Scrutinizing and Supplementing Children’s Trade Books about Child Labor

John H. Bickford III, Eastern Illinois University
Cynthia W. Rich, Eastern Illinois University

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Abstract
State and national initiatives place an increased emphasis on both students’ exposure to diverse texts and teachers’ integration of English/language arts and history/social studies. The intent is for students to critically examine diverse accounts and perspectives of the same historical event or era. Critical examination can be accomplished through teachers’ purposeful juxtaposition of age-appropriate, engaging trade books and relevant informational texts, such as primary source materials. To guide interested elementary and middle level teachers, researchers can evaluate trade books for historical representation and suggest divergent or competing narratives that compel students to scrutinize diverse perspectives. Researchers can locate germane primary sources and modify them in ways that maintain their historicity. As students read, they scrutinize, contextualize, and corroborate sources, which enables them to actively construct historical understandings. We examined children’s literature centered on child labor. We juxtaposed trade books targeting elementary students with those intended for middle level students. While our findings revealed various forms of historical misrepresentation, child labor trade books appear far more historically representative than those centered on slavery.

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The allegation today is that children are working more than 45 hours a week in the rag trade sweatshops. An allegation which seems to be entirely true as well. So why is this outrage happening? And that's why there is child labour there. Simply because Bangladesh is poor. To slightly mangle the technical jargon child labour is an inferior input.