WONDER WOMEN: GENDER-REPRESENTATION IN CALDECOTT-WINNING PICTURE BOOKS
Purposes of The Presentation

1. To examine the gender representation in Caldecott books
2. To provide samples of picturebooks that have notable female characters
3. To present ideas on how the audience can help children develop gender-equitable perceptions in children’s picture books
Picture Books

- Most common form of literature
- Children learn gender behavior through discourse in picture books (Weitzman, 1972).
- 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).
The Caldecott Medal

- 19th-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott
- Awarded annually by the American Library Association to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children
- Caldecott Winner and Honor Books
- Significance of the Caldecott Award
Past Character Counts
(Nilsen, 1971, 1978; Engel, 1981; and Dougherty and Engel, 1987)

- Text-based
  1. Listed the characters.
  2. Categorized the characters.
     - 3 gender categories: male, female, neuter
     - Determined by name, physical characteristics, attire, or personal pronoun references
     - Anthropomorphized animals or objects – counted
  3. Counted how many times each character was mentioned in the text.
- The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another, his mother called him “wild thing!”
- And when he came to the place where the wild things are, they roared their terrible roars...

Characters:
- Max
- His mother
- The wild things
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Done</th>
<th>5-Yr. Intervals</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nilsen, 1978</td>
<td>1951 - 1955</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1956 – 1960</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1961 – 1965</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1966 – 1970</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1971 – 1975</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Done</td>
<td>5-Yr. Intervals</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Neuter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Image Counts (Engel, 1981)

- Each textual reference to and visual representation of a character
- If the illustration of an animal did not contain identifying information regarding its gender - “neuter”
## Character (Text) Counts

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Study Done</th>
<th>5-Yr. Intervals</th>
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<th>Female</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 – 1975</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Image (Illustration) Count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Done</th>
<th>5-Yr. Interval</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engel, 1981</td>
<td>1976 – 1980</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender Roles (Dellmann-Jenkins, 1993)

- Active (energetic action or activity) or Passive (not participating or acting; compliant)

- Traditional (male characters portrayed in dominant, strong roles and females portrayed in subservient, homemaker roles) or Nontraditional (roles not in accordance with tradition)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Neuter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Character</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Role</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Role</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Role</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontraditional Role</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Research

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

- Methodology
  - 29 total books (excluded 1 book)
  - Followed guidelines from previous studies
### Male and Female Percentages of Characters in the Text of Caldecott-Awarded Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Done</th>
<th>5-Yr. Intervals</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender-Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior &amp; Willson, 2015</td>
<td>1986 – 1990</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996 – 2000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001 – 2005</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was Kitten’s first full moon.
When she saw it, she thought,
There’s a little bowl of milk in the sky.
And she wanted it.
Male and Female Percentages of Total Images in Illustrations of Caldecott-Awarded Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Done</th>
<th>Intervals</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender-Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991 – 1995</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996 – 2000</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001 – 2005</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006 – 2010</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011 - 2015</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

- Predominance of males (characters, text, illustration)
- Increase in the gender-neutral counts (Deconstruction of categorizing characters into male/female binary)

Discussion

- Use of wordless picturebooks

2006
Discussion

- Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

(1938)

https://www.hbook.com/2013/01/authors-illustrators/thomas-handforth-china-and-the-real-mei-li/
Discussion

Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

- *Madeline* (1939)
- *Madeline's Rescue* (1953)
Discussion

- Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

"There was a girl in the village who loved horses... She led the horses to drink at the river. She spoke softly and they followed. People noticed that she understood horses in a special way."

(1977)
Discussion

- Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

Rosa

(1938)

(2005)
Discussion

- Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

“I set the North Star in the heavens and I mean for you to be free.”

2006
Discussion

- Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

(2014)
Discussion

- Caldecott Winners With Noteworthy Female Characters

(2016)
What Can We Do?

What teachers can do to help children develop gender-equitable perceptions in children’s picture books?
What Can We Do?

- Recognize and articulate our 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.
A Mighty Girl website - https://www.amightygirl.com/
Characteristics of Gender-Neutral Books

- 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
- The language used in the text is gender-free

Rudman, 1995
Group the books in your classroom library by theme and not gender.
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)
For Classroom Teachers

- Have children guess a writer's gender on the basis of the story they have just heard
- 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
- 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.
Last Words…

- Need to challenge gender stereotypes
- Need to hold conversations regarding gender issues in children’s literature
- Further studies:
  - effects of seeing gender-neutral characters in picture books
  - correlation between author’s gender and main character’s author
  - the impact of the intersection of gender, race, and class in children’s literature
- Regardless of the type of book chosen, the message of respect for both genders should be contained in the picture books.
“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience.” — Rudine Sims Bishop