WONDER WOMEN:
GENDER-REPRESENTATION IN
CALDECOTT-WINNING PICTURE BOOKS
St. Mary’s University, March 6, 2018

Introduction
* Picture books - most common form of literature
* Children learn gender behavior through discourse in picture books (Weitzman, 1972).
* Also find role models who represent what they can and should be (Albers, 1996)
* Picture books unobtrusively condition boys and girls to accept particular ways of behaving in the world (Fox, 1993).

Past Research Studies
Character Count (Nilsen, 1971, 1978; Engel, 1981; and Dougherty and Engel, 1987)
* 3 gender categories: male, female, neuter
* Determined by name, physical characteristics, attire, or personal pronoun references
* Anthromorphized animals or objects – counted
* Group of 7+ individuals = 1 character according to which sex dominated a group, or “neuter” if it contained equal numbers

Image Count (Engel, 1981)
* Any reference to characters in the text and any depiction of the characters in the illustration

Gender Roles (Dellmann-Jenkins, 1993)
* Active/ Passive
* Traditional/ Nontraditional

Research Questions
☐ How is gender represented in Caldecott-Awarded Books from 1986-2015?
☐ In what ways can teachers help students deconstruct gender in picture books?

Findings

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Character Count</th>
<th>5-Yr. Intervals</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender-Neutral</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1986 – 1990</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996 – 2000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001 – 2005</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006 – 2010</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011 - 2015</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
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Discussion
☐ Predominance of males (characters, text, illustration)
☐ Picture book covers – males (45%), females (16%), gender-neutral (39%)
☐ Author/main character – same gender (61%)
☐ Deconstruction of term “neuter”
☐ Deconstruction of categorizing characters into male/female binary
☐ Changing female/male roles
☐ Intersection of race, gender, and class

Regardless of the type of book chosen, the message of respect for both genders should be contained in the picture books.

Presenter:
* Angeli Willson, St. Mary’s University, San Antonio, TX
Some Picturebooks To Use in Teaching Critical Literacy Focused on Gender Representation:


Some Instructional Strategies

- As a class, analyze gender representations in the words and illustrations of picture books
- Model formulating questions about main characters and their portrayal in these books
- Have children reverse the genders of characters, e.g., "What if Cinderella was a boy?" (Temple, 1993)
- Have children guess a writer’s gender on the basis of the story they have just heard (Lawrence, 1995)
- Ask children to use gender-neutral names in the stories they write; read the stories aloud so other students can guess the protagonist’s gender (Lawrence, 1995)
- Have children adopt the opposite sex’s point of view about a very gendered issue (Lawrence, 1995)
- During discussions with children, validate both feminine and masculine voices and listen to dissenting individual opinions (Trites, 1997).
- Allow students to make choices in their reading material.
- Remember - this is an ongoing process

Characteristics of Gender-Neutral Books (Rudman, 1995)

- Characters are portrayed with distinctive personalities irrespective of their gender
- Achievements are not evaluated on the basis of gender
- Occupations are represented as gender-free
- Clothing is described in functional rather than gender-based terms
- Females are not always weaker and more delicate than males

What Can We Do?

* Recognize and articulate your own attitudes about gender representation in children’s literature (Rudman, 1995).
* Look for books and stories that do not portray either gender in a stereotypical manner.
* Group the books in your classroom library by theme and not gender.

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