

Book Review

Voices of resistance: Interdisciplinary approaches to Chican@ children's literature

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Voices of resistance: Interdisciplinary approaches to Chican@ children's literature
By Laura Alamillo, Larissa M. Mercado-López, and Cristina Herrera (Eds.)

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The banning of Mexican-American Studies and censorship of Chican@-authored books in Arizona were part of a succession of anti-Mexican and anti-Chican@ policies that were enacted across the state and in the education system. The counterstories offered through these classes and literature not only created a sense of cultural inclusion, but ignited a political and activist consciousness among the mostly Chican@ youth, and reinvigorated conversations among educators about the teaching of race, ethnicity, and culture in the classroom, particularly through youth literature. While most work on youth literature has emphasized “multicultural” literature as a means of being inclusive, *Voices of Resistance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Chican@ Children's Literature* recognizes that our present moment--one that is rife with continued anti-Mexican sentiment but that has given rise to our first Chicano National Poet Laureate--demands a more focused study of children's and young adult literature by and about Chican@s. This collection re-examines how we view multicultural and diversity literature and recognize literature that invites social transformation. Using multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives to critically examine a wide range of Chican@ children's picture book and young adult novels, this collection reaffirms Chicano@ children's literature as a means to achieve equity and social change. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018)

Voices of Resistance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Chican@ Children's Literature gathers a wide range of experts from diverse academic fields in the analysis of Chicanx children's and young adult (YA) literature. The editors make the case for the urgency of using multicultural children's literature as a means for empowerment and social justice. The book provides a framework that is useful to multiple audiences--from caregivers, teachers,

school leaders, community members, to teacher educators, and beyond. The book highlights the Chicanx history of resistance situated in the various US socio-political contexts that have negatively impacted people of color since the country's formation. The book reminds readers of the important role that literature has on the lives of children, and its potential to either affirm an asset-based perspective connected to their lives,

cultural identities, gender constructions, and home language practices of Chicax children and youth or to perpetuate a harmful deficit view.

Furthermore, the book reminds readers that powerful children's and YA literature can help raise Chicax children's consciousness, even from a young age, towards sustaining self-love in the uplifting of Chicax identity, culture, and linguistic practices schools.

The book includes a variety of authors from different fields, exploring a collection of children's books and YA literature along with prevalent Chicax scholarship and theory. It is a celebration of the timeless and critical contributions of thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, and it articulates how their theories prevail in the lived experiences of Chicaxs. These theories are used for framing the analysis of Chicax children's literature.

The book is divided into three sections, each given a theme that is further explored and delved into by the chapters that follow. The first section analyzes manifestations of Chicax identity and consciousness, highlighting the complexity of this effort given the diversity in the Chicax experience. The second section focuses on characters in select children's and YA literature, specifically examining their journeys in constructing their gender identities and negotiating their sexuality.

Finally, the third section examines culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies through the use of children's literature. The authors in this section explore the fluid gender identities as well as language practices in children's book that can support its young readers' own sense of self and their linguistic practices. This includes translanguaging, in which speakers draw from a variety of features available in their linguistic repertoires, such as those from Spanish and English. For instance, in the chapter, "Translanguaging con mi abuela: Chicax@ Children's Literature as a Means to Elevate Language Practices in Our Homes," author Laura Alamillo analyses prominent children's books, such

as *Grandma and Me at the Flea* by Juan Felipe Herrera and Mango, *Abuela and Me* by Meg Medina, and illustrates how grandmothers are often important characters in Chicax children's stories. Alamillo highlights their roles in the negotiation of language practices with their grandchildren. The author argues that language practices that includes translanguaging is common in Chicax families and should also be reflected in the language practices that are honored in schools.

One strength of this book is its interdisciplinary undertaking, asserting the importance of reflecting on and examining literature through various lenses. The authors included in the text represent a variety of fields, including education, Chicax and Latin American studies, women's studies, film and visual studies, English, as well as others. The lens represented in the book reflects how these often intersect.

The book uses children's and young adult literature as a means for empowerment and identity formation and affirmation, while making the various stakeholders in children's lives—from caregivers to teachers and community members—critically aware of their roles and responsibilities. These two elements in the book prompt readers to recognize the heterogeneity that exists within the Chicax population and a variety of experiences, social-economic statuses, sexual orientations, gender identities, family structures and relationships, and cultural and linguistic practices. For instance, one of the books that the authors use in their analysis is Maya Christina Gonzalez's *Call Me Tree/Llámame Árbol*. The text features a variety of gender fluid characters that are rarely represented elsewhere in children's literature. In addition, Cristina Herrera engages readers in an analysis of Belinda Acosta's YA book, *Damas, Dramas, and Ana Ruiz*, and shows how two Chicanas, a mother and daughter, reinvent themselves as their family structure shifts and continuously challenge gender norms.

The text also recognizes that schooling is a powerful establishment in the formation of the self and ways of being; a significant space through which a multitude of (often opposing) perspectives

can be upheld or challenged, though not always in a linear way, and thus can be in perpetual state of negotiation.

The book is a call to action. The editors extend an important reminder for readers to collaborate in the effort towards sustaining Chicanx youth's ways of being. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), one in three school-aged children will be Latinx by 2023, and in states such as California, New Mexico and Texas, more than half of the children already are of Latinx descent (as cited in Gándara, 2017, p. 4). This is a significant increase from the current number of one in four, or 25 percent, of children in K-12 schools in the US that the authors cite. The authors also remind us that the majority of the Latinx population is Chicanx or of Mexican descent. Consequently, it is everyone's responsibility to not only recognize the vast and rich diversity in community, experiences, cultural and gender identities, language practices, and other ways of being that exist within the Latinx population, but also the need for these to be normalized.

A recommendation for the text is to include an expanded bibliography or list of additional books and resources. This would be a valuable tool for educators who might be looking for additional resources. An additional recommendation for the editors is to explore a wider variety of books and resources, though such an undertaking would reasonably require at least an additional volume to this text. For instance, authors in different chapters examine the same two books: Juan Felipe Herrera's *Downtown Boy*, and Maya Christina Gonzalez's *Call Me Tree/Llámame Árbol*. Each chapter examines the books through a different lens, but readers may be interested in additional book titles and authors.

The book asserts the critical need and importance for more authors and editors, such as Alamillo, Mercado-López, and Herrera, whose work values and affirms the experiences of young people of color. *Voices of Resistance* amplifies the multifaceted and complex stories of Chicanxs as they are represented in the literature. That aspect alone makes this book an important contribution

for more than just researchers and teachers. It is a valuable text for anyone that seeks to better understand the dynamic identities and experiences of Chicanxs and Latinx people.

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