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Pondering Diversity

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Guest Editor's Note

By *Mary-Kate Sableski*

Pondering Diversity

I heard a story on the radio recently about Misty Copeland and Brooklyn Mack, two African American ballet dancers who starred in a production of *Swan Lake* by the Washington Ballet. It was the first time ever two black dancers starred in the production, and its significance lay in the symbolism inherent in the story of the beautiful white swan that falls in love with the handsome prince.

Casting these roles with black dancers provided an overt challenge to the traditional, dominant interpretation of the tale, in which the swan and the prince are white. All I could think was—finally!—an interpretation of a classic story for today's black young people to relate to, to become carried away with, and to see themselves in.

I thought immediately of the book *Beautiful Ballerina* (2009) by Marilyn Nelson and Susan Kuklin, which highlights young black dancers from the Brooklyn Ballet, and how maybe, just maybe, diversity was becoming no longer just a “buzzword,” but truly part of the stories we share.

Diversity in children's literature and in library programming matters if we want to hear more stories like these. When children read diverse literature, they see new possibilities for themselves, for their peers, and for society than they might have before. Copeland and Mack paved the trail for *Swan Lake*—there were no precedents to follow.

Did they see themselves in the literature they read as they grew up? Did they read about strong role models who had also challenged stereotypes and blazed a trail in their fields for people of diversity? If we are to develop young people who will challenge traditional casting for the roles they want to play, whether it is in *Swan Lake*, in the publishing house, the classroom, or the board room, they need to read literature that helps them to imagine these possibilities, and they need libraries to provide them with these rich resources for building strong personal identities.

Throughout this issue, you will find examples of how diversity is not just a buzzword, but an integral, critical element in our literature and in our conversations in our libraries. The iconic Kathleen T. Horning describes the historical trends in diverse literature, and Allie Jane Bruce provides us with a powerful and thought-provoking call to action concerning the need for diverse books.

Interviews with authors of diverse literature, examples of library programming highlighting diversity, and perspectives to consider as you integrate diverse literature into your collections and programming will challenge you to consider diverse literature in new ways. &

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