



Revitalizing Multnomah County Library's Spanish Language Picture Book Collection

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University of Washington Capstone 2024



Introduction – Aotearoa

On UW's iSchool Aotearoa Indigenous Librarianship study abroad trip in early fall 2023, our team had the opportunity to meet with Professor Nicola Daly, a sociolinguist and co-director of the Waikato Picturebook Research Unit at the University of Waikato. During that time, we learned about her study of language hierarchies present in children's literature. Her workshop – which focused primarily on how English and te reo Māori were represented in translingual, dual language, and bilingual children's picture books – inspired us to consider how a prominent first language in the US such as Spanish may be similarly represented.



Introduction – Multnomah County

In 2019, the Multnomah County Library (MCL) performed an audit and leveling of the Spanish Early Readers collection in response to requests from Spanish-speaking patrons for more resources for beginning readers in Spanish. With funding from the Library Foundation, the Spanish Readers Assessment and Leveling project team — comprised of monolingual and bilingual Youth Librarians, a Youth Services Project Librarian, bilingual Spanish Library Assistants, a bilingual Spanish Material Selector, and a bilingual Spanish Program Specialist — conducted an assessment from July 2019 through March 2020. Using a Guideline for Auditing, the team members audited a sampling of 168 titles in the collection.

The assessment was a huge success and resulted in Spanish-speaking library staff developing criteria to evaluate Spanish early reader books for language and cultural specificity, and to increase the Spanish early readers collection. The Bienvenidos a la Lectura project is an expansion of the Spanish Readers Assessment and Leveling project. Created during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bienvenidos a la Lectura bags were a practical and efficient system for patrons to check out materials that included culturally specific books that Spanish-speaking readers could relate to.

Overall, the team increased the quality and accessibility of Spanish early readers. We had the pleasure of meeting with the team to learn about their process and hopes for continued improvement to the Spanish children's collection.



Introduction – UW Capstone

As a result of our time with both Professor Daly and MCL, we married what we learned from Professor Daly with the previous work done by MCL's Bienvenidos a la Lectura project to create our capstone project serving Gresham Library's Spanish language picture book collection. Our project, overseen by Spanish Selection Librarian Berenice Creecy with support from Youth & Family Bilingual Services and Systemwide Spanish Translator Delia M. Palomeque Morales, consisted of two main steps:

- 1** Evaluate the existing Spanish language picture book collection based on criteria from the Spanish Early Readers Assessment and Leveling project and research and input from Nicola Daly on sociolinguistics considering language and cultural representation.
- 2** Develop an assessment tool for children's department selectors to use to provide children and families with access to quality first language offerings that prioritize own voice, authentic translations, and culturally relevant content, as well as a compilation of publishers and vendors where Spanish language materials can be sourced.

While MCL was our primary stakeholder, as their specific collection will improve from our work, we know other libraries will likewise benefit. Indeed, MCL staff mentioned how, during a presentation on the Bienvenidos a la Lectura project, other libraries expressed a strong interest in their work and hoped to learn more as the project progressed.

Our Team



Ann Heiliger

In-person auditing of MCL's Spanish language picture book collection and interviewing librarians and bookshop owners about purchasing options via publishers.



Catherine Jensen

Remote research and review of collection development opportunities. In-person overview of library space and Spanish language picture book collection.



Kimberly Peterson

Interviewing library staff about patron needs and collection development successes/challenges. In-person auditing of MCL's Spanish language picture book collection. Researching vendor and publisher options.

Objectives

- The overarching improvement is a furthering of MCL's Spanish Early Readers Assessment and Leveling project via a Spanish language picture book collection that prioritizes first language, authentic translations, and culturally relevant content.
- Additional benefits include:
 - An increase in data regarding what comprises the Spanish language picture book collection.
 - A better understanding of various techniques MCL and other libraries can use to bolster a first language collection.
 - A document that details the process of improving a first language collection, from the auditing stage through acquisition.



Deliverables

- A document detailing our evaluation of MCL's existing Spanish language picture book collection based on a combination of previous criteria from MCL's Spanish Early Readers Assessment and Leveling project and research from Nicola Daly on sociolinguistics considering language and cultural representation.
- An assessment tool for children's department selectors to provide children and families access to quality Spanish language children's picture books.
- Additional resources for Spanish language publishers/vendors for sourcing these materials, if we discover resources not already used by MCL.



Method

Developing the assessment tool for use in the audit:

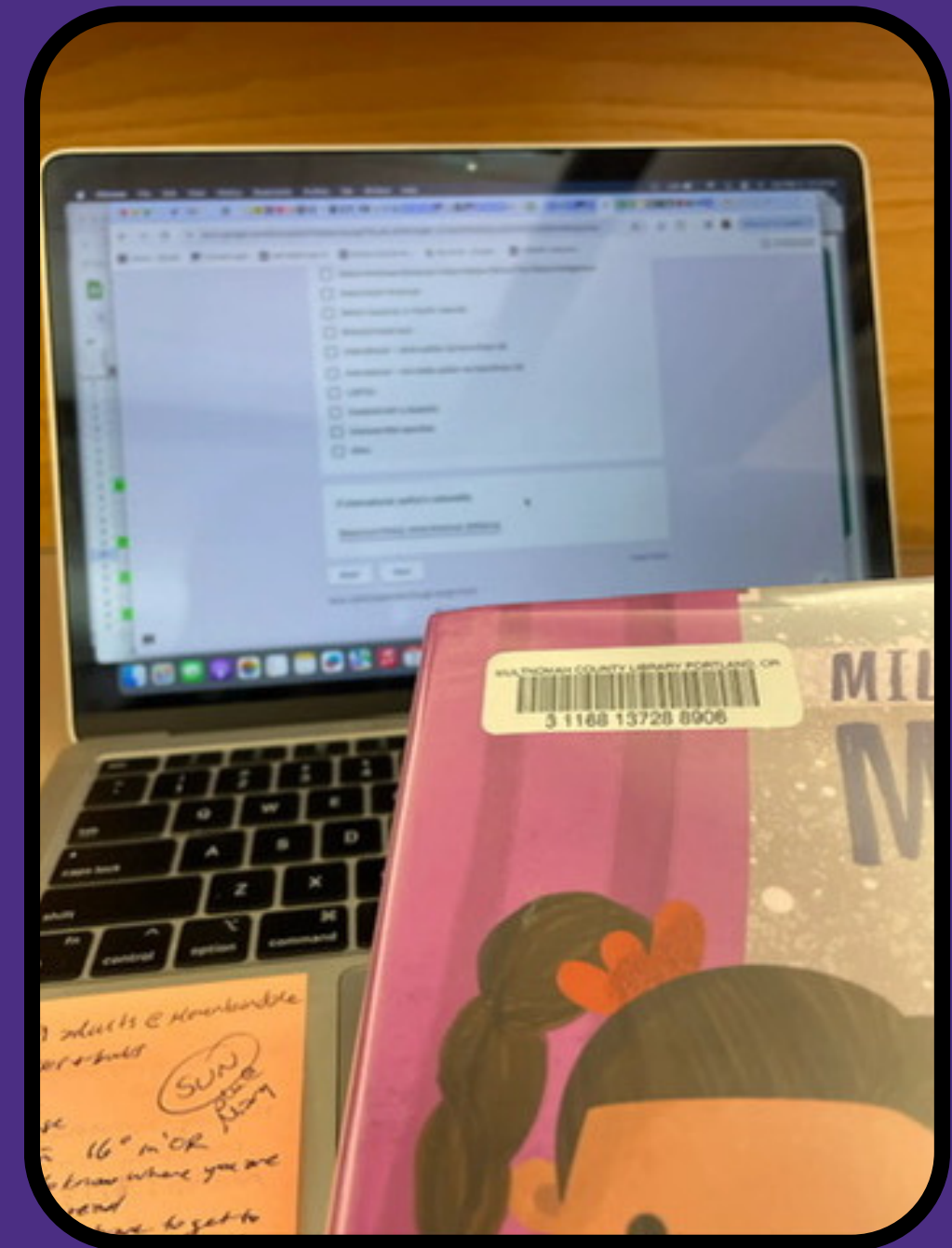
1. MCL shared the audit form they used for assessing the Spanish Early Readers collection, and we added assessment sections for collecting data on author and illustrator nationalities, country of publication, and translator info.
2. Created a Google Form to collect data collaboratively across several library visits to audit approximately 1,000 physical books.
3. Ann and Kimberly did a test run by auditing ten random books in the collection to ensure we were using the assessment tool consistently.



Method

Performing the audit:

1. All three of us performed the audit using the assessment tool – often alone, but at times in pairs or as a trio.
2. We audited approximately 1,000 books in person over the course of a month – frequently checking for books that had been returned since the last visit to ensure as thorough an audit as possible.
3. We made notes about how the assessment tool served our project, both positively and negatively.
4. We then created a results Excel spreadsheet to fill in any additional information we needed to gather about authors and illustrators not found in the physical books.



Challenges

Three prominent challenges emerged for us throughout this capstone, not including difficulties we experienced regarding determining authors' and illustrators' nationalities, auditing more books than we had anticipated and learning (a bit late) about other exciting initiatives happening at MCL:



Assessment Tool

How to create a meaningful and useful assessment tool for this project as well as for folks beyond MCL



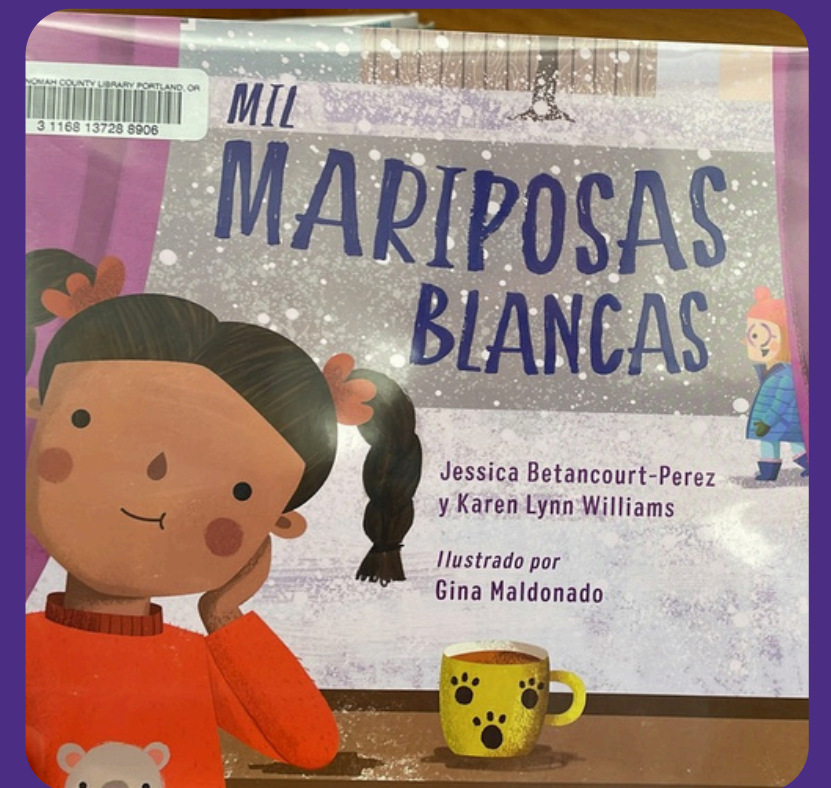
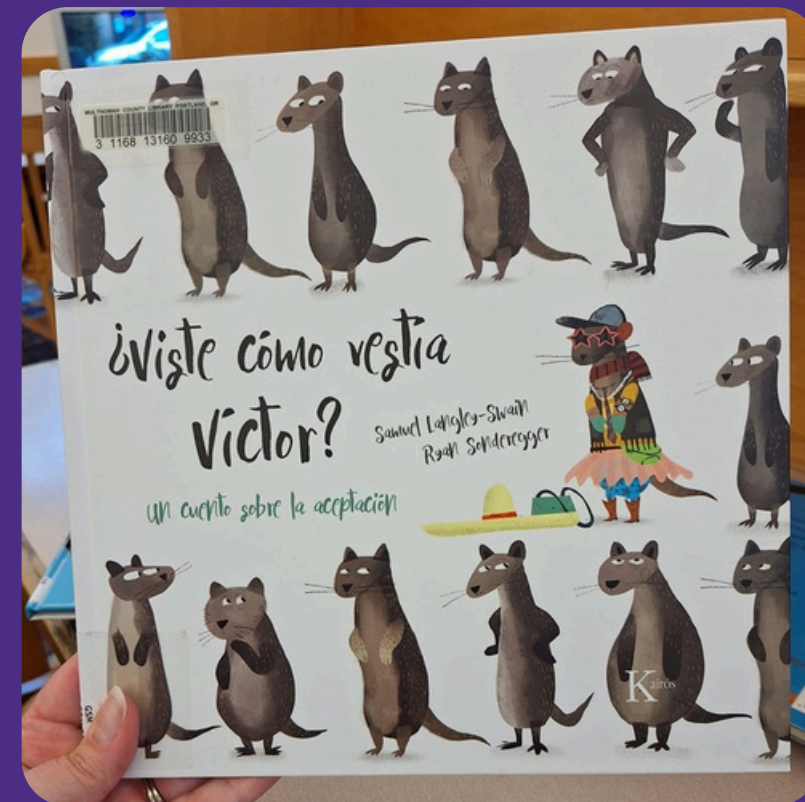
Established Standards

How to establish information collection standards early on while also accounting for data that's best evaluated on a case-by-case basis



Additional Data Points

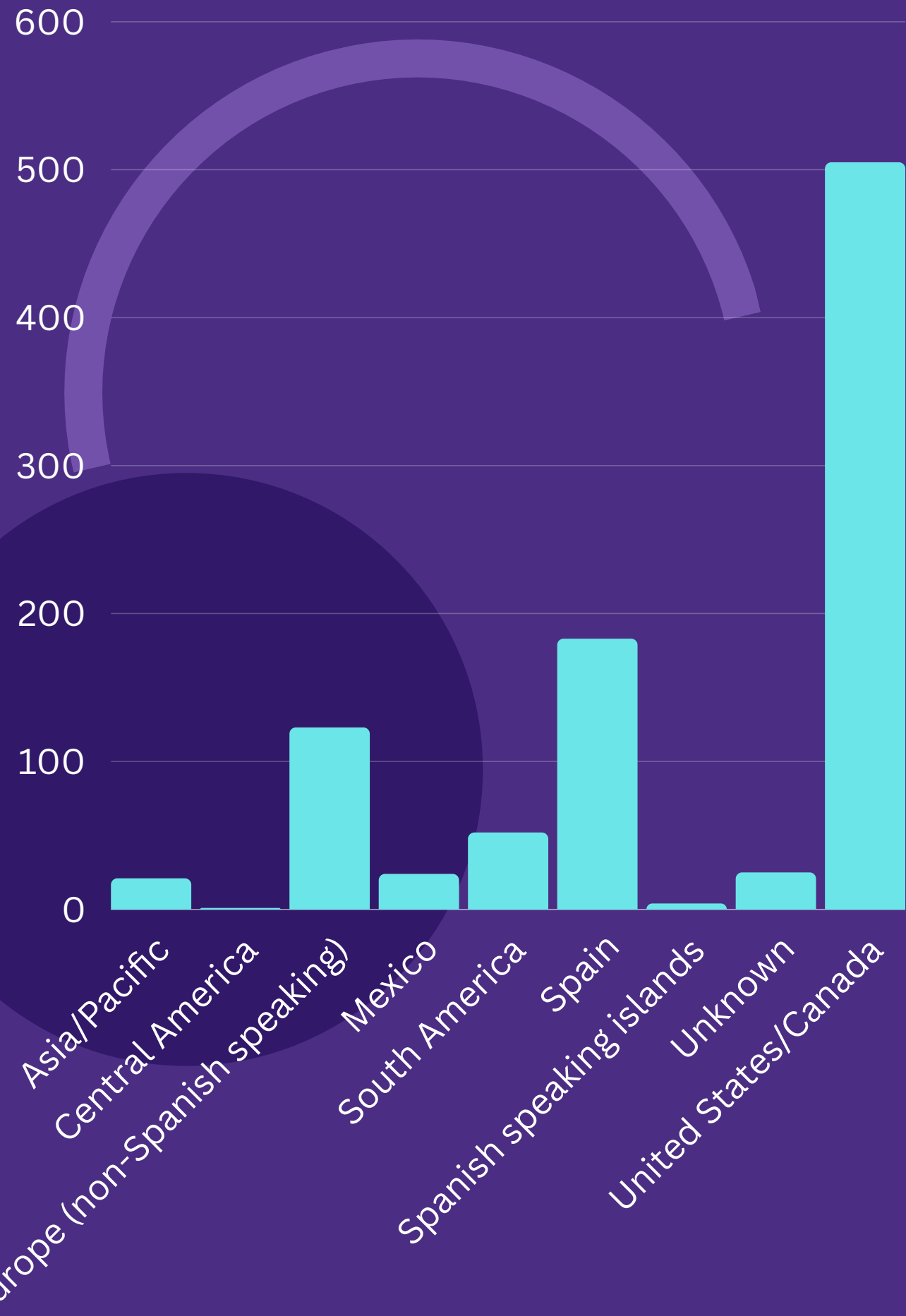
How to include data points that we did not initially collect but discovered were valuable as we conducted the audit



Takeaways: Collection Data

Publishing Nations

Where books are published tells us a lot about what cultural content is likely to show up within the book. The vast majority of Spanish language picture books were published in the US/Canada, which account for approximately half of the books in the collection – these tend to be translations of popular children’s books in the US. The second highest comes from Spain, which – while a Spanish-speaking country – does not reflect the same culture as MCL’s patrons from Mexico and Central America. In fact, books from Mexico and Central America combined only make up 3% of the entire collection. We know from talking to MCL that they want more titles from these locations, and attend the annual Guadalajara International Book Fair every autumn to select culturally responsive picture books for the collection. However, sourcing quality books, especially from Central America, remains difficult, particularly with respect to availability and library budgets for materials, staff time, and travel expenses. We hope that by evaluating these aspects of the collection it helps open doors for libraries to purchase books directly from publishers like those located in, and specialized in, Spanish language books from Mexico and Central America.

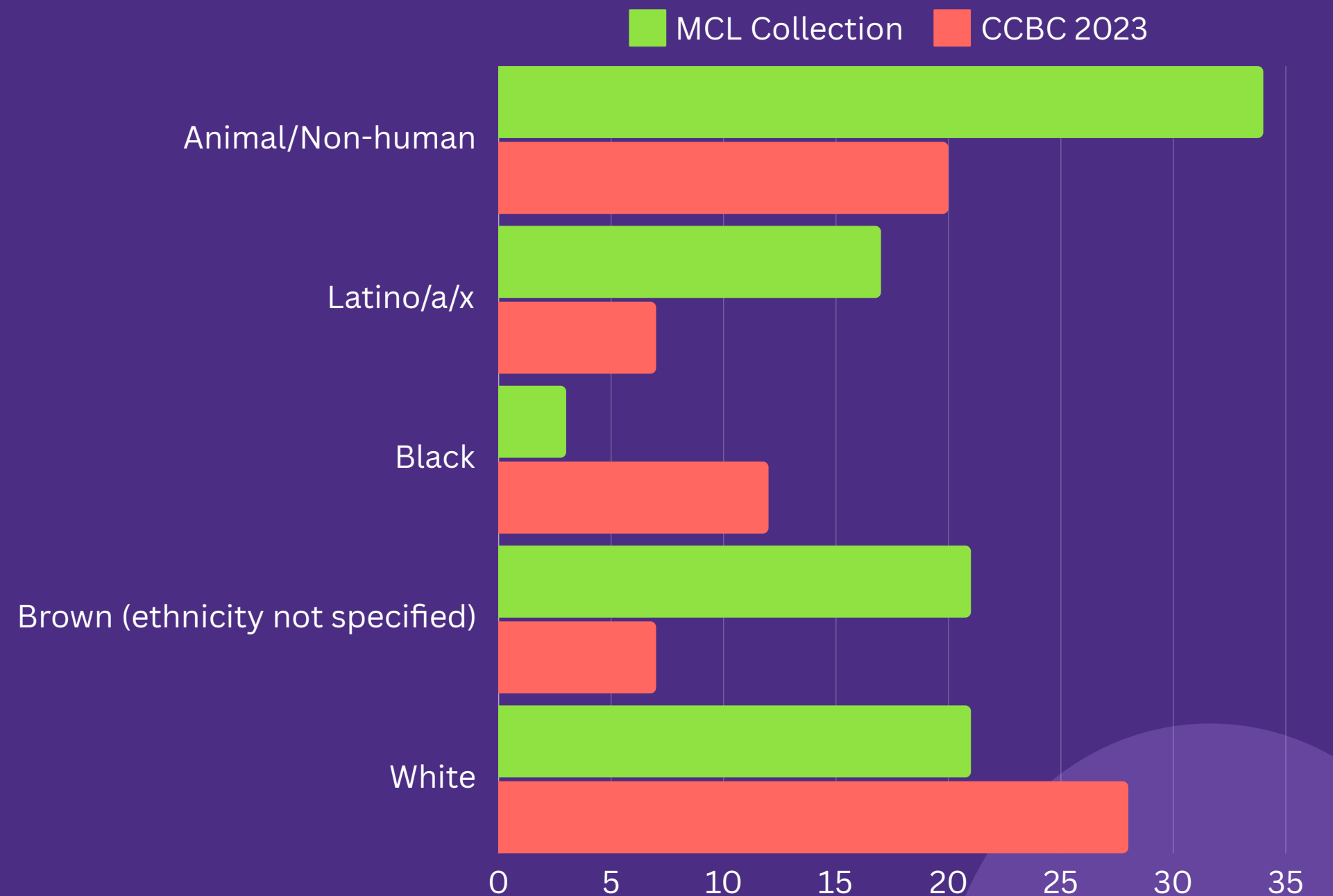


Takeaways: Collection Data

Character Representation

We compared the results of our audit with the most recent statistics on character representation compiled by the [Cooperative Children's Book Center](#). Although this is not a direct comparison, as the CCBC evaluates only the most recent year of publication, its data serve as a reference point when evaluating picture books for racial, cultural, and ethnic representation. The MCL Spanish language picture book collection features many more Latinx/a/o primary characters (17%) than even the 2023 publications evaluated by CCBC (7%), which is not surprising in a Spanish language collection. Animal and non-human characters were overrepresented in this collection (34% compared to 20% CCBC), while there were fewer white characters (21% compared to 28% CCBC).

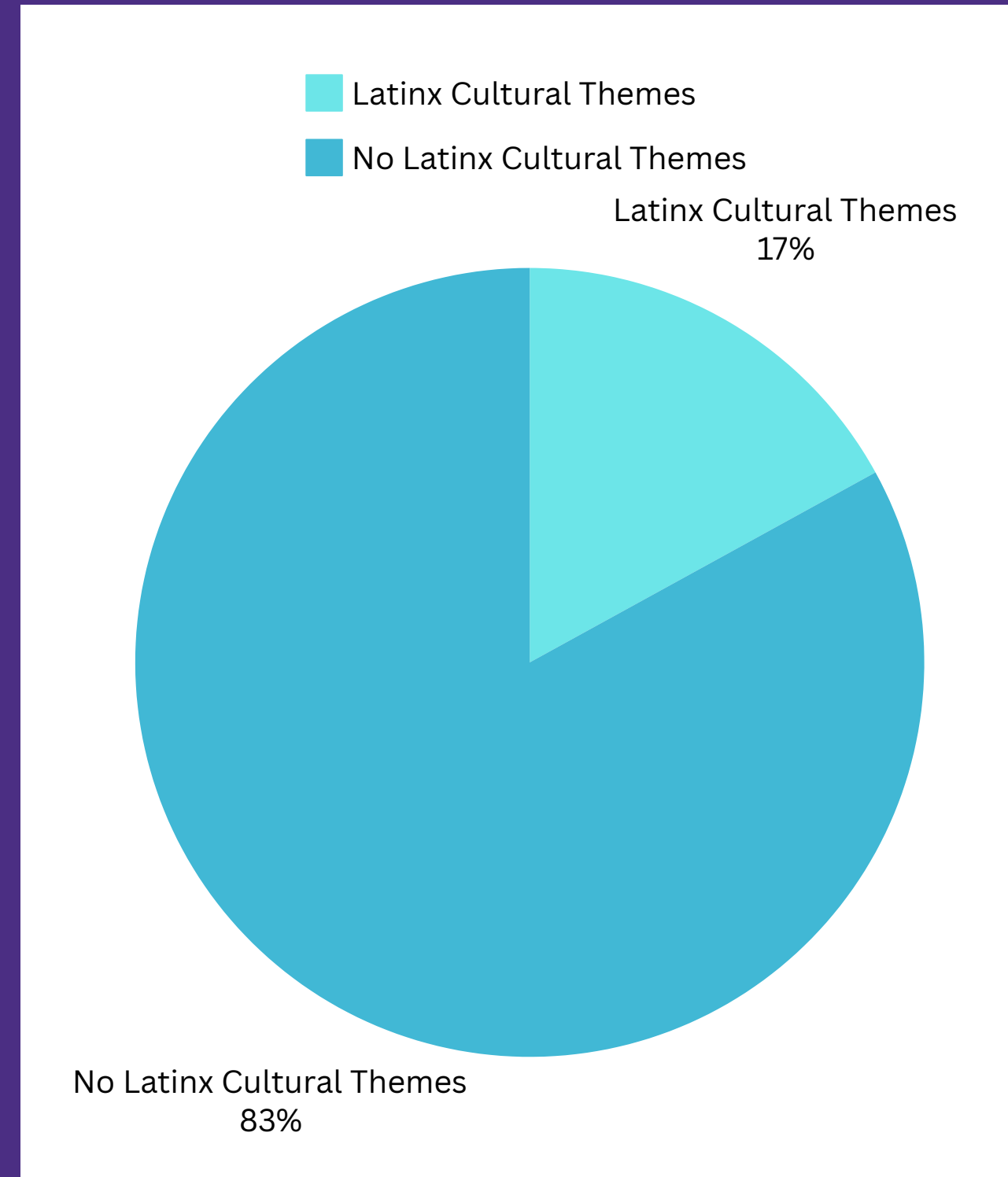
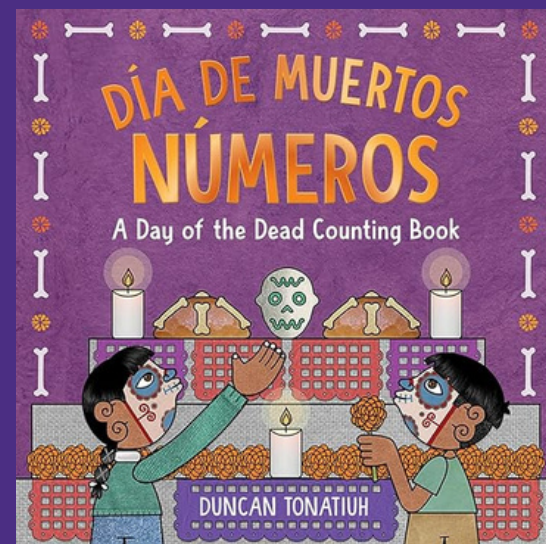
Character Representation, by percentage



Takeaways: Collection Data

Cultural Content

In addition to language, we also audited the Spanish language picture book collection for content themes. Of the roughly 950 books we audited, 160 had identifiable Latinx cultural themes. This could be anything touching on Latinx culture – holidays, food, history, traditions, family dynamics, and/or celebration of a specific geographical area. Only 17% of the collection includes these themes – meaning the remaining 83% do not speak specifically to Latinx culture in an obvious way. Children and their families therefore have fewer opportunities to see their culture reflected in the books they read together, and as a result have fewer opportunities to make personal connections to the books they are reading.

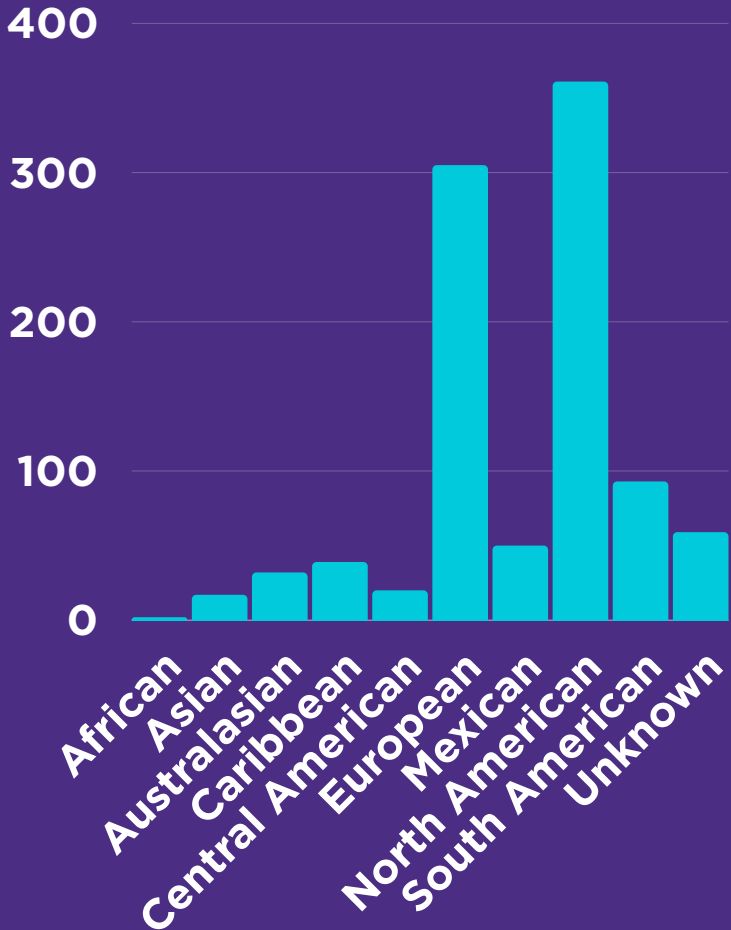
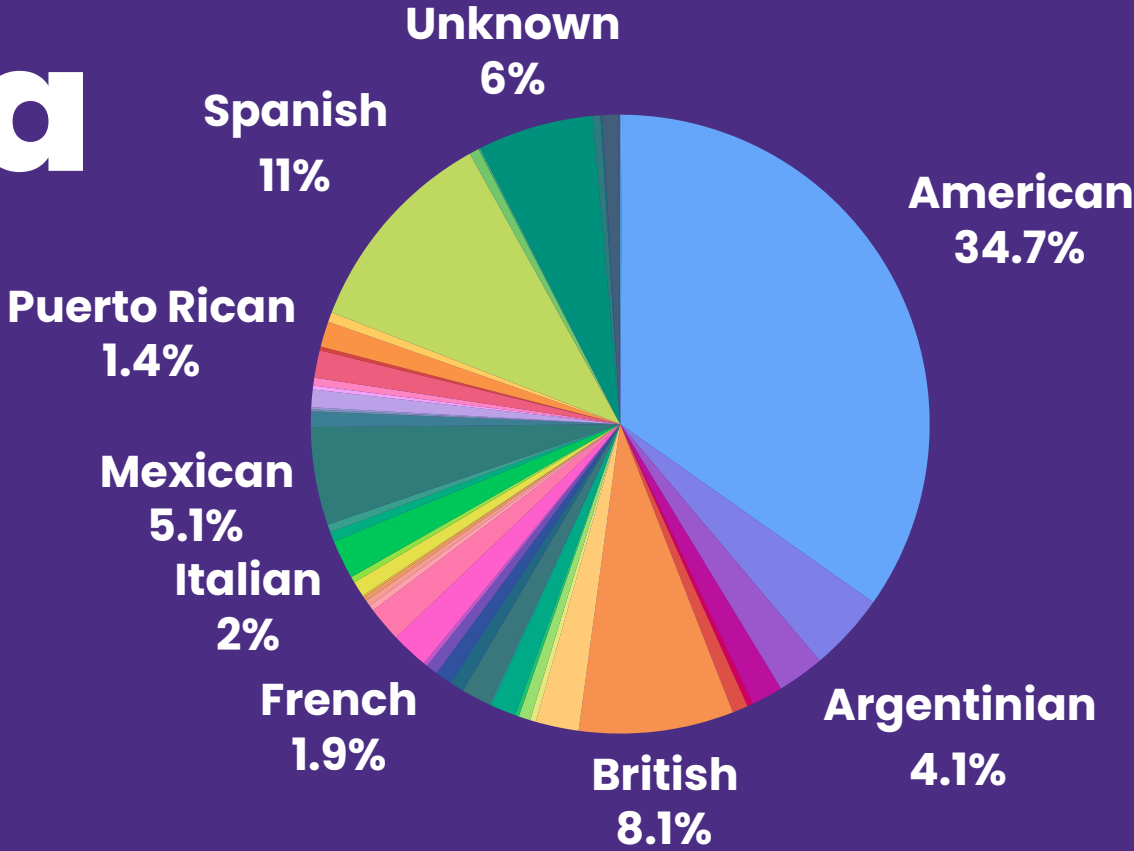


Takeaways: Collection Data

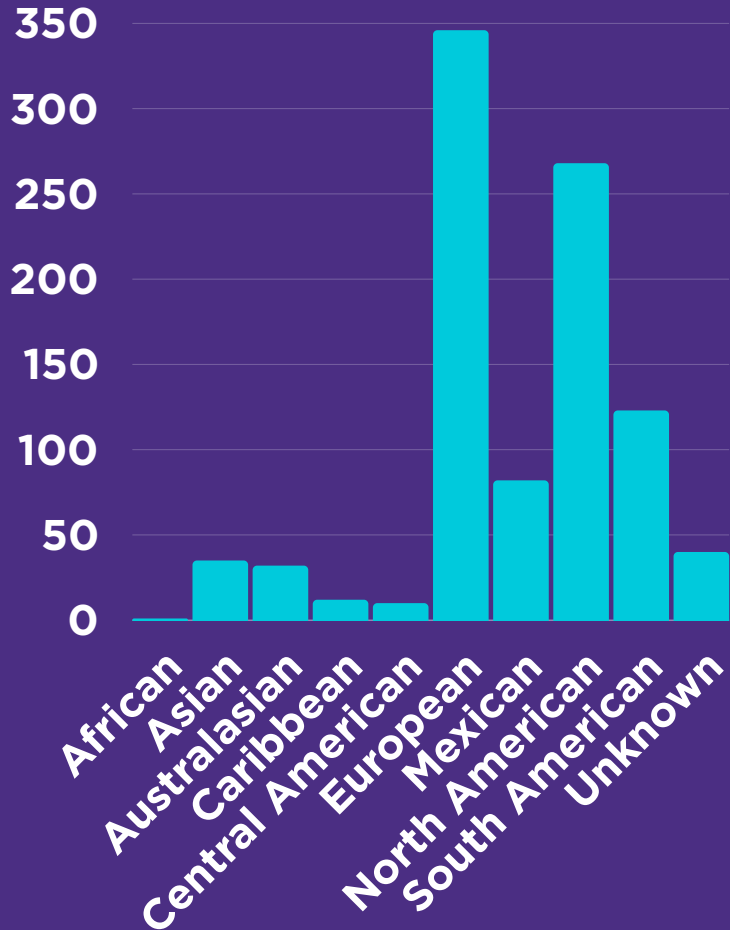
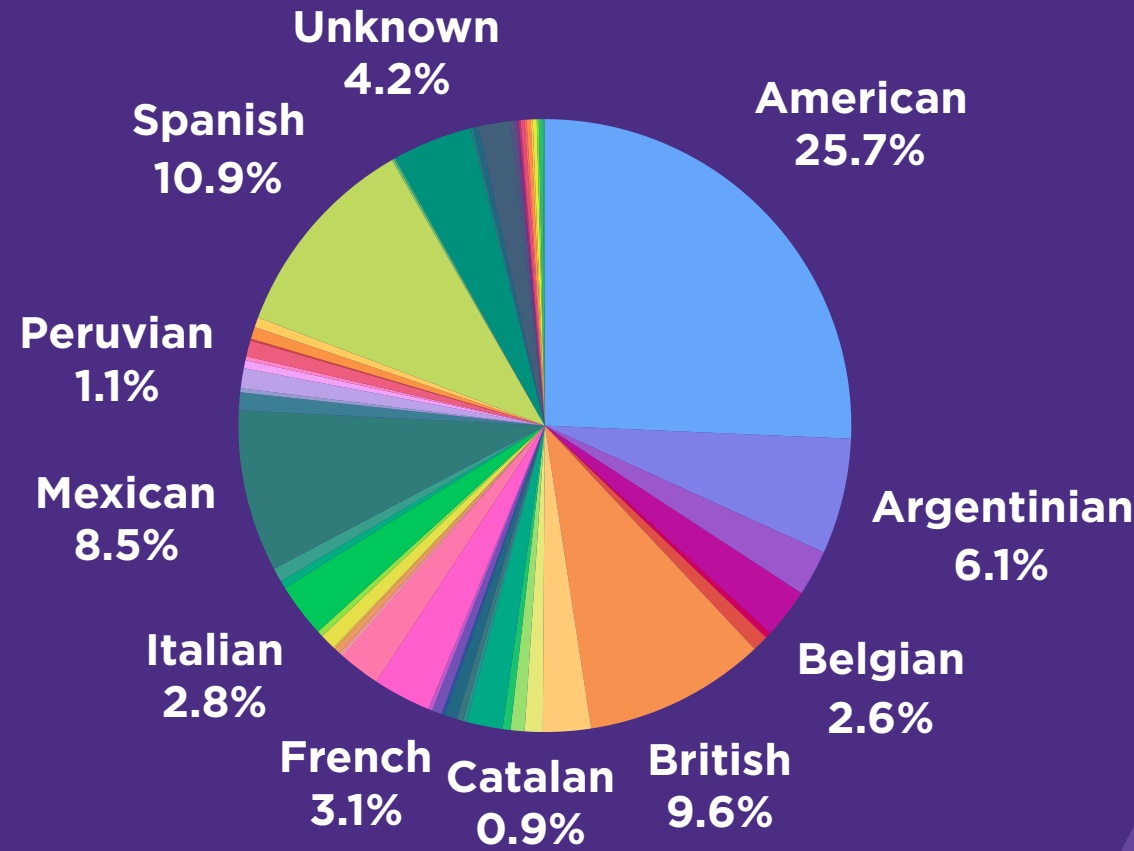
Turns out it's difficult to determine folks' nationalities! Although some of the books we audited provided this information, not all did. Our research yielded additional information, but the data seen here are only approximate percentages.

Books in the Spanish language picture book collection are primarily written and illustrated by folks with North American and European nationalities, followed distantly by folks with South American nationalities. As MCL's Spanish-speaking population primarily comprises patrons from Mexico and Central America, more culturally relevant content is recommended.

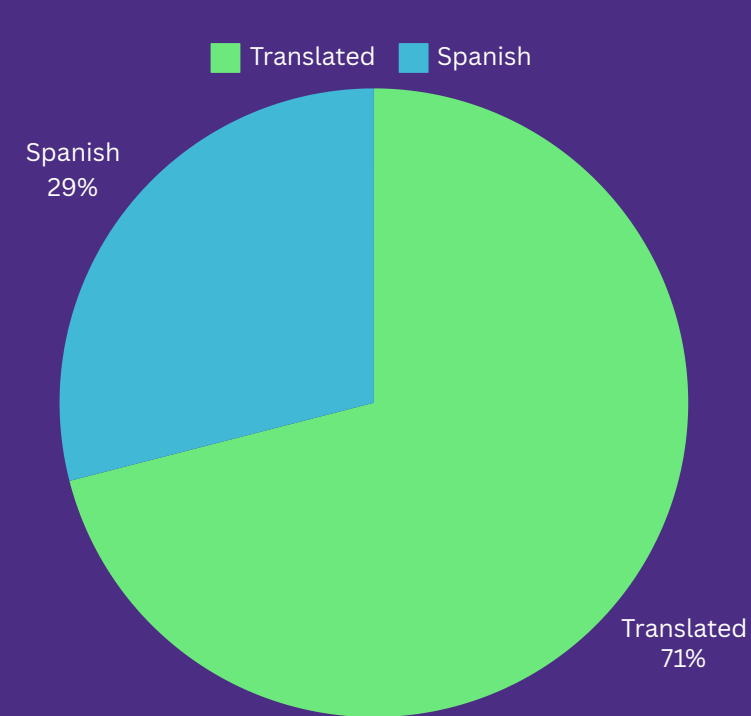
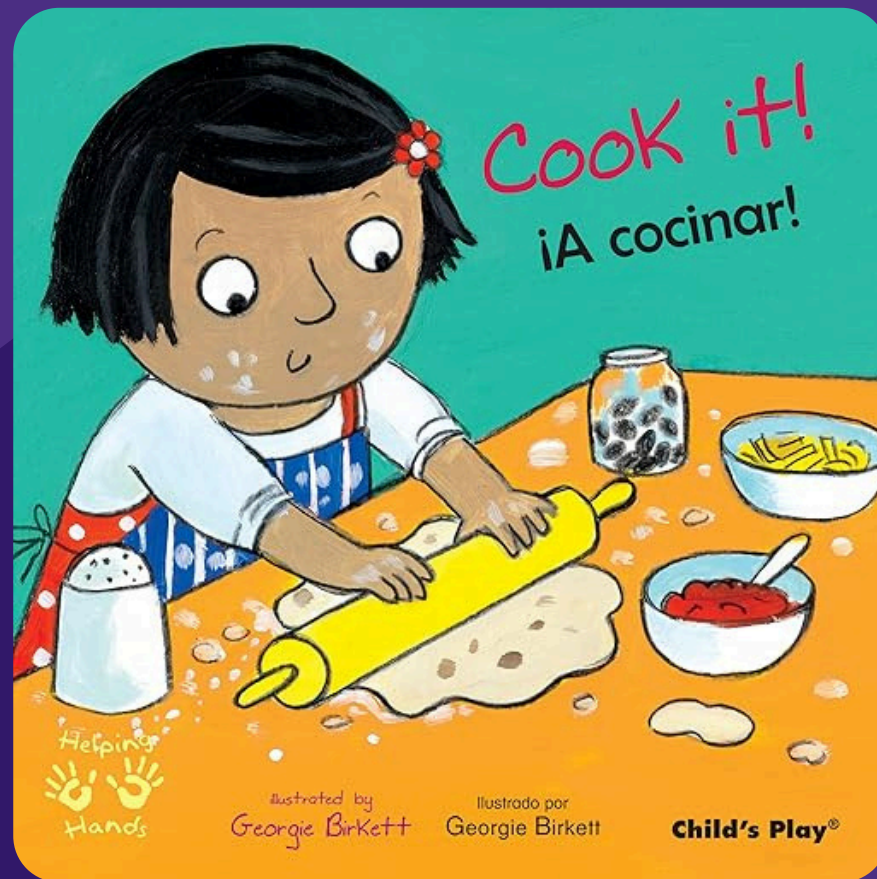
Author Nationality



Illustrator Nationality

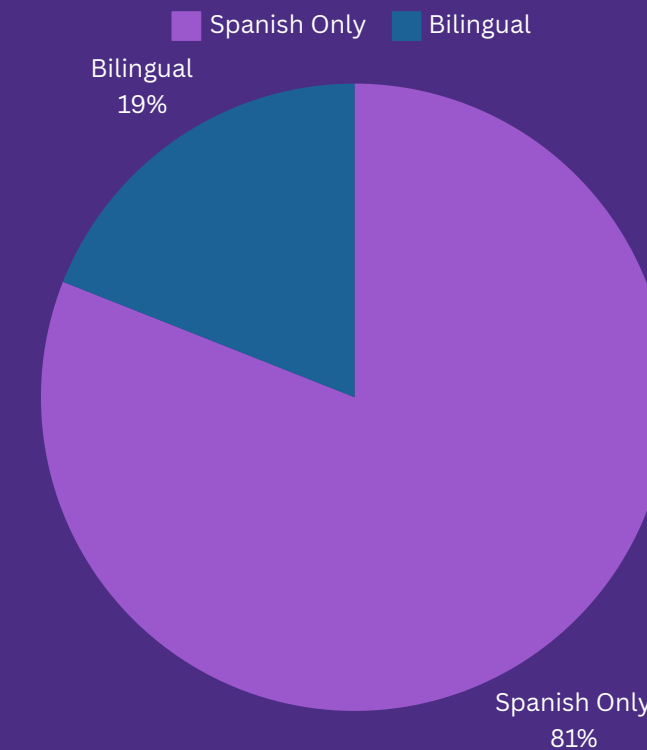


Takeaways: Collection Data



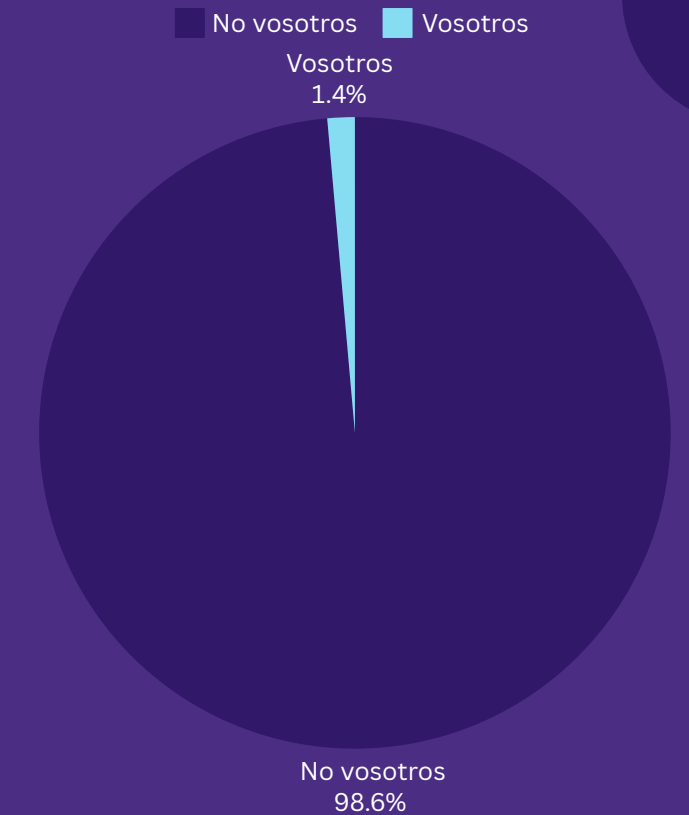
Originally in Spanish vs. Translated

The majority of books are translations – not originally written in Spanish. This relates to other data we collected on author nationality and publishing nations. Most books are simply not written by Native Spanish speakers. Furthermore, while some translators are Native Spanish speakers, or extremely proficient, some companies, such as Scholastic, do not even list a translator of the work, suggesting translation as more of a function relying on technology like AI, and less of a nuanced art form.



Spanish only vs. Bilingual

Bilingual books serve a special purpose in the collection because they help bridge languages, in this case Spanish and English. For families in which different members may be at different levels of fluency with either language, bilingual books can be shared as a way of involving everyone in a story. This is especially important for initiatives regarding family literacy. MCL is currently reorganizing their Spanish language picture book collection to have a separate section for bilingual books so they are more readily available to patrons looking for them – previously they were mixed within the collection and not labelled.

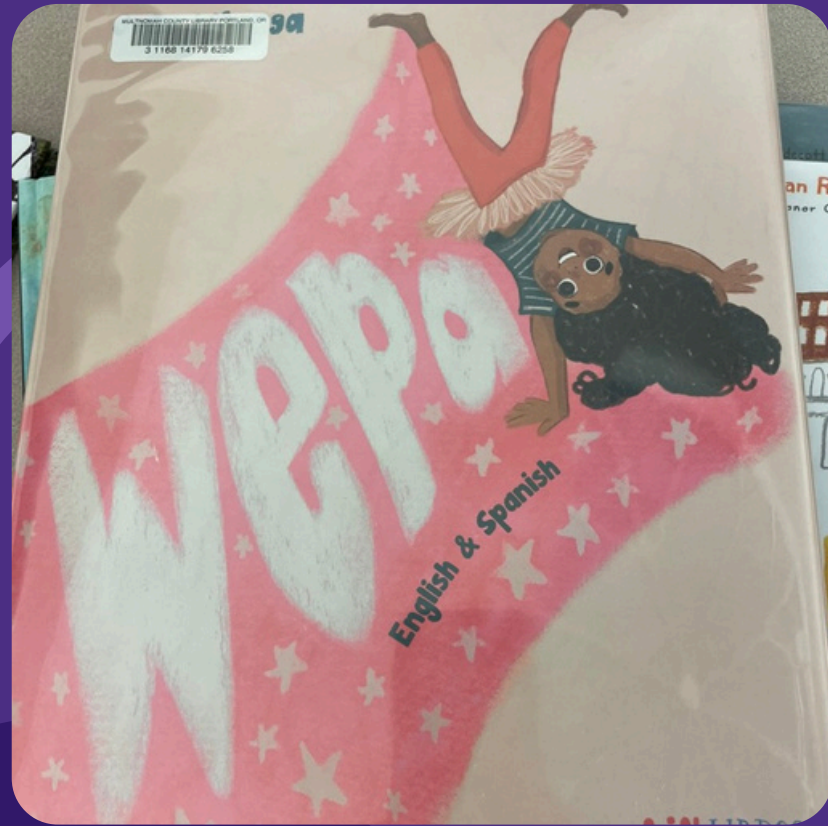


Use of vosotros in text

We were asked by MCL to assess for this because vosotros is a proxy for European culture vs Central/South American and Mexican cultural representation. However, it rarely shows up in picture books simply because of the nature of who is shown in child-centered stories (more familiar relationships rather than formal). In that way, it is a more objective way to assess culture than subjective interpretations of illustrations and textual content. But with so few examples, we still had to rely on those subjective assessments. It would be helpful to know how vosotros is received by MCL's Spanish-speaking patrons and whether its use discourages patrons in any way. If not an issue, then it may not be important to assess in library materials.

Takeaways:

Assessment Tool Evaluation



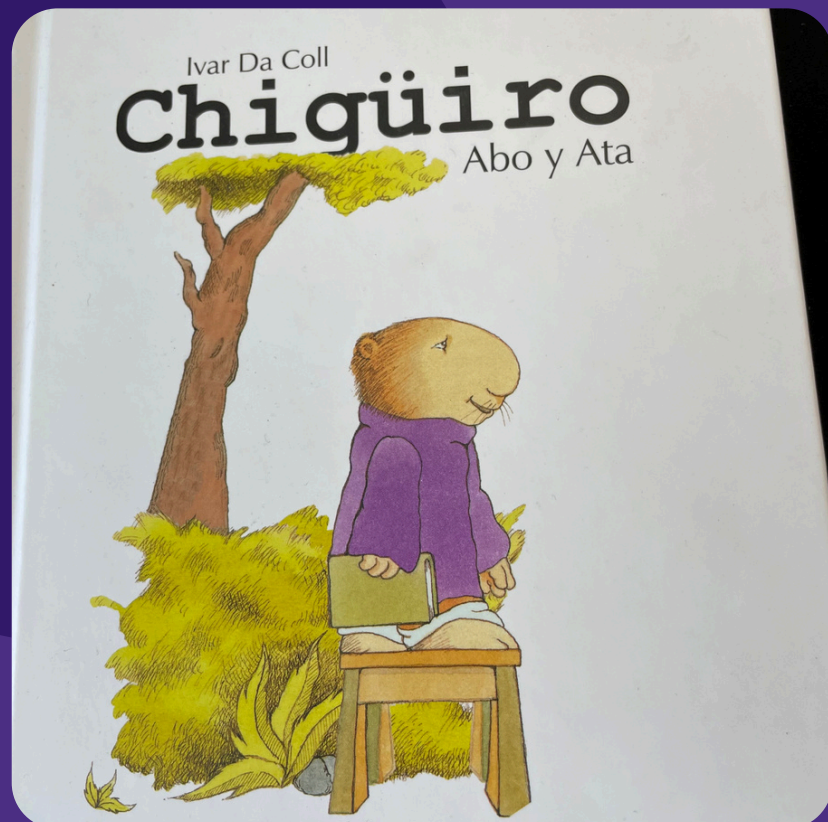
Positives:

1. We were able to collect data quickly across consistent areas to easily compare results both qualitatively and quantitatively.
2. The tool captured the information MCL requested from our team.
3. The data collected will allow MCL to make informed changes to their future collection development work.



Negatives:

1. Some sections of the form did not allow for nuances in identity – for instance authors of multiple nationalities or characters with unspecified identities.
2. We tried to capture too many themes in the diversity section, when really we should have focused more specifically on Latinx cultural elements for this particular audit.
3. People who use the tool will bring their own perspective, experience, and goals, and they should definitely tailor it to their own needs. Any assessment tool will not be a final product but rather a place to start to then customize to serve a specific purpose.



Takeaways: Our Experience



We learned a ton throughout this project that will help us enormously as future librarians and informational professionals! Notably:

- Specifically defining broad terms like diversity, authenticity and even accuracy can be incredibly helpful before beginning work
 - Helps with consistency when multiple team members are gathering data
 - Helps align data that we're capturing with broader project goals
- Very clearly defining the type of audit before beginning
 - For example: Are we conducting a diversity audit or a general audit?
- Conducting a sample audit vs. a whole audit
 - Would a sample audit have provided as much relevant information as a full audit? Full audits may not be feasible due to staffing and time limitations.
- Building relationships
 - Contributing to ongoing efforts is both rewarding, and allows us to make connections with other folks who are thinking about and working on similar projects!

Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

Moving forward, our team sees three possibilities for creating greater access to culturally and linguistically relevant books for MCL's Spanish-speaking patrons:

1

Separate bilingual books from the Spanish language picture book collection. One staff member at MCL, Sandi, is already working on this project as time permits, shelving bilingual books in their own section adjacent to the Spanish language picture books. As she noted, families use bilingual books differently: they are tools for learning the language, shared experiences within multilingual families, and opportunities to talk about Latinx culture from a parent's home country. With additional, eye-catching signage, unique spine labels, and educational tips for families, the bilingual books will be more accessible to MCL patrons.

2

Identify translingual books. We expected to see more translingual books among the Spanish language picture book collection, but we learned that they are mostly shelved with English books. Because translingual stories can help readers to become familiar with the first language and often contain references to Latinx culture, it would be beneficial for patrons to be able to easily identify these books. We recommend tagging the translingual books with spine labels indicating the presence of a second language to increase findability.

3

Deselect for improved access. We recognize the inherent challenges of collection development in another language, sourced from other countries. Any selector occasionally will end up with titles that are disappointing or even offensive. As the Spanish language picture book collection develops and grows with a focus on cultural relevance and accurate representation, it will be necessary to weed the current collection to remove titles that are not serving patrons well. The space created by deselection will make the excellent titles stand out and be more browsable, and it will allow room for growth with more wonderful books for patrons to enjoy.

Conclusion

How will this inform our work as librarians?

To best meet the needs of library patrons, particularly marginalized patrons, we are committed to regular, intentional diversity audits of all collections in our future libraries. These audits will be most effective when tailored to patron needs and limited to a well-defined scope.

In both audits and collection development, we recognize the strength of collaboration with colleagues. We benefited from the hard work of MCL's Spanish selectors when building our assessment tool, and received valuable guidance from other MCL staff and Professor Nicola Daly at the University of Waikato. As we take this work forward, we envision an open-source assessment tool that is adaptable to any library. Additionally, as we and our fellow librarians research the materials in our collections, we would love to see shared results in the form of spreadsheets, databases, or more detailed catalog metadata. Finally, as libraries work to thoughtfully grow collections, selectors will benefit from collaboratively built resource lists that detail publishers, vendors, and distributors with high quality materials that are culturally and linguistically representative of our patrons.



[Click here to make a copy of our assessment tool for your own use](#)



[Click here to review the data from our audit](#)



[Click here for a pilot selector's guide to first language materials](#)

Edit access available upon request

Thank you to Roland Conley, UW MLIS student, for sharing the Filipino language resources used in this guide.

Thank You!

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