

Expanding Social Justice Curriculum: A Collection of Multimedia Text Sets for Elementary Teachers

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Abstract

This article provides elementary teachers with multimedia text set resources paired with Picower's (2012) established social justice elementary curriculum: *Six Essential Elements of Social Justice Teaching*. Such a union builds student's background knowledge, starts discussions, and spurs writing. Selected resources align with Lexile scores and social justice elements. Materials were sorted into categories such as children's books, chapter books, artwork, or websites. This article includes practical and accessible resources that save teachers time and support social justice teaching goals.

A common myth about children is that they do not recognize racial differences. This colorblind myth posits that children are not developmentally able to grasp complex ideas (Kimura, 2022). This illusion is accepted even though multiple researchers assert that even infants can sort and organize the world around them. This myth is a well-used argument against utilizing elementary school anti-biased curricula (Kimura et al., 2022; Marks et al., 2015; Sugden & Marquis, 2017). However, young children need instruction in the language of race and the ability to process inequalities and resist normalizing oppressive systems (Kimura et al., 2022). Elementary anti-bias or social justice curricula provide these lessons. Appropriate curriculum can help children organize their understanding of the world and “enable students to sort through the minutia of divisive cultural rhetoric that affects so much of their modern lives (Thomas, 2020, p. 84). Social justice teaching helps students unpack their world.

Teachers and Social Justice Curriculum

Social justice instruction labors to undo the social phenomenon where some community groups are more valued than others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014, p. 2). This type of instruction is fraught with unease. As Wilson et al. (2019) and Odebiyi (2023) asserted, teachers may be uncomfortable or unable to include anti bias teaching in their daily lesson plans because there is too little time to teach it or to locate appropriate materials. First, mandated learning outcomes hamstring teachers from including additional curriculum and discussing social justice issues in the classroom can create a politically divisive environment (Kelly et al., 2004; Meckler & Natanson, 2022). Some teachers even report fearing for their physical well-being; “I would be lying, one confessed, if I told you every day I leave school, I don't walk out to my car and wonder if someone's going to be out there” (Meckler & Natanson, 2022; Kelly et al., 2004). Lastly, teachers worry about termination, as Meckler and Natason (2022) described. Researchers noted that teachers are afraid because of educational gag orders. Such directives allow students, parents, or even school employees to file complaints against those who violate the laws regarding presumed critical race theory instruction (Watson, 2023; Wong, 2022). Yet, despite this turmoil, teachers still fight for social justice.

Even if teachers found classroom time, the most dedicated social justice-minded educator might still struggle locating materials. Available social justice minded resources, teachers report,

are frequently regulated to the textbook sidebars or are too simplified (Kelly et al., 2004). Picower (2012) echoed this sentiment and reported that teachers often feel inundated by multiple tasks, such as finding appropriate SJ resources. Picower (2012) noted that teachers are confused; they do not know how or where to start; teachers need help organizing a framework and locating resources to guide their SJ teaching.

The Picower's Framework

In response, Picower (2012) developed a structure that helps SJ educators ease the burden of planning. This outline described six social justice elements in a scripted order. Each element provides a rationale coupled with suggested classroom activities. For example, element one, *Self-Love, and Knowledge*, helps students unpack who they are. The second element, *Respect for Others*, assists students in deconstructing negative racial beliefs (p. 3) Every element description ends with suggested classroom activities like writing poetry, developing self-portraits, or completing family interviews. Each essential element is displayed in Table 1. Where this framework ends, my work begins.

Table 1

Picower's Essential Elements of Social Justice Curriculum

Element	Description
1. Self-Love	Students explore identity and the histories associated with identity.
2. Respect for Others	Students share their culture and start to break down stereotypes through listening.
3. Issues of Social Injustices	Students explore how diverse populations experience oppression.
4. Social Movements and Social Change	Students share examples of how icons and everyday people create positive change.
5. Awareness Raising	Students teach others about social justice issues.
6. Social Action	Students take action to create their own positive change.

Research Purpose

I expand this framework by developing a multimedia text set for the six elements. Text collections such as this include materials that introduce diverse and underrepresented voices and points of view that connect topics and “build a metaphorical bridge” to the classroom curriculum (Cappiello & Dawes, 2023; Opatz et al., 2022 p. 521). Others noted that text sets are “collections of resources from different genres, media, and levels of reading difficulty that supports learning using a wide range of experiences and interests” (Egawa, n.d.; Tussey & Haas, 2020). Text sets add texture to the curriculum by building voice and perspective and support teaching difficult or complex ideas (Tschida, & Buchanan, 2015). Pairing each component with a multimedia text set supports teachers because they provide much-needed resources and are easily incorporated into daily lessons. They can build background and vocabulary knowledge in ELA or Social Studies curricula (Lupo et al., 2019). Finally, the prepared resources are appropriate for upper elementary based on Lexile scores or interest level. Each element includes various materials that

can be read independently or with guidance and can be used as a background builder, discussion starter, or writing prompt. All weblinks are hyperlinked within the charts for each text set.

Text Set One: Self-Love and Knowledge

This text set explores identities and histories.

Picture Book	Fiction	Nonfiction	Web Resource	Art	Audio
<p>Skin Like Mine by LaTashia M. Perry</p> <p><i>Brown Sugar Babe</i> by Charlotte Watson Sherman, illustrated by Akem</p> <p><i>The Colors We Share</i> by Angélica Dass</p> <p><i>All the Colors of the Earth</i> by Hamanaka Sheila</p> <p><i>Showers</i> by Paul and Kathleen Kuchera</p>	<p><i>The Blacker the Berry: Poems</i> by Joyce Carol Thomas and Floyd Cooper.</p>	<p><i>The Antiracist Kid</i> by Tiffany Jewell Chapter One p. 1-35</p>	<p>PBS Kids</p>	<p>Portrait of a Woman with a Hat, 1962 by Pablo Picasso</p>	<p>How do you define yourself? A TEDx talk by Lizzie Velasquez</p>

Text Set Two: Respect for Others

This text set expands cultural background knowledge.

Picture Book	Fiction	Nonfiction	Web Resource	Art	Audio
<p><i>Equality's Call: The Story of Voting Rights in America</i> by Deborah Diesen, illustrated by Magdalena Mora</p> <p><i>A Ramadan to Remember</i> by Marzieh, A. Ali</p> <p><i>What Your Ribbon Skirt Means to Me: Deb Haaland's Historic Inauguration</i> by Bunter Alexis</p> <p><i>Spanish is the language of Family</i> by Michael Genhart</p> <p><i>Rene' Do I Belong Here?</i> by Lainez Colato</p> <p><i>Jayylen's Juneteenth Surprise</i> by Lavette Lavaile</p>	<p><i>Beautiful You, Beautiful Me</i> by Tasha Spillett-Summer, illustrated by Salini Perera</p> <p><u><i>This is How We Do It</i></u> by Matt Lamothe</p> <p><u><i>I Am New Here</i></u> by Ann Sibley O'Brien</p>	<p><i>We Rise We Resist We Raise Voices</i> edited by Wade Hudson & Cheryl Willis</p>	<p>News Omatic Includes non-fiction and fiction articles aligned to the standards. Students can have the article read to them to hear important vocabulary. Also, it has multimedia tools which includes videos, infographics, polls, and interactive maps.</p>	<p>(poem) KKK Nicolás Guillén</p> <p>Abracadabra Mia Kang</p>	<p>Flyest Fables by Morgan Givens</p> <p>Mija Podcast</p>

Text Set Three: Issues of Social Injustices

This text set explores how diversity is experienced as oppression.

Picture Book	Fiction	Nonfiction	Web Resource	Art	Audio
<p><i>Ruth and the Green Book</i> by Calvin Alexander Ramsey</p> <p><i>Salat in Secret</i> by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow</p>	<p><i>Where We Come From</i> by Diane Wilson</p>	<p><i>Stamped (For Kids)</i> by Jayson Reynolds and Ibram X Kendi Ch 10 <i>Truth Tellers</i></p>	<p>Smithsonian's History Explorer web-based Interactives</p> <p>EdSitement webpage explores humanities and culture</p> <p>The BackStory: The Melting Pot Americans and Assimilation This resource includes recorded interviews, videos, and photographs.</p>	<p>Santos Dumont- The Father of Aviation II by Kehinde Wiley, United States</p>	<p>Code Switch episodes for kids by NPR</p>

Text Set Four: Social Movements and Social Change

This text set shares examples of movements and of iconic and everyday people collectively addressing social justice issues.

Picture Book	Fiction	Nonfiction	Web Resource	Art	Audio
<i>Hey, Wall: A Story of Art and Community</i> by Susan Verde and John Parra	<i>March (Trilogy Slipcase Set)</i> by John Lewis	<i>Stamped (For Kids)</i> by Jayson Reynolds and Ibram X Kendi Chapters 14-16	<u><i>12 Kids who are changing their communities and the world.</i></u>	<i>Guernica</i> by Pablo Picasso <u>https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica</u>	<i>Interview with Ford Foundation</i> <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwqI3YOkTOI</u>
<i>Ganesha Goes Green</i> by Lakshmi Thamizhmani and Debasmita Dasgupta	<i>There's More to the Story: Using Literature to Teach Diversity and Social-Emotional Skills in the Elementary Classroom</i> by Gwendolyn Cartledge		<u><i>40 Incredible Kids Who Changed the World</i></u>		

Text Set Five: Awareness Raising

This text set helps students learn about important social justice issues.

Picture Books	Fiction	Nonfiction	Web Resource	Art	Audio
<i>Where the Butterflies Fill the Sky: A Story of Immigration Family, and Finding Home</i> by Zahra Marwan	<i>Inside Out and Back Again</i> by Thanhhá Lai <i>Included: A Book for All Children about Inclusion, Diversity, Disability, and Equality and Empathy</i> by Jayneen Sanders, illustrated by Camila Carrossine	<i>A Kids Book about Disabilities</i> by Kristine Napper	<u>Background: United Nations: World Day Against Child Labor June 12</u>	<u>Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles</u> by Faith Ringgold	<u>The Wrong Rock</u> by Michael Cawood

Text Set Six: Social Action

This text set models how children can impact each other and their communities.

Picture Book	Fiction	Nonfiction	Web Resource	Art	Audio
<p><i>Armando and the Blue Tarp School</i> by Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson, illustrated by Hernán Sosa</p> <p><i>The House that Jane Built: A Story about Jane Addams</i> by Tanya Lee Stone, illustrated by Kathryn Brown</p>	<p><i>Wild Robot</i> by Peter Brown</p> <p><i>Cardboard Kingdom</i> by Chad Sell</p>	<p><i>101 Small Ways to Change the World</i> by Aubre Andrus</p> <p><i>Pay it Forward: A Young Readers Edition</i> by Catherine Ryan Hyde</p>	<p><u>Take Action: United Nations: World Day Against Child Labor June 12</u></p>	<p><u>Artists as Agents of Social Change Past and Present</u> by Lee Down</p>	<p><u>Michael Platt Kids Can Solve Big Problems</u> by TEDx Jacksonville</p>

Conclusion

Despite the colorblind myth, Watson (2023) noted that “almost one in four parents believed that instruction about racism should begin in kindergarten, and a majority agreed it should start in elementary school” (p. 495). The resources provided scaffold student learning and help them “engage critically in the world around them” (Picower, 2012, p. 1). They also prepare students to be active democratic participants because the text sets build skills that assist students in honoring multiple perspectives and recognizing and responding to unequal situations (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014). “We need to know, share, and discuss accurate information about complex social issues and get to know other Americans as full human beings, including across political divides” (Pollock, 2017, p. 427). The resources provided aid students in making sense of their experiences.

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