Trade books’ Historical Representation of Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, and Helen Keller

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Abstract
Common Core State Standards Initiative mandates increased readings of informational texts within English Language Arts starting in elementary school. Accurate, age-appropriate, and engaging content is at the center of effective social studies teaching. Textbooks and children’s literature—both literary and informational—are prominent in elementary classrooms because of the esoteric nature of primary source material. Many research projects have investigated historical accuracy and representation within textbooks, but few have done so with children’s trade books. We examined children’s trade books centered on three historical figures frequently incorporated within elementary school curricula: Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, and Helen Keller. Findings revealed various forms of historical misrepresentation and differing levels of historicity. Reporting such lacunae is important for those involved in curricular decisions. We believe children’s books, even those with historical omissions and misrepresentations, provide an unique opportunity for students to incorporate and scrutinize diverse perspectives as they actively assemble historical understandings. All secondary narratives, even historically representative children’s books, can benefit from primary source supplementation. We guide teachers interested in employing relevant and rich primary source material.

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