The portrayal of immigrants in children's and young adults' American trade books during two peak United States immigration eras (1880-1930 and 1980-2010s)

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Document Type
Dissertation

Degree
Ph.D.

Degree Granting Department
Curriculum and Instruction

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Keywords
immigrant, immigration, multicultural education, social studies, stereotypes, trade book

Abstract
ABSTRACT

Although immigrants are an integral part of the nation's founding and history, it is unclear how they have been historically portrayed in children's and young adults' American trade books, especially at the turn of the 20th century. This study offers a critical and comparative analysis focusing on the historical evolution, depiction of immigrants, and authors' perspectives of selected trade books written during two peak United States immigration eras (1880-1930 and 1980-2010s).

Utilizing a discourse analysis approach, this study examined how first-generation immigrants were portrayed in selected trade books and how various themes and representations may have affected students and the social studies curriculum. After studying 98 books, it was determined that in both peak immigration eras, first-generation immigrants were depicted as inferior to native-born Americans. Although the time period and countries of origin changed, the issues that immigrants faced and the problems they experienced were similar; first-generation immigrants were scorned, harshly criticized, and viewed as inferior not only by Americans, but also by fellow immigrants who were members of other cultures. Overall, the books left out the immigration experience, and were mostly tales of assimilation and mistreatment in the United States.

Because children's ideas and understandings of people and cultural groups are formed by what they learn from others and by the media, it is important that books which portray immigrants and their experience provide accurate and meaningful representations of these individuals. Although many of these books reviewed in this study are considered classics and offer an immense amount of valuable information about historical events which can benefit the social studies curriculum, teachers should be wary of serious overt and covert criticism of ethnicities before introducing them in the classroom.

There is a need for literature that sends positive messages about accepting those from other countries and that focuses on how first-generation immigrants helped shape America. Teachers should use trade books in the classroom as they can help children read about history. However, new books need to be written about immigrants. Future research should look into effective ways to use the existing body of trade book literature in the classroom, investigate if (and to what degree) trade books were or are used in schools, compare trade books' portrayal of immigrants to
Among immigrants to the United States, young people between the ages of 15 and 30 dominated. Immigrants provided a workforce to power the new factories and industries of cities. Many lived in New York City and Boston. In the 1920s and 1930s, a large number of these immigrants set out west, with Detroit getting a large number of Middle Eastern immigrants, as well as many Arabs working as farmers in Midwestern areas. From 1880 to 1924, around two million Jews moved to the United States, mostly seeking better opportunity in America and fleeing the pogroms of the Russian Empire. The Immigration Restriction League was founded in 1894 by people who opposed the influx of "undesirable immigrants" that were coming from southern and eastern Europe.