

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Read the guidelines.

2. Complete the practice exercise: First reflect on the illustrations individually. Then discuss in your team which books you would use in an ECEC setting and why.

3. Create a list of at least 10 suitable books for an ECEC context in your country. Aim to include books that represent different forms of diversity. If possible, include multilingual books. Prefer books with a fairly recent copyright date, as children's books can age quickly. Familiarize yourself with the selection criteria for compiling the country-specific lists and use them to guide your choices.

4. Add the books to the Excel spreadsheet "Anti-Bias Children's Books." You do not need to complete the columns "*How to use this book in an ECEC context*" and "*Potential weaknesses*" unless relevant. The first can be used to note ideas for how the book might be used in practice. The second should only be filled in if the book contains potentially problematic elements. If you identify several potential weaknesses, reconsider whether the book should be included in your list.

5. Review your list. Check whether your collection as a whole reflects the criteria in the guidelines. Also check your final list against the selection criteria to ensure that all requirements are met. Make adjustments if necessary.

Selection Criteria for Country-Specific Anti-Bias Book Lists

Quantitative guidelines

Choose 10 books in total.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include no more than 1 book with animals as the main characters.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure at least 5 books explicitly address diversity.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include at least 1 book that is accessible for children with different needs and abilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include at least 1–2 books that explore issues of (in)justice, not only diversity or identity.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Qualitative guidelines

Types of anti-bias books

<p>Include a mix of books in which diversity is addressed implicitly and explicitly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implicitly: diversity is present (e.g., diverse characters), but not discussed in the story-line. • Explicitly: diversity is directly addressed in the story. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>For books that explicitly address diversity, include a balance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books about diversity (e.g., explaining different family structures), and • Books from a diversity-specific perspective (e.g., focusing on a child's lived experience). 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Include some books that go beyond representation and engage with issues of (in)justice.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Guidelines for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books

The following guiding questions are intended to support the selection and reflection on anti-bias children's books in an ECEC context. For the criteria for compiling your country-specific list, see the previous section.

It can also be helpful to think of books in three groups: discard, keep with discussion, and best practice (implicit or explicit equity).

Illustrations

- **Stereotypes:** Are characters portrayed in stereotypical ways? For example, Muslim women as passive. It may help to reflect on common stereotypes in children's books.
- **Tokenism:** Are only one or two characters from marginalized groups included while most other characters are able-bodied, male, and white?
- **Invisibility:** Who is missing? For example, blue-collar workers or single-parent families.
- **Background representation:** Look at the background of the illustrations. Are people in the background diverse (e.g., on the street, in a crowd, on public transport)? Are different languages visible (e.g., on signs or posters)? Are forms of accessibility visible in the environment (e.g., ramps, accessible signage, or other inclusive design features)?

Story Line and Character Relationships

- **Human characters:** Are human characters central to the story? While animal characters can engage children, they are **not a substitute for addressing diversity and fairness with human characters.**
- **Characters and Relationships:** Who are the main and supporting characters? How do they relate to each other? Consider various dimensions of diversity, including gender, race/ethnicity, dis/ability, neurodiversity, socioeconomic background, and more, and how these dimensions may intersect in the portrayal of characters. Watch for common tropes (e.g., the "Black Best Friend").
- **Agency:** Who is proactive versus passive? Do female characters succeed because of their abilities and initiative rather than appearance or relationships with male characters? Who causes problems, and who solves them?
- **Social justice:** Do characters stand up against injustice or work toward social justice? Are children and adults shown working together to create change?¹

¹ Not every book needs to do this, but your collection should include some that do.

- **Story line:** Does the story avoid messages that “the other” must change or prove their worth to be accepted? **Be cautious of such narratives, as they can reinforce exclusion rather than inclusion.**

Lifestyles: What messages about different lifestyles does the book send? Across your collection, are people within the same group portrayed in diverse ways, not only between groups?

Language

- **Biased Language:** Is the language inclusive and respectful, avoiding biased or stereotypical terms?
- **Language Hierarchy:** In bi- or multilingual books, are languages presented on equal terms (e.g., size and placement)? Does your collection include books with different reading directions or formats?
- **Linguistic Representation:** When books include other languages, which languages are represented—and which are not? Across your collection, which languages are represented? Which are missing?
- **Othering:** Does the language avoid “we vs. them” distinctions or portraying certain groups as fundamentally different or distant?

Accessibility: Is the book accessible to children with different needs and abilities. For example, does it include accessible formats or features (e.g., Braille, tactile elements, high color contrast, or clear visual design)? Are different ways of communicating represented, such as sign language in illustrations?

Appeal: Is the story and artwork engaging for the intended age group (e.g., toddlers or older preschoolers)? Avoid overly didactic books. Consider whether visual clarity, color contrast, or sensory elements (e.g., textures or tactile features) support engagement and accessibility for diverse learners.

Author/Illustrator: Consider the author’s and illustrator’s background and perspective. What qualifies them to tell this story? Are the characters portrayed respectfully? Across your collection, do authors and illustrators reflect diverse identities and experiences?

Copyright date: Consider the copyright date. Older books may reflect outdated attitudes or stereotypes.

Overall Collection

- **Agency Across the Collection:** Look at your collection as a whole. Are the characters who take action diverse?
 - **Representation and Relatability:** Does your collection meaningfully reflect the backgrounds of the children in your group? Does it also include diversity beyond your group?
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Adapted from

- <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/>
- <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/assessing-childrens-book-collections-using-an-anti-bias-lens.pdf>

Resources: Browse these links for English-language anti-bias books.

- <https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists/early-childhood/>
- <https://diversebookfinder.org/recommended-reads/>

Practice Exercise: Reflecting on Illustrations

Instructions:

Look at the pages from these children's books and answer the questions for each image.² The focus is on illustrations (and to a lesser extent, the story) because illustrations can be reflected on without knowledge of a specific language. Information about the books and their stories is provided in the boxes below each set of questions. Use this exercise to consider whether the books might be suitable for use in an ECEC context.

Image A: After their son goes missing, one parent calls the police. Which one? What does the other parent do? Who is the "doer," who is more passive? How does this illustration reinforce gender stereotypes or existing imbalances in representation? Consider the type of family, the house, and the parents' appearance.

About the book

"*Wim is weg*" (Dutch; *Wim Is Gone*) by Rogier Boon, 1959. The story follows a young white, able-bodied boy who receives a bicycle for his birthday and sets off on a trip to Spain, forgetting to tell his parents.

Image B: Nico and his grandfather meet his friend Imany and her grandmother Lucie at a café. How do the characters look? Who is related to whom? What does this suggest about family and race? What does the setting suggest about socioeconomic background?

About the book

"*Grandpas, Piranhas, and Other Stories*" by Rocio Bonilla, 2020. A young white, able-bodied boy shares stories and experiences with his grandfather. The book celebrates grandparent-grandchild relationships.

² The focus is on illustrations (and to a lesser extent, the story) because illustrations can be reflected on without knowledge of a specific language. Information about the books and their stories is provided in the boxes below each set of questions. Use this exercise to consider whether the books might be suitable for use in an ECEC context.

Image C: The readers are asked where they would like to be and who they would like to meet there. Look at the characters on this page. What is the ratio of male to female characters? What is the skin color of the characters? How are they dressed, and what are they doing? Why might the author and illustrator have chosen these characters? Where are stereotypes reinforced or subverted? Which types of diversity are not represented? What might this suggest about who is imagined as someone children would find interesting to meet (e.g., why might we not see a disabled person in this role)?

About the book

“Die Welt, die dir gefällt” (German; *The World You Like*) by Sarah Neuendorf, 2019. This interactive book encourages children to imagine their own journeys and stories, inviting engagement with illustrations.

Image D: Doris is preparing for a celebration at her parents’ friends’ home, suggested to be a same-sex couple (two women living together). Doris wants to wear her sailor suit, which is now too small. Her mother prepares a cake while her partner irons clothes in the background. Doris is told to wear her dress instead. How does Doris look? How do the adults look and act? Where are they going? What is Doris supposed to wear? How does this illustration reinforce or subvert stereotypes?

About the book

“Doris drar” (Swedish; *Doris Runs Off*) by Pija Lindenbaum, 2015. Told from Doris’s perspective, the story follows a young white, able-bodied girl navigating family life with her mother and extended family, exploring independence and reconciliation.

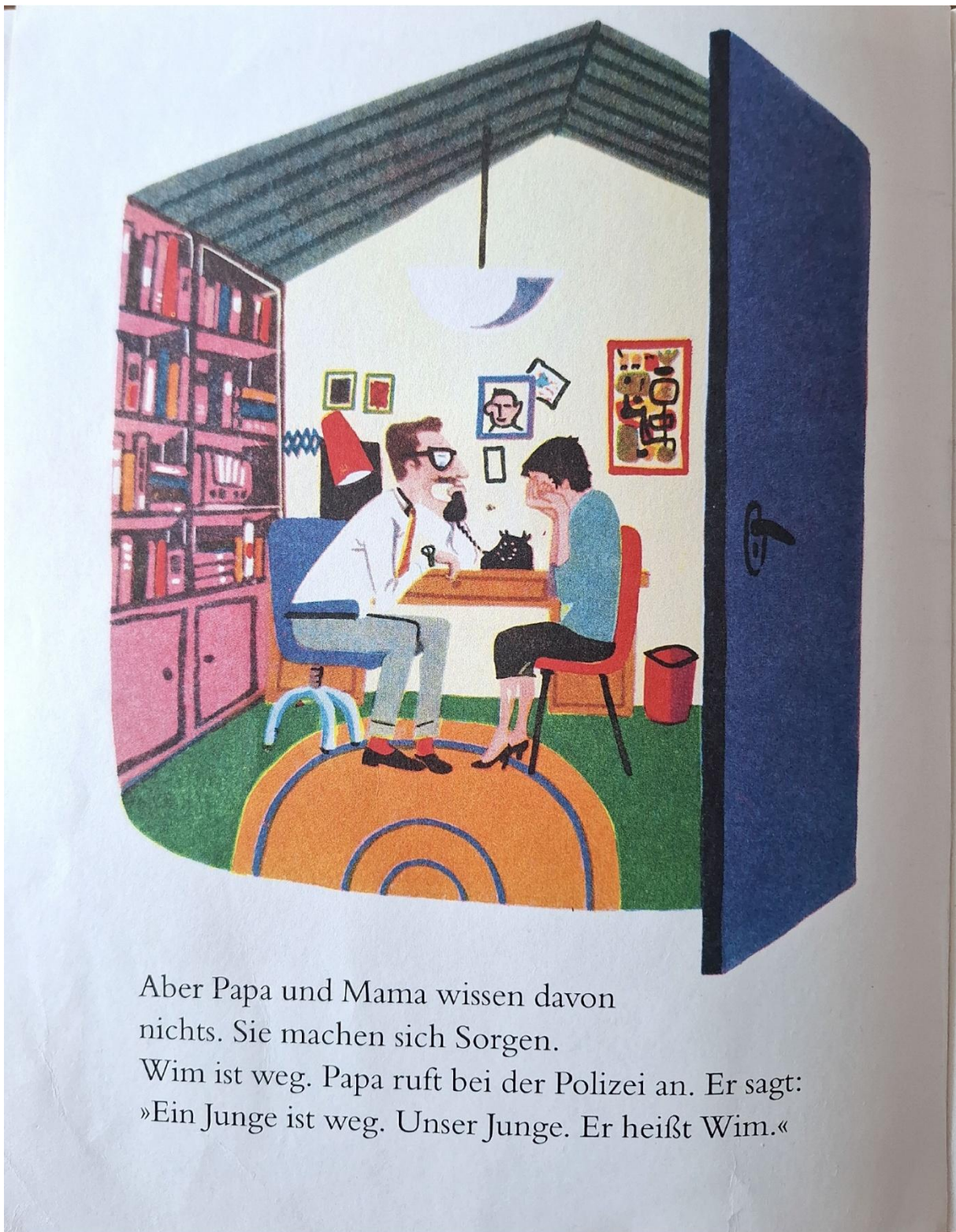
Reflection:

After answering the questions, discuss with your team whether you would:

1. **Discard** the book,
2. **Keep with discussion**, or
3. **Use as a best-practice example** in early childhood education.

Be sure to explain the reasons for your choice, citing specific examples from the illustrations and/or story.

Image A



Aber Papa und Mama wissen davon
nichts. Sie machen sich Sorgen.
Wim ist weg. Papa ruft bei der Polizei an. Er sagt:
»Ein Junge ist weg. Unser Junge. Er heißt Wim.«

Image B



Image C



Image D

