

Going Back to Get the Stories: Oral Histories of Childhood Reading from Diverse Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, children's book publishing experienced significant shifts throughout the 20th century, starting with the establishment of dedicated children's books departments in the 1920's through to late century changes in printing technology leading to the cost-effective publication of full color non-fiction for youth. Each generation experienced children's books differently.

One constant was the sparse availability of books representing any child who was not white. As in Rudine Sims Bishop's analogy, these youth easily found windows and sliding glass doors in their books but rarely found the self-affirming mirror. Conversely, white children had many mirrors but far fewer opportunities to view unfamiliar experiences nor enter new worlds to discover empathy for others.

Today's children are growing up with increasingly diverse representation in the available literature. To fully understand the significance of this moment, we must "go back and get" the experiences of the children who grew up in the 20th century. In this oral history project, we collect individual's memories of reading and stories from their youngest years through adolescence. Participants are drawn from diverse backgrounds, with an emphasis on people who identify as Black, Latinx, Asian, and/or Indigenous. Findings illuminate the overlooked literacy experiences of people of color and the impact of childhood reading. This project provides insight into the historical impact of library services and the importance of contemporary libraries providing children with diverse literature.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Print culture; Reading and reading practices; Readers' advisory services; Children's services; Young adult services.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Oral history; Diverse books; Children's literature; Young adult literature; Own voices.