and provide extra information about the Indigenous peoples the books evolve around.

Critical Race Theory is a highly debated framework that has been banned or restricted in several US states for being a form of anti-American propaganda. CRT is not a new phenomenon is, and it is not “anti-white”, but it recognizes that understanding and analyzing racial disparity and issues pertaining to race and racism requires the experience of people of color (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). As Ladson-Billings emphasizes, it is necessary to put the whole notion of CRT in a larger socio-political context. What CRT can do is teach people about and endorse the experiences of those who have frequently been ignored by politicians, educators and others who hold power

and authority. CRT as a framework can assist educators in recognizing the importance of fostering accurate knowledge and help students build pride in their racial and cultural identity. By incorporating CRT in educational institutions, it can ensure that the stories of marginalized people are present in curricula for students from diverse backgrounds.

Including minority and marginalised children and stories that reflect their reality adds to the rich tapestry of literature and the options available to everyone. Including marginalised people does not take away from literature, it adds value.

Michell Mpike, (2020, p. 69)

The message of this quote by Mpike (2020) represents the essence of this thesis; that positive and authentically representation of racial diversity in literature is an absolute necessity to make sure that every child feels acknowledged as part of the world or a society. Educators and librarians must select texts that enrich and enhance children's knowledge and accurately reflect the lives of those depicted in them, not the ones who enforce ill-informed stereotypes. There's a tendency that the availability of diverse children's literature has often centered on the quantity, while the importance of cultural authenticity has been less valued or neglected. As the Norwegian curriculum emphasizes cultural diversity as a valuable resource, the schools' libraries should reflect this. LK20 emerges as a liberal multicultural curriculum designed to meet the needs of all students, and it declares that every individual has equal opportunities regardless of their background. To achieve this goal, it is crucial that teachers possess the cultural knowledge necessary to be able to handle sensitive issues regarding race or ethnicity in school, as well as foster a diverse, inclusive classroom where all students' identities are acknowledged and valued. From a very young age, the Norwegian students are supposed to be actively involved with picturebooks and acquire cultural knowledge through English-language literature for children (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 5). To accomplish this goal, it is imperative that schools can provide their students with authentic texts that represent diverse cultures, races, and ethnicities.

Often, adults avoid talking about racial issues, prejudice, and racial equity as they do not feel comfortable talking about these issues, or they think that their students are too young to recognize and comprehend such information. On the contrary, children notice race and commonly by the age of 5, children's expressions of racial prejudice have already peaked (Aboud, 2008). Alerting young readers of the existence of racism in children's literature is simply not sufficient enough. Unless we devote our time and attention to question the racism in classics and discuss its consequences, this literature may cause more harm than good. *We Are Water Protectors* is an important contribution to the growing field of ecocriticism and can be utilized as a literary tool to introduce children to two important topics. The Black Snake represents the widespread destruction of the environment by oil pipelines across the U.S., and it is also a sufficient way to illustrate how Indigenous peoples have been discriminated against by legal systems, suffering class and racial oppression. *Zonia's Rain Forest* presents the home of the Asháninka, one of South America's largest tribes. This story may seem distant for students in Western countries, yet it can be a book that many fugitives can relate to, having their homes ruined by illegal deforestation or other environmental crimes.

6 Conclusion

The history of marginalized groups of people being ignored and misrepresented in literature for young children have been proved to be harmful towards the children that identify with these groups. This study found that lack of racial presentation in picturebooks is still the reality, but that there has been a slow progress in culturally authentic authors producing these much-needed books. Focusing on diversity in curriculums can be one way to show publishing companies the urgent need of racially diverse picturebooks. Norway seems to have a positive multicultural education policy, and teachers are expected to accommodate different types of diversity to meet the students' needs. Furthermore, the terms "race" and "ethnicity" are left out of the learning outcomes for the English subject, in favor of "cultural knowledge" and "cultural belonging". As a result, each teacher has considerable latitude and a crucial responsibility for fostering enlightening teaching that includes racial and ethnic knowledge. Schools have the responsibility to help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 2).

This study provides examples of racially diverse children's literature that can serve as a helpful educational tool for several reasons. Among them is the possibility of students of color who share a racial background and/or ethnic values with the picturebook's protagonists feeling acknowledged and included in society. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of educators and parents being proactive in providing multicultural literature that prevents racial prejudice. Children receive daily input from adults, the media, and their environment, and these influences help shape their identity as well as their behavior towards others. Racial differences are perceived by children as early as age 4, even before they can read, which is why picturebooks can be one of the best ways to introduce this topic. Appendix 2 provides a list of other contemporary picturebooks that could profit educators and parents of any children.

The environment and the relationship between child and nature was one of the main focuses during the close reading of the included picturebooks. The analysis showed that in all books, nature is very much present throughout the whole story, and can be seen as a character of its own. The attribution of human characteristics and emotions to nonhuman entities and animals in these books is seen as anthropomorphism, rooted in cognitive theory of cultural representations. In some of the stories, natural elements are given names, implying that the environment is the protagonist's friend. The majority of the stories sees Mother Earth as equal to humans and the young girls are being represented as protectors of the environment, particularly the Indigenous characters who function as activists to help nature and their people through environmental crises. In the Principles for education and all-round development of the Norwegian Core Curriculum it is stated that through sustainability development, "the pupils shall develop competence which enables them to make responsible choices and to act ethically and with environmental awareness" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 15). The existing literature reviewed in this study confirms that children's literature and picturebooks is an effective way of raising environmental awareness from an early age.

While this study contributes with one perspective on ecocritical and racially diverse literature, it has some implications. The study is not representative of all *culturally*

diverse picturebooks, as it mainly focuses on the aspects of race and ethnicity. During the data collection and selection of data, only ecocritical books were assessed, meaning that there is a higher chance of finding multicultural picturebooks if one is less specific. The initially stated research questions of this thesis have been answered through developing a theoretical framework based on Critical Race Theory and Ecocriticism, as well as qualitative methods relying on text and image data of four picturebooks. The sample size of texts is limited, as this study is a Master's Thesis with a restricted and short timeframe. Future studies and comparatively lengthier pieces of scholarly writing, like a PhD dissertation, could further investigate the direct impact of racially diverse literature on young children and developing an improved sample size of texts.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: Picturebooks Included in Analysis

Picturebook	Publisher Year	Author	Illustrator
<i>Earthbred: The Light of Mine</i>	Own My Canvas 15 Dec 2020	C. S. Drummond <i>Black, mother of 3</i>	Sawyer Cloud <i>From Madagascar</i>
<i>Oona</i>	HarperCollins Publishers Inc 18 Mar 2021	Kelly Dipucchio <i>White, born in Michigan</i>	Raissa Figueroa <i>Black, from San Diego</i>
<i>We Are Water Protectors</i>	St Martin's Press 17 Mar 2020	Carole Lindstrom <i>Anishinaabe/Métis</i>	Michaela Goade <i>Tlingit and Haida tribes</i>
<i>Zonia's Rain Forest</i>	Candlewick Press, U.S. 30 Mar 2021	Juana Martinez-Neal <i>Asháninka (indigenous people of Peru)</i>	Same as author

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Appendix 2: Multicultural Picturebooks and Other Helpful Resources to Advocate Racially Diverse Literature

The listed picturebooks are texts that were evaluated but not included in this thesis. They can be valid options to bring into the classroom to advocate racial diversity in literature.

Picturebook	Publisher Year	Author & Illustrator	Protagonist
<i>A Story About Afiya</i>	Lantana Publishing 01 Oct 2020	James Berry Anna Cunha	African girl
<i>Anita and the Dragons</i>	Lantana Publishing 06 Apr 2021	Hannah Carmona Anna Cunha	Dominican girl
<i>Areli is a Dreamer</i>	Random House USA Inc 08 Jun 2021	Areli Morales Luisa Uribe	Latinx girl
<i>Beautifully Me</i>	Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. 14 Sep 2021	Nabela Noor Nabi H Ali	Bangladeshi girl
<i>Becoming Vanessa</i>	Random House USA Inc 15 Jun 2021	Vanessa Newton	African American girl
<i>Birdsong</i>	Greystone Books 26 Mar 2020	Julie Flett <i>Cree/Métis</i>	Cree/Metis girl
<i>Brown Sugar Babe</i>	Astra Young Readers 04 Feb 2020	Charlotte W. Sherman Akem	African American girl
<i>Bubble Kisses</i>	Sterling Publishing Co Inc	Vanessa Williams	African American girl
<i>Carmela - full of wishes</i>	Penguin Putnam Inc 09 Oct 2018	Matt de la Peña Christian Robinson	Latinx girl and her big brother
<i>Desert Girl, Monsoon Boy</i>	Penguin Putnam Inc 12 May 2020	Tara Dairman Archana Sreenivasan	Village boy Nomadic girl
<i>Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music</i>	Houghton Mifflin 31 Mar 2015	Margarita Engle Rafael López	Chinese African Cuban girl
<i>Eyes that Kiss in the Corners</i>	HarperCollins Publishers Inc. 18 Feb 2021	Joanna Ho Dung Ho	Asian American girl
<i>Festival of Colors</i>	Beach Lane Books 30 Jan 2018	Kabir Sehgal Surishtha Sehgal Vashti Harrison	Indian brother and sister
<i>Fry Bread</i>	Roaring Brook Press 22 Oct 2019	Kevin Noble Maillard Juana Martinez-Neal	Native American family
<i>Gratitude is my Superpower</i>	Alicia Ortego 07 Jul 2021	Alicia Ortego	Girl of color, mixed family
<i>Green on Green</i>	Simon & Schuster 25 Jun 2020	Dianne White Felicita Sala	Boy of color
<i>Hair Love</i>	Penguin Random House Children's UK	Matthew Cherry Vashti Harrison	Black British girl and her dad

<i>I am Brown</i>	Lantana Publishing 05 Mar 2020	Ashok Banker Sandhya Prabhat	Brown-skinned children
<i>I am You: A Book about Ubuntu</i>	Amazon Crossing Kids 01 Feb 2022	Refiloe Moahloli Zinelda McDonald	Children
<i>Jayden's Impossible Garden</i>	Free Spirit Publishing Inc 09 Mar 2021	Malina Mangal Ken Daley	African American boy
<i>Just Like Me</i>	Random House USA Inc 14 Jan 2020	Vanessa Newton	African American girl + various girls
<i>Kits, Cubs, and Calves: An Arctic Summer</i>	Inhabit Media 01 Sept 2020	Suzie Napayok-Short Tamara Campeau	Indigenous Inuit family
<i>Laxmi's Mooch</i>	St Martin's Press 17 Mar 2020	Carole Lindstrom <i>Anishinaabe/Métis</i>	Indian girl
<i>Meesha Makes Friends</i>	Bloomsbury Publishing PLC 09 Jul 2021	Tom Percival	Girl of color
<i>Move, Mr Mountain!</i>	Templar Publishing 10 Jun 2021	Francesca Sanna	Girl of color
<i>My Big Welcome: A story about kindness</i>	Onaolapo Dagunduro 19 Mar 2021	<i>Onaolapo Dagunduro</i> <i>Saoirse Lou</i>	African American girl
<i>My Dad</i>	Aurum Press 06 Apr 2021	Susan Quinn Marina Ruiz	Boy of color and his dad
<i>My Friend Earth</i>	Chronicle Books 25 Feb 2020	Patricia MacLachlan Franscesca Sanna	Mother Earth in the form of a girl of color
<i>My Heart Fills With Happiness</i>	Orca Book Publishers Canada 01 Mar 2016	Monique Gray Smith Julie Flett	Indigenous family
<i>Not Quite Snow White</i>	HarperCollins Publishers Inc 22 Aug 2019	Ashley Franklin Ebony Glenn	African American girl
<i>Nibi's Water Song</i>	Lee & Low Books 12 Oct 2021	Sunshine Tenasco Chief Lady Bird	Indigenous girl
<i>Over and Under the Pond</i>	Chronicle Books 07 March 2017	Kate Messner Christopher Silas Neal	Boy of color and his mother
<i>Over and Under the Rainforest</i>	Chronicle Books 07 March 2020	Kate Messner Christopher Silas Neal	Rain Forest of Central America and tropical annials
<i>Ruby's Worry</i>	Bloomsbury Publishing PLC 01 Jun 2021	Tom Percival	Black British girl
<i>Sulwe</i>	Penguin Random House Children's UK	Lupita Nyong'o Vashti Harrison	Black British girl
<i>Swashby and the Sea</i>	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company 05 May 2020	Beth Ferry Juana Martinez-Neal	Girl of color

<i>Sweetest Kulu</i>	Inhabit Media 06 Apr 2016	Celina Kalluk Alexandria Neonakis	Indigenous Inuit
<i>That Is My Dream!</i>	Random House USA Inc 03 Oct 2017	Langston Hughes Daniel Miyares	African American boy and his family
<i>The 1916 Project: Born on the Water</i>	Penguin Putnam Inc 16 Nov 2021	Nikole Hannah-Jones Renée Watson Nikkolas Smith	History of Black resistance in the U.S.
<i>The Biggest Little Boy A Christmas Story</i>	Penguin USA 23 Nov 2021	Poppy Harlow Ramona Kaulitzki	Boy of color, Black mom, white dad
<i>The Earth Gives More</i>	Albert Whitman & Company 01 Mar 2019	Sue Fliess Christiane Engel	Diverse ethnicities
<i>The Magical Yet</i>	Disney Book Publishing Inc. 14 May 2020	Angela DiTerlizzi Lorena Alvarez	Latinx
<i>The Proudest Blue A Story of Hijab and Family</i>	Little, Brown & Company 10 Sep 2019	Ibtihaj Muhammad S. K. Ali Hatem Aly	Muslim girl
<i>The Boy Who Grew a Forest: The True Story of Jadav Payeng</i>	Sleeping Bear Press 15 Mar 2019	Sophia Gholz Kayla Harren	Asian Indian boy
<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind</i>	Penguin Putnam Inc 05 Jan 2016	William Kamkwamba Bryan Mealer Anna Hymas	Malawian boy
<i>The Not-so Great Outdoors</i>	Prentice Hall Press 16 May 2019	Madeline Kloepper	Girl of color
<i>The Tale of the Whale</i>	Scallywag Press 04 Mar 2021	Karen Swann Padmacandra	Child of color (Maori?)
<i>The Wall and the Wild</i>	Lantana Publishing 07 Sep 2021	Christina Dendy Katie Rewse	Girl of color
<i>The Water Princess</i>	G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers 13 Sep 2016	Susan Verde Georgie Badiel Peter H. Reynolds	African girl
<i>The Year We Learned to Fly</i>	Nancy Paulsen Books 04 Jan 2022	Jaqueline Woodson Rafael López	African American girl
<i>Think Big Little One</i>	LB Kids 01 Oct 2019	Vashti Harrison	Diverse ethnicities
<i>Tomatoes for Neela</i>	Viking Books for Young Readers. 31 Aug 2021	Padma Lakshmi Juana Martinez-Neal	American Hindu Multicultural girl
<i>Under the Mango Tree</i>	Sugar Apple Books 14 Aug 2021	Valdene Mark Sawyer Cloud	Children of color
<i>We Planted A Tree</i>	Random House USA Inc 23 Feb 2016	Diane Muldrow Bob Staake	Diverse Families

<i>We've Got the Whole World In Our Hands</i>	Scholastic US 09 Oct 2018	Rafael Lopez	Diverse ethnicities
<i>When We Are Kind</i>	Orca Book Publishers Canada 13 Oct 2020	Monique Gray Smith Nicole Neidhardt	Indigenous family
<i>Where Are You From?</i>	HarperCollins Publishers Inc 17 Sep 2020	Yamile Saied Méndez Jaime Kim	Latinx girl
<i>Who Will You Be?</i>	Random House USA Inc 07 Apr 2020	Andrea Pippins	African American family
<i>Your Name Is a Song</i>	The Innovation Press 15 Aug 2020	Jamilah Thompkins- Bigelow Luisa Uribe	African American girl and her mother

Other helpful resources	Published by	Link
20 Children's & YA Books That Celebrate Native American Heritage	Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich (Read Brightly)	<i>Website</i>
Diverse and Inclusive Kids Books - Storytime with Tristan	Storytime with Tristan (<i>YouTube channel</i>)	<i>YouTube Channel</i>
Amazon Best Sellers in Children's Diversity & Multicultural eBooks	Amazon.com	<i>Website</i>
African American Children's Book Project's Best Picture Books of 2020	Kelly Starling Lyons (The Brown Bookshelf)	<i>Website</i>
Teaching Resources Database	ASLE	<i>Website</i>
Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada	ALECC	<i>Website</i>
Meet 13 Indigenous Young Indigenous Right Activists	United Nations	<i>Website</i>
Recommendations for meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Youth	Bond. Authors: Rebecca Aaberg, Ashley Law & Kailee Smart	<i>Website</i>
International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples	United Nations	<i>Website</i>
Broadening the Story: 60 Picture Books Starring Black Mighty Girls	A Mighty Girl	<i>Blog Post</i>

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Appendix 3: Ecological Settings in Texts and Pictures

Table 10.1 Ecological settings in texts and pictures

<i>Settings/system levels</i>	<i>Social settings</i>	<i>Physical settings</i>	<i>Temporal settings</i>
Microsystems	Active, daily contacts with people (like family, schoolmates)	Immediate surroundings, where a person's activities take place (e.g. home, school class, nest)	Immediate time of events (e.g. school week, summer, weekend)
Mesosystems	Connections, occasional contacts	Local areas and regions (e.g. home town, home forest)	Period of time in person's life (childhood, pre-teens, adulthood)
Macrosystem	Nationality, ethnicity, religious or ideological societies, species	National or global setting	Centuries, decades

This table made by Kaisu Rättyä (in *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Text and Cultures* (Goga et al, 2018, p. 162) is developed as an analytical tool for reading how ecological settings can be presented in picturebooks.