THE OPPORTUNITY:

Books can be mirrors reflecting who we are -- and they can be windows onto a wider reality beyond our own lived experience. This is what we call “Mirrors and Windows” – Book Harvest’s focus on promoting and sharing books that portray all children, honoring diverse backgrounds, languages, abilities, and perspectives, and including stories by and about people of color. We believe that books should serve as mirrors and windows for all children: in order to become avid readers and to reap the full benefits of lifelong literacy, children have to see both themselves and worlds beyond their own in the stories they read.

We are inspired by the work of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop whose seminal essay, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors” asserts:

“Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books... When there are enough books available that act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what makes us all human.”¹

Book Harvest works every day to provide books to children and families that are “Mirrors and Windows” into the lives of all children everywhere. Want to learn how to help or see a list of suggested diverse and inclusive titles? Visit bookharvestnc.org/why-books/mirrors-and-windows.

THE CHALLENGE:

The unfortunate reality is that there is limited availability of diverse and inclusive children’s books. These statistics² underscore the stark challenge we face:

- Of all the children’s books published in 2018, most main characters were white (50%), followed by animals (27%). Only 10% were African/African American; less than 5% were Latinx.
- Black, Latinx, and Native authors combined wrote just 7% of new children’s books published.
- Inclusive children’s literature that features characters who are either physically and/or intellectually diverse—characters who have been labeled as disabled—remain few and far between. Additionally, those texts that do exist often follow tropes of pity or dehumanization. These texts have also been heavily critiqued for their over-representation of white male characters who access prosthetics.³
As civil rights activist Marian Wright Edelman observes, “You can’t be what you can’t see.” We clearly have a long way to go before we can say with certainty that all children can see themselves in the books and authors they read – but Book Harvest is determined to make progress along this road.

WHAT WE’RE DOING: MIRRORS AND WINDOWS IN ACTION

At Book Harvest, we are committed to providing high quality diverse and inclusive books to children and families.

Here is Mirrors and Windows in action:

- **Book drives:** We provide materials that explain Mirrors and Windows and encourage book drive captains to share this perspective with their participants. While we welcome all donations of new and gently used children’s books, we are always especially grateful for diverse and inclusive titles!
- **Dream Big:** At our cornerstone event, celebrated on MLK Day each year, we celebrate our big dream of books and literacy for all children as we honor the legacy of Dr. King.
- **Informal learning spaces:** Laundromats, barbershops, health clinics -- in all these everyday places where families spend time, we stock bookshelves filled with free books in which children recognize themselves, through which they become eager readers on the laps of their parents while the laundry spins or in the barber’s chair as the clippers buzz.

Want to help us ensure all children have access to high-quality diverse and inclusive books? Visit bookharvestnc.org/why-books/mirrors-and-windows where you can order books directly from our wishlist and have them sent to our office.

Want to learn more? Contact Operations Coordinator Caitlyn Bergmann at caitlyn@bookharvestnc.org.

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2“Data on books by and about people of color and from First/Native Nations published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.”