Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Content Equity, Inclusion & Diversity Guidance: Vendor Reference Guide

Version 3.0

Contents

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
The Learning Company™

Content Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Pledge

At Houghton Mifflin Harcourt®, we realize that it is a privilege to play a role in education. As a learning company focused on empowering students and teachers, it is our responsibility to build content and provide services and resources that foster a holistic understanding of our world and honor the diverse communities we serve. As an organization, we too are always learning and growing, and we will continue to be intentional about improvements we make as part of our continuous evolution.

We pledge to:

1. Provide curriculum and services that reflect and celebrate the rich diversity within our school communities, empowering all students and teachers.

2. Strive for equitable, nonbiased, and sensitive treatment and representation for all individuals, communities, and experiences across all programs, services, and platforms.

3. Leverage our deep expertise in the K–12 space and engage with current scholarship on equity in education, ensuring HMH's content development framework is informed by best practices and highest standards.

4. Conduct rigorous review of our materials throughout the development process, with insight from both internal specialists and third-party experts.

5. Listen to and learn from the students and educators we serve; respect their feedback and act with their best interests at heart.

We are committed to producing curriculum materials in which all students can see themselves and the possibilities for their future success. Our programs are strongest when they resonate with learners, inspire connections and spark dialogue, and honor the unique qualities and experiences of every learner. The integrity of our content and services, informed by the values expressed here, is at the center of all we do and is inextricably tied to our goal of improving outcomes for the millions of students and educators we reach each day.

Introduction

Goals of This Document

The Content Guidance for Inclusion and Diversity has several related goals:

- To integrate and standardize the support available to content developers across subject areas and content types
- To highlight a wide range of possible concerns so that content developers are able to notice and work past the personal blinders we all have
- To guide content developers in making decisions when they identify concerns

The term "content developers" in this case means not only those who plan and write materials, but also those who design materials, acquire and commission text and images, and review content in all its formats.

This document is intended to help drive learning and support the implementation of the Content Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Pledge. If you have a question about content inclusiveness and sensitivity, please continue to ask, research, and talk to your colleagues across functions and discipline, as well as those on the Content Review Panel. Learn more at HMH Today.

Philosophy and Tensions

These guidelines reflect several tensions that content developers encounter when striving for inclusion and diversity. One is the tension between diversity and inclusion—wanting to show a wide array of people and experiences without stereotyping or making anyone feel left out or that they are lacking the background to understand the instruction. Rather than limiting representation to experiences common among all students, look for alternative ways of depicting access and ensure variety across the component. In addition, provide background information when needed.

For example, students might sometimes be depicted in their school library, although not all schools have their own libraries. That doesn't mean libraries or even school libraries should be avoided, however. One way to adjust would be to refer to *a library* rather than specifying *the school library*. Another option is to refer to the school library in one story or example, and depict students using a public library elsewhere in the component. Similarly, in a math problem about public library late fees, it should be made clear how library late fees are calculated, as some students might not have that experience.

Another tension is between realistic and aspirational representation. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) described how books can be windows, "offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange"—but also, at times, mirrors, reflecting our experiences back to us, acting as a "means of self-affirmation" that we are seen, understood, and considered important. HMH materials should not try to be only realistic mirrors of students' lives; they should also present new possibilities, showing that HMH believes students are capable not only of achieving their dreams but of imagining new dreams.

Finally, there is a tension between presenting relevant, engaging content and avoiding what is controversial or disturbing. Content creators should not necessarily avoid controversial or dramatic topics

but should weigh the instructional purpose carefully and also ensure that the content format allows support from teachers or choice by teachers or students about how to use that content. Controversial topics should be addressed factually and in appropriate contexts that promote civil discourse.

The intention is that this document will alert content developers to possible issues and provide suggestions. HMH content has a wide array of contexts—fiction and informational, realistic and hypothetical, historical and present-era, permissioned and newly created, across subject areas, grade levels, and content types. Language that might be appropriate in a classroom discussion on literature might be distracting or disturbing in a reading assessment or a math item. The creators of this document have tried to avoid being overly prescriptive or prohibitive, while still providing rigor and support.

Representation and Sensitivity

HMH strives for both representation and sensitivity in our content. Representation means showing a wide range of people in realistic and aspirational contexts. Sensitivity means making sure each representation avoids negative connotations and stereotypes. While creating or reviewing content, consider representation not only at a program or grade level, but within components, even possibly down to a single unit test. For example, it is OK to have a character who is a female nurse, as long as women are also shown in less-traditional roles in that instructional unit.

However, images and text are sometimes seen out of context. If an image or depiction could be seen as extremely negative, stereotypical, or exoticizing, consider replacing it to avoid detracting from the lesson or offending a student.

Finally, whenever possible, image teams should ensure that photographs of people are authentic in terms of demography and identification. That is, an image of a person using a wheelchair should feature a model who does use a wheelchair; an image illustrating a particular culture or religion should feature models of that culture or religion, not models putting on the apparatus of another identity or culture. Image teams accomplish this by working with specialty agencies and by doing photo shoots. Other content developers then work closely with image teams to ensure that captions are accurate.

Naming and Self-Identification

In most cases when discussing real people, content should refer to them as they refer to themselves, whether that is their name, ethnic identity, gender, or pronouns. A person's preferred self-identification typically overrides other lists of terminology. There may be content-specific exceptions and nuances.

Structure

Section organization Each section of the Guidance document highlights one to three related topics. Topics typically include an overview of considerations, guidance on language and text, and guidance on images.

Special Topics Special Topics are HMH-created documents that go into more depth on a particular subject. They can vary in length and format. Further Special Topics will continue to be developed. Users are welcome to propose and draft these for consideration. Links to relevant Special Topics are found at the end of each major document section. A list of Special Topics is in the Appendix.

Previous Versions

This is Version 3.0, released in 2020. See the Change Log to find the document history, see recent updates made from the previous version, and submit suggestions.

See the Content Guidance Change Log

Using These Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to be read in their entirety during project training or vendor onboarding as appropriate. With an awareness of the common issues introduced here, content developers can then come back to this document as a reference during their work.

This document does not provide specific breakdowns of representation demographics. HMH will determine demographics at a product level based on market needs and state requirements.

1 Age Equality and Physical Appearance

Show people of all ages with a diversity of physical characteristics, such as hair that is straight, curly, short, long, brown, blond, black, red, white, and gray as well as balding and nonbalding; and body types that are thin, heavy, short, and tall. Consider including people with albinism, vitiligo, and alopecia, across all races.

Where possible, avoid drawing attention to people's physical attributes as examples of difference. Consider showing attributes and interests students can control or attributes in nature. For example, rather than using children's heights or hair color in examples of data displays, consider heights of trees or children's favorite colors.

Show people who are older with the same range of emotions, attitudes, abilities, and self-sufficiency that people who are younger have. Avoid representations of people who are older as dependent or mentally incompetent.

When depicting people who are older, show a variety of attributes, possibly including white or gray hair or balding, but not exclusively so. Show people who are older with a diversity of assistive devices, such as canes or eyeglasses, but not exclusively so. Show people who are older engaged in diverse activities such as working, shopping, driving, exercising, playing sports, enjoying entertainment, and learning new skills. In general, be judicious in showing people who are older taking part in stereotypical activities, such as playing bingo.

When appropriate, show the aging process as a continuous process spanning an entire lifetime.

2 Disability

HMH is committed to ensuring all of our materials are not only inclusive and representative, but also accessible to students with disabilities. To learn more about HMH's work to ensure all content is accessible to students with disabilities, please explore this page on Sharepoint.

2.1 Overview and Representation

In general, emphasize the humanity of people with disabilities, not their disabilities. Show people with disabilities expressing a range of emotions and talents and leading active, meaningful lives. Avoid overtones of fear, distrust, amusement, ridicule, contempt, or pity.

One in four U.S. adults—61 million Americans—have a disability that impacts major life activities (CDC.gov, 2018). Keep in mind it is likely that most, if not all, students know somebody with a disability.

2.2 Text Considerations

- Focus on a person's individuality, inclusion, and ability rather than level of disability.
- Portray successful people with disabilities in a balanced way, not as heroic or superhuman. Stereotypes may raise false expectations that everyone with a disability is or should be an inspiration.
- Avoid labels that generalize or stereotype, such as *the deaf* or *the disabled*.
- Do not group similar disabilities under the most severe degree of impairment. For example, use *person with a visual impairment* and *person who is blind,* as appropriate.
- Avoid these terms: *afflicted, suffer, sufferer,* and *victim of.*
- Avoid terms that can be considered condescending: *differently abled*, *challenged*, *handi-capable*, or *special*.
- Some people with disabilities prefer person-first language, e.g., *person who is deaf*; *person with diabetes*, and others prefer identity-first language, e.g., *Deaf person*. Use the language that the person with the disability prefers. When the person's preference is unknown, use person-first language.
- People with disabilities can be healthy, although they may have a chronic condition such as diabetes.
- Only refer to someone with a disability as a *patient* when their relationship with a health care provider is under discussion.
- Use due diligence when naming a disease or syndrome; note that sometimes these labels change (e.g., *Down syndrome* rather than *Down's Syndrome*). Check current online resources created for and by members of the community whenever possible.

2.3 Image Considerations

- Show people with disabilities as active participants of society, in the same social and work environments as people without disabilities.
- Ensure that images within a given program or project represent a diverse cross-section of people with disabilities. Images should portray real people with disabilities engaged in the context. Images of signs and iconography should be sourced carefully, using the latest, ADA-compliant versions.

Special Topic: Acceptable Terms for People with Disabilities

3 Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race

3.1 Overview and Representation

Nationality, ethnicity, and race are social constructs that are similar, but not the same. **Nationality** refers to the status of belonging to a particular place or nation by origin, birth, or naturalization. **Ethnicity** relates to groups of people who share a common cultural identity or expression, including linguistic, religious, or national heritage. **Race** refers to a group of people identified as distinct from other groups based on perceived physical characteristics. Race is often incorrectly associated with biology, and linked with traits such as skin color or hair texture. While it is true that humans have some genetic variations that were once associated with ancestry from different parts of the world, the concept of race has no genetic basis. In fact, today's racial categories arose long before the field of genetics, and have been used to justify all manner of discrimination and violence.

In text and visuals, avoid content that stereotypes ethnic, racial, or national groups in negative or positive ways (e.g., *model minority*, *hostile Indians*). Do not single out any ethnic group as being quaint, backward, uncivilized, or strange.

Classroom activities

Content developers should be very careful in crafting role-playing exercises, to ensure that all roles are appropriate for all students. Consideration should be given to issues of power dynamics, stereotypes, and trauma. In particular, problems may occur when a disadvantaged group is asked to take the perspective of and defend the view of an advantaged group.

Accessibility

Do not add race information to text alternatives (alt text) unless it is part of the lesson. For example, if it is a segment on Martin Luther King Jr., his race is vital to appreciate his photograph. If it's stock photography you can say, e.g., *a man and a woman*. Most of the intentional diversity we introduce in our imagery is to subconsciously influence the sighted student, so that over time they absorb the fact there are all kinds of people. To recreate that effect for the blind student, we simply fail to mention race at all, unless it is fundamental to the instructional purpose of the image.

If skin color must be included in alt text—for example, to differentiate among digital avatars—consider using color words that do not evoke race. For example, use *beige* instead of *pale* or *flesh tone*. Avoid using food descriptions for darker skin colors; see this Tumblr post for more ideas.

Copyediting Pedagogical Text Alternatives for Static Images

Please be sure to refer to program-specific style guides, standards, or any sensitivity guidelines provided by states or school districts to ensure that content requirements are satisfactorily met.

3.2 Text Considerations

Avoid all slurs as well as potentially insulting terms. For example, avoid terms such as *primitive* and *Oriental*. Generally avoid the terms *tribe* and *tribal* in discussions of Africa and indigenous people, unless they are the only appropriate terms.

When ascribing a race or ethnicity to any one person or group, always defer to how that person or group prefers to be identified. Specify race, ethnicity, and nationality only where relevant to the content. Be as accurate as possible; reference specific countries of origin rather than continents or regions, if the information is known.

When choosing names for fictional characters, include a diverse spectrum of names with varied origins and spellings. Names do not need to match a person's perceived culture or gender, but consider if the person's culture is central to the lesson and a traditional name would be appropriate.

Do not hyphenate ethnic group names, for example *African American*, *Italian American*, and *Chinese American*.

Be careful not to use ethnic identifiers interchangeably with religious identifiers. For example, *Arab American* is not the same as *Muslim American*; *Indian American* is not the same as *Hindu American*.

Use parallel terms for ethnic, racial, national, and geographic identifiers. For example: *Italian Americans and African Americans* (not *Italians and African Americans*); *schools in China and Kenya* (not *schools in China and Africa*).

Avoid using the term *minority* as a synonym for a racial or ethnic designation. One possibility is to use *person of color* or *people of color* when appropriate.

Avoid terms rooted in outdated or scientifically unfounded racial classification schemes such as *Caucasian*, *Negroid*, and *Mongoloid*.

See also Immigration, Refugees, and Migration

3.3 Terms for Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race

The section below lists preferred terms and style points for ethnicity, nationality, and race in the United States.

Wherever possible, use terms specific to nation of origin: *Egyptian American, Filipino American, German American, Indian American, Irish American, Italian American, Korean American, Kuwaiti American, Pakistani American, Samoan American, Saudi American*, *Syrian American*.

African American, Black

The terms *African American* and *Black* are considered equally acceptable adjectives. If it is known that an American traces their heritage to Africa, since the founding of the United States, use *African American*; otherwise *Black* (capitalized) is preferred. *The soldier was Black*; *African American people became soldiers.* The term *Black* should never be used as a noun; avoid both *the Blacks* and *the whites* in this form.

An exception to the above rule for usage of *African American* versus *Black* is the term *free Blacks*. *Free Blacks* is the historically accurate term used to describe free people of African descent in the pre-Civil War period.

Sources may differ on their capitalization of *Black* (and capitalization of *white* may be inconsistent). When quoting a source, follow their capitalization format.

Use the term *enslaved Africans* to refer to Africans who were brought to the Americas against their will. Use *enslaved African Americans* to refer to enslaved people of African ancestry who were born in the Americas.

Note that some Black people in immigrant communities of the United States do not identify as African American, even if their ancestry is from countries on the African continent. Wherever possible or preferred, be specific about nation of origin: *Haitian American*, *Nigerian American*.

Avoid *Afro American, colored people*, and *Negro*, except in some limited historical contexts.

American, U.S. citizen

Use *Americans* to refer to permanent residents or citizens (native-born or naturalized) of the United States.

Note: Be aware of the potential for geographic bias when using the term *American* (and *America*). *American* may refer to a resident or citizen of any country in North, Central, or South America. In this broader regional context, use either *the people of the United States* or *U.S. citizens*.

Arab American

Use *Arab Americans* to refer to Americans who trace their heritage to Arabic-speaking countries in northern Africa and southwestern Asia.

Asian American

Use *Asian Americans* as an umbrella term for Americans who trace their heritage to the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.

biracial, multiracial

Use the terms *biracial* and *multiracial* to describe a person or group with more than one racial heritage. Use *biracial* for people with two heritages and *multiracial* for people with more than two.

Where relevant, be specific about an individual's heritage. For example: *He has an African American father and a Scandinavian mother*.

Avoid the terms *mixed race*, *half breed*, *mulatto* (except in very limited historical contexts).

Hispanic American

Hispanic Americans is the preferred term for Americans who trace their heritage to Spanish-speaking countries. Do not use *Hispanic* as a noun, it is an adjective. *Hispanic* relates to Spain or Spanish-speaking Latin America.

Latinos (use as a generic term and for males) and *Latinas* (for females) are also acceptable terms but they are generally used with less frequency. Use *Latino* or *Latina* if a person self-identifies as such; name the specific country of origin if it is known; otherwise, use *Hispanic*.

Hispanic emphasizes language (Spanish) and *Latino* emphasizes place of origin (Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries, South America, and most of Central America; there is debate about including Belize, Suriname, or Guyana under *Latino* due to distinct cultural differences).

The term *Latin American* is also acceptable to refer to the people of Central America, South America, and the Caribbean who speak languages of Latin origin, predominantly Spanish, Portuguese, and French.

Latinx, which is gender neutral, is not broadly used but it is gaining currency in higher education, academia, journalistic situations, and among younger, more progressive Hispanic Americans. It can be used in specific contemporary contexts, but Latinos or Hispanic Americans outside of these circles may not identify with the term *Latinx*.

Wherever possible, avoid pan-ethnic terms and use terms specific to nation of origin: *Dominican American*, *Cuban American*, *Mexican American*, and so forth are preferred. However, *Puerto Rican* is the complete term, and is not followed by *American*. If a character or person's nation of origin is known, also use this rule for descriptions, such as *Mexican culture*, instead of *Latino culture* or *Hispanic culture*.

Mexican Americans is the preferred term for Americans who trace their heritage to Mexico. *Chicano*/*Chicana* refers only to Mexican Americans, and may be used in some limited historical and cultural contexts related to the civil rights movement of the 1940s through the 1970s.

Jewish American

Typically, use *Jewish Americans* to refer to contemporary Americans who are Jewish by descent or religion; Jewish identity has both religious and ethnic components (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). The adjective *Jewish* is also acceptable. For example: *a Jewish American leader, a Jewish teacher*.

It is sometimes appropriate to use *Jew* as a noun in discussions of religion and world history (e.g., *Russian Jews*).

See also Religion

Native American

Native American is the preferred term for people who inhabited land in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans. This term *Native American* should be used first and most frequently.

The following terms are also acceptable: *American Indian, Native Peoples, indigenous Americans, indigenous peoples, First Nations* (Canada), *Alaska Native, Hawaiian Native* (Thomas & Hirsch, 2016). Please also refer to state guidelines or reach out to HMH with any inquiries.

Wherever possible use the names that groups use for themselves, and specific names of Native American groups (*Hopi, Lakota*, *Navajo*). Note that some of these are exonyms and did not originate from the groups themselves.

Use the term *Arctic peoples* for the native populations living in the Arctic regions of Greenland and North America. Wherever possible, use the names of specific groups such as *Inuit*, *Inupiat*, *Yupik*, *Yuit* (not interchangeable).

Avoid the term *Anasazi*, the preferred term is *Ancestral Puebloans*.

Avoid the term *Eskimo*, except in some limited historical contexts and in the official names of groups. Avoid the term *aborigine*. However, *aboriginal* may be used as an adjective when speaking of the indigenous people of Australia.

Avoid the term *Indian*, unless referring to a person from India. Avoid the terms *brave, redskins,* and *squaw*. The term *squaw* is particularly offensive.

Avoid showing sports teams that have Native American mascots.

Do not use the term *tribe* to describe Native Americans or Africans, unless it is the only correct word in a particular context. Use the terms *nation*, *society*, or *people* instead.

Pacific Islander American

Use *Pacific Islander* to refer to people who trace their heritage to Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, and other Pacific Islands.

Use *Native Hawaiian* or *Hawaiian Native* to refer to the native populations of Hawaii.

Use *Filipino Americans* to refer to Americans who trace their heritage to the Philippines. Note Filipinos are ethnically both Asian and Pacific Islanders.

White

Use the term *white* (lowercase) as an adjective to describe people who identify as white racially, and some people with light-colored skin who trace their heritage to Europe: for example, *white people*, *white northerners*, *white Americans*. Avoid using *white* or *whites* as a noun. Carefully consider how depictions of white people, or whiteness as a race or culture, are juxtaposed with other content—avoid implications that whiteness is the norm or the default. Avoid implications that race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage are nonwhite concepts.

The term *European American* is also acceptable, but note that it is not common and is not interchangeable with *white*.

4 Family Structure

According to the Pew Research Center (2015), two-parent households are on the decline and there is no longer one dominant family form in the United States. 32% of children in the U.S. live with single or unmarried (cohabiting) parents (Pew, 2017), and according to the 2018 U.S. Census, 4% of children live in a household without a biological parent. Children live within a variety of family structures. Some live with both biological parents, parents of the same gender, or in blended families. Others live with a single parent, with grandparents, or other extended family members, in multigenerational homes, or with other children and unrelated adults in a group setting. Still other children live with adoptive parents or foster families.

- Note that the term *adopt* should only be used to describe a person (or pet) who becomes part of a family permanently. Use the word *sponsor* to describe donations or short-term charitable support.

To reflect this diversity, strive to represent a variety of family members and forms. Show family members of varying ages, including parents who are older and parents who are younger, as well as single-parent families, same-sex couples, and families that include more than one race or ethnicity. Avoid stereotypical representations of families. Consider avoiding activities that assume that students live in a traditional family, such as referencing a father-son picnic or asking students to create a family tree.

To reflect these demographics, many school districts no longer refer to *mother, father,* or *parent* but instead use *guardian(s)* when referring to the adults in a child's life.

Guardians and caregivers may include grandparents, siblings, extended family members, and non-family members. Similarly, family relationships (e.g., sisters, aunts, cousins) may include a wide variety of family and non-family members.

5 Gender Equality and Sexual Orientation

Promote the concept of gender equality, especially with regard to individuals' roles, capabilities, and potential. When feasible, include content, language, and images that represent LGBTQ+ people in various contexts.

As guidance, follow these three key principles:

- **Learn when gender matters.** It's less often than you think. Gender matters quite a bit in terms of understanding various aspects of human experience across space and time. However, if an individual's gender is not important to the content, don't mention it. Beyond gender equality, strive to represent that biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation should not be defining attributes of an individual, their circumstances, or their experiences—unless by that individual's choice.
- **Expand your concept of diversity.** Gender identities and gender expressions should be incorporated into your concept of diversity. Where it's appropriate, go beyond representing men and women, and represent nonbinary and LGBTQ+ individuals as well. Demonstrate awareness and respect for the diversity of gender identities and expressions, which are personal, dynamic, overlapping, and unique.
- **Use the correct terminology.** Convey that biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are distinct concepts. Be aware that the language surrounding gender, sex, and sexual orientation in U.S. culture is rapidly and constantly evolving.

5.1 Gender Representation

5.1.1 Overview and Representation

Wherever feasible, represent men and women (as well as boys and girls) in a variety of roles and in roughly equal numbers in leading and subordinate roles. Avoid stereotypical representations, whether by activity (such as a mother cleaning as a father leaves home for work; a boy playing guitar as a girl cares for a younger child) or by attribute (boys as troublemakers, girls as passive). This is especially relevant for HMH-created contemporary content, such as reading comprehension passages, math problems, and in-house imagery.

5.1.2 Text Considerations

Two approaches to gender equality in text are using equality-advocating language and using gender-neutral language.

Equality-Advocating Language and Images

When addressing a topic that is traditionally associated with a specific gender, consider using the less conventional gender's pronouns and selecting less stereotypical images.

For example:

- Consider using *she* and images of women for soldiers, mechanics, plumbers, construction workers, and engineers.
- Consider using *he* and images of men for clerical workers, librarians, nurses, supermodels, and stay-at-home parents.

This method must be used with careful attention to context, especially historical. For example, when covering the landowners or railway barons in U.S. history, using *she* pronouns or illustrating women becomes a factual error. Use your discretion to ensure that equality-advocating depiction is used when the instruction will not be compromised.

Ensure that women and men are referred to in the same manner, whether by last name, with honorifics, etc. Specific naming style will vary by content type and grade level.

5.1.3 Use of "They" as a Singular Inclusive Pronoun

When referencing a person in real life

- Individuals in HMH materials should reflect current U.S. demographics and include males, females, nonbinary people, and transgender people across different races, ages, and socioeconomic statuses.
- Male and female individuals using the pronouns *he* or *she* will continue to be represented in HMH content.
- Always defer to an individual's personal pronoun preference.
- If a person has transitioned genders, be considerate of the person's preference for using or avoiding references to a past name or gender.

Special circumstances

- Some markets limit or prohibit references to LGBTQ+ individuals. In these markets, the use of singular *they* may be considered to be representation of LGBTQ+ individuals, and could be restricted by the state or local governing body.
- LGBTQ+ individuals and those whose gender is nonbinary, agender, or bigender should still be positively represented and included in HMH content.
- References to real LGBTQ+ persons in HMH content should not be removed, adapted, or limited.
- HMH content should continue to use preferred pronouns for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

When a person's gender is not relevant or is unknown, avoid gendered language

- Avoid using the binary phrases *he or she*, *his or hers*, *him or her*.
- The singular *they* is a more inclusive way to talk about individuals of unknown or unspecified gender. *He or she* implies that there are only two options, and many people today consider that unnecessarily limiting. The pronoun *they* is gaining popularity as a way to avoid this binary restriction. Note that *they* is not exclusively a nonbinary, queer, or transgender pronoun—it is an all-inclusive pronoun.
- Individuals in HMH materials should reflect current U.S. demographics (under age 18).

When representing a fictional person

- When creating fictional characters, aim for the same balance of inclusivity we promote throughout all HMH materials.
- Include and positively represent LQBTQ+ characters in HMH content.
- HMH recommends the singular pronoun *they* to promote inclusivity and avoid gendered language in Grades 6–12.
- **Use of *they* as a singular pronoun is not recommended for grades K–5.** This threshold is intended to avoid contradicting existing state standards through Grade 5 with specific pronoun/antecedent and singular/plural instructional requirements.
- HMH supports the occasional representation of nonbinary individuals for Grades 6–12 (according to current U.S. demographics). Consider using support language if clarification is needed.

Examples of support language in student materials

- "Luz and her teammate Suzanne, who prefers the pronouns they/them/theirs, practice daily."
- "Suzanne skinned their knee today (Suzanne uses the pronouns they/them/theirs)."

Examples of support language in teacher materials

- "Explain to students that the pronoun *they* is being used per Suzanne's stated preference."
- "Explain to students that the pronoun *they* is being used because the author does not say what gender the person is."
- "The pronoun *they* is usually plural, but it can sometimes be used informally to refer to a single person, if a person chooses, or if a person's gender is unknown or irrelevant."

Consider the use of existing third-party content or classroom library materials to introduce nonbinary or transgender characters, especially if it is possible to include authentic content created by members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Special Considerations for Intervention Students or English Language Learners

Content developers should consider the target age of the students, as well as their English grammar proficiency, and adjust the recommended Grade 6 threshold accordingly.

Special Considerations for Assessments

It is necessary to include folks of all gender representation in all aspects of HMH curricula. The assessment team should strategize ways to include gender nonbinary characters and individuals in its texts based on project needs. In these instances, gender should be ancillary to the main point of the text unless it is important to the development of a character or an individual in history.

Since assessment is an independent activity, care should be taken to ensure balance between representation and student understanding. Possible approaches include, but are not limited to:

- Using a passage introduction to clarify use of singular *they* pronouns
- Representing gender nonbinary characters visually in illustrations
- Not including gendered pronouns if they are not necessary (often this makes for the most concise item stem when gender is unknown)

Special Considerations for Accessibility

In alt text situations, use of gendered pronouns can sometimes be unavoidable. Just as a picture passively includes gendered references, such as hair or clothing styles, alt text must passively mention gender so the student who is blind has equitable access to information in the image.

Gendered words and pronouns in text alternatives serve as the first, and possibly only, declaration of gender the student will encounter, and that text functions in the same way an image might for a student who is sighted. After both the sighted and blind students have equitable exposure, we can fairly apply the "gender is irrelevant" rule. As such, any text-based content should follow best practices for gender inclusion and representation.

5.1.4 Image Considerations

When gender is not specified by instructional content, seek to represent people in activities and jobs outside of traditional gender roles. Maintain an equal balance of gender in individual images and as a whole.

5.2 Sexual Orientation

5.2.1 Overview

In addition to promoting gender equality, wherever possible promote the equality and visibility of LGBTQ+ people. **LGBT** stands for *lesbian, gay, bisexual,* and *transgender* and is a standard shorthand for referring to those groups.

The LGBT population constitutes 4.5% of the total U.S. population (Newport, 2018). Of that, 8% identify as transgender, and over 80% identify as either gay or bisexual. Now expand the acronym to LGBTQ+ (Q stands for *queer* or *questioning*). The addition of Q+ is intended to go beyond traditional notions of gender identity and sexual orientation to include a limitless remix of gender attributes and orientations.

5.2.2 Image Considerations

When feasible, represent people interacting with a variety of other people in pairs and groups, with a diversity of gender expressions and in a variety of situations. Avoid stereotypical scenarios and negative or exoticizing depictions.

See also Representation and Sensitivity

Special Topic: Gender-Inclusive Language

Special Topic: Glossary of Gender and Sexual Identity

6 Global and Social Issues

This section addresses historical and contemporary issues at a global level that affect or have affected large numbers of people, often in traumatic ways. For these topics, wherever possible, emphasize the resilience and agency of people and societies. Be aware that students may have firsthand or family experience with some of these issues, and any discussion of them will be emotionally charged.

6.1 Colonization and Indigenous Peoples

6.1.1 Text and Image Considerations

Wherever possible, emphasize the resilience and agency of indigenous people and other societies that have lived under colonial rule. Use documents (texts, oral histories, photographs) to represent diverse perspectives.

Use specific names for cultural and social groups. Give preference to the names that individuals and groups use for themselves as well as for their homelands. An example is to use *Indigenous Australians* and *the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* to refer to the original inhabitants of Australia. Be as specific as possible (e.g., avoid using *America* to refer only to the United States; the term *the Americas* should be used to describe the continents). Be aware of geographical terms that are in flux.

See also Terms for Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race

In discussions of indigenous peoples, the terms *oral tradition* and *traditional stories* are generally preferred to *folklore* and *myths*. The term *legend* is acceptable for a story about a legendary past event.

Give proper credit to individuals or groups for text selections and images of material culture. Ensure that images, captions, and graphics are fair and accurate in their depictions.

6.1.2 Practices to Avoid

Do not use *discover* or *discovery* to describe the arrival of Europeans in places or regions already occupied by other people (*discovering America, discovering the Grand Canyon*).

When writing about European explorers, write factually and avoid overgeneralizing their accomplishments. Many of the explorers who made great gains in geography, cartography, and science also had enormous negative impacts on people and societies they encountered; avoid referring to them in broadly heroic terms.

Avoid stereotypes and slurs. Also, do not use value-laden terms when referring to individuals, groups, and nations. In most cases, avoid using outdated and value-laden terms such as *culturally deprived*, *backward*, *underdeveloped*, *civilized*, *uncivilized*, *Third World*, *savage*, *primitive*, *Orient*, *Oriental*.

Take care to avoid text and visual content that inadvertently reproduces attitudes used to justify colonization, including language that communicates racial or cultural superiority (of colonizers) or paternalistic attitudes (toward those who were colonized). When primary sources are shown that

illustrate racist or colonialist beliefs, care should be taken to explain their relevance and context. A problematic primary source should not be the only depiction of a people or culture.

6.2 Genocide

6.2.1 Overview

Genocide is intentional action to destroy a people, in whole or in part. HMH content may cover instances of genocide in various contexts—for example, in history programs, in a biographical sketch, or in a literature selection.

Because of its very nature, genocide leads to lasting wounds for a whole culture, including the loss of lives, knowledge, and traditions. Be aware that some students and teachers may have personal experiences with genocide, perhaps as relatives of survivors, or even as victims or as witnesses.

For these reasons, HMH content should be sensitive when covering or alluding to genocide, including (but not limited to) the Holocaust of the 1940s and other genocides in living memory:

- Stalin and Soviet Union inflict a famine upon Ukraine: 6-10 million people died (1932–1933)
- Japanese Army kills 300,000 Chinese people in Nanking (1937–1938)
- Nazi Germany kills 6 million Jewish people (1938–1945)
- ~2 million Cambodians killed by Khmer Rouge regime (1974–1979)
- 100,000 Iraqi Kurds killed by Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime (1988)
- 100,000 Muslims killed in conflict between Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1992–1995)
- 800,000 Rwandan civilians, mostly Tutsis, murdered (1994)
- 200,000–500,000 Sudanese people killed in Darfur region (2003–present)
- Thousands killed by ISIS (2013–2017)
- 3,000 Rohingya (Muslims) killed and 270,000 displaced in Myanmar (ongoing)

6.2.2 Text and Image Considerations

Take care to introduce key terms, provide accurate facts and statistics, and review the social and historical context necessary for students to fully understand the content being studied.

Portray all individuals (victims, perpetrators, witnesses, bystanders, and rescuers) as people capable of moral judgment and agency; discuss the social and historical forces that shaped the range of choices available to individuals and groups.

Use source materials (texts, photographs, first-hand accounts) to represent the diverse experiences of participants, especially of survivors and witnesses.

Describe and depict the positive actions taken by people and nations in the face of genocide. For example, describe instances of resistance and resilience.

Capitalize *Holocaust* when referring to the murder of 6 million Jewish people, along with members of several other ethnic groups and religions, people with disabilities, homosexual men, and others, by German authorities during World War II. Lowercase in other uses.

6.2.3 Practices to Avoid

Avoid overgeneralizations and comparisons of pain such as *All Germans were Nazis* or *The 1994 mass slaughter of Tutsis in Rwanda was the worst genocide in world history*.

Avoid simulations and role-playing activities.

Avoid content that implies that an act of genocide was inevitable, or that places blame on victims of genocide.

Unless factually accurate, avoid language that implies the total destruction of a people such as *The Serbs wiped out Bosnian Muslims*. Though all genocides involve the intent to destroy a people, few achieve this end.

6.3 Immigration, Refugees, and Migration

More than 44.7 million immigrants resided in the United States in 2018 (Migration Policy Institute). Note that most immigrants (77%) are in the country legally.

- In 2017, Mexicans accounted for approximately 25 percent of immigrants in the United States, making them by far the largest foreign-born group. People from India and China (including immigrants from Hong Kong but not Taiwan) were the next two largest groups, each comprising close to 6 percent, followed by Filipinos at 5 percent. Rounding out the top 10 were El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (about 3 percent each); and South Korea and Guatemala (approximately 2 percent). Together, these countries were the origin for 57 percent of the U.S. immigrant population in 2017.
- Immigrants current make up 13.7 percent of the overall U.S. population (325.7 million people).
- 50,000 refugees were admitted to US in 2017. (President Trump slashed the cap for 2017 refugee admissions from 110,000 to 50,000, and the amount of refugees admitted during his administration has dropped.)
- 4 million individuals were deported between October 2002 and January 2016: 66% Mexican, 16% Other, 10% Guatemalan, and 8% Honduran.
- 600,000 deportation cases are currently pending in immigration courts.
- Since the creation of the federal Refugee Resettlement Program in 1980, about 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S.
- In 2017, about 29 million immigrants were working or looking for work in the U.S., making up some 17% of the total civilian labor force.
- Under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival program (DACA), nearly 700,000 undocumented youth have temporary permission to stay in the U.S., and are eligible to work without being deported.

6.3.1 Text Considerations

In discussions of immigration, use terms that are legally accurate, such as *undocumented immigrant* or *foreign national*. Use *illegal* only to describe activities, such as *illegal immigration*, not to describe a person or people.

Use the term *refugees* to refer to people forced to leave their homelands to escape persecution, violence, war, or human or natural disasters. *People escaping* and *people fleeing* are also acceptable.

Use the term *migrant* to refer to a person who moves for economic opportunity. Use *displaced person* or *forced migrant* to refer to a person who has been displaced within a home country by violence, development projects, or disaster. Avoid using the term *migrant* to refer to refugees or forced migrations.

6.3.2 Image Considerations

Be sensitive when selecting images of war and natural disaster and the people affected. When determining whether to use an image of people and populated areas, consider both the dignity of the people affected and the effect on students.

Keep in mind that refugees and immigrants, undocumented or otherwise, can come from anywhere in the world. Avoid depicting them only as people of color.

6.3.3 Practices to Avoid

Avoid simulations and role-playing activities about illegal immigration or forced migrations. Avoid politically charged language such as *illegal alien*, *illegals*, and *anchor babies*.

6.4 Slavery

6.4.1 Overview

In all coverage of slavery, take care to use terms, language, and content that emphasize the humanity of those who were held in servitude (SPLC, 2017). Keep in mind that slavery and human trafficking is not only a historical issue or one limited to the United States but is an issue that continues, if in less institutionalized forms, throughout the world (Tutton, 2017).

- 40.3 million people are in modern slavery across the world
- 10 million children are in slavery across the world
- 30.4 million people are in slavery in the Asia-Pacific region, mostly in bonded labor
- 9.1 million people are in slavery in Africa
- 2.1 million people are in slavery in The Americas
- 1.5 million people are in slavery in developed economies
- 16 million slavery victims are exploited in economic activities
- 4.8 million people are in forced into sexual exploitation
- 99% of people trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls
- 4.1 million people in slavery are exploited by governments
- $150 billion in illegal profits are generated annually by forced labor in the private economy

6.4.2 Representation

In discussions and depictions of U.S. slavery, wherever possible:

- Use historical documents (texts, oral histories, photographs) to represent the diverse perspectives and experiences of enslaved people.

- Describe or depict daily and family life.
- Underscore the centrality of slavery to the U.S. economy and the contributions made by enslaved people.
- Tell about or depict the lasting contributions enslaved people made to American culture (including musical, culinary, and artistic traditions).
- Connect slavery to ideologies of race and white supremacy.
- Describe acts of resistance, resilience, and rebellion.
- Tell about the efforts of Black abolitionists.

6.4.3 Text Considerations

When possible, observe the following language guidelines for writing about the practice of slavery and enslaved people.

- The terms *enslaved person*, *enslaved people*, *enslaved Native American*, *enslaved African*, or *enslaved African American* are preferred to *slave* or *slaves*. For example: *a woman enslaved by the Washington family*, not *a Washington family slave*; *Tubman recruited formerly enslaved people*, not *Tubman recruited former slaves.*
- As a noun, the term *slave* may be used in correct and limited historical contexts. When a term for *enslaved people* is used several times in a short space, you may substitute *slaves* for some instances, but not the first one and not in most cases.
- As an adjective, *slave* is acceptable—for example, *slave states*, *slave traders*, *slave ship*, *slave laws*.
- Use the term *slaveholder* to refer to those who owned enslaved people. The terms *master* and *owner* may be used in limited historical contexts.
- The term *free Blacks* is the historically accurate term for free African Americans before the Civil War.

6.4.4 Image Considerations

Be mindful of the date and context of any image of slavery. Sometimes images of sharecroppers in the late 1800s are used, inaccurately, to depict slavery. Images should be appropriately and accurately captioned and contextualized.

6.4.5 Practices to Avoid

Avoid simulations and role-playing activities that have students act as enslaved people or as slaveholders. Avoid portraying romanticized images of slavery. At the same time, avoid focusing solely on the brutality of slavery or the suffering of enslaved people.

7 Health, Safety, and Environment

Promote a responsible attitude to the following:

- Food, drink, and drugs
- Health and safety
- The environment

Some states have specific requirements or legislation pertaining to these topics that should be considered when developing programs.

In addition, some disciplines may require that specific issues be addressed, for example in a literary or historical context. Use discretion in such cases, and treat content factually, without judgment, while keeping the content engaging for the learner.

7.1 Food, Drink, and Drugs

7.1.1 Overview

Where food and drink are used, for example in math problems or in reading passages, focus on nutritious products and on a healthy attitude toward food and drink.

7.1.2 Food

Aim to include a balance of healthy foods. References to and images of foods and drinks that have a high amount of sugar or fat—including candy, cookies, ice cream, fries, and carbonated drinks—should be used sparingly. Cite fresh foods from all food groups rather than processed foods, unless the latter are necessary for the educational content.

An example of when a less-nutritious food may be necessary for educational content is a math context using a pizza to assess knowledge of fractions. Content owners should use their judgment in such situations.

7.1.3 Alcohol and Drugs

Mention alcohol and drugs only where essential to a specific subject or topic. Coverage of alcohol and drug use should be factual and nonjudgmental and should not endorse or glamorize alcohol or drug consumption.

Avoid text and visual content of the following, unless necessary for instruction:

- Alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine, and liquor
- Products with tobacco or nicotine, including cigarettes, e-cigarettes (vaping), cigars, and pipes
- Recreational drugs, such as marijuana, cannabis, cocaine, and heroin. As a reminder, at the time of this writing, marijuana is legal for adults in some states and illegal in others.

- Over-the-counter drugs that may be subject to abuse, such as painkillers and cough syrup
- Prescription drugs used irresponsibly or illegally, such as antidepressants, tranquilizers, and amphetamines

7.2 Health and Safety

7.2.1 Overview

Promote physical activity whenever possible and appropriate, focusing on sports and activities that are relevant to the age group and culture of the audience.

7.2.2 Text and Image Considerations

Describe and show as appropriate the use of safety equipment, such as helmets on cyclists and the use of seatbelts in cars and life jackets in boats. When depicting people, especially children, doing potentially dangerous activities, consider the following:

- What is the age of the person shown doing the activity? (How young is too young to scuba dive or to use an electric push lawnmower?)
- What is the age of the audience for that program/component?
- How dangerous is the activity?
- What are some accepted safety guidelines for that activity (per child safety groups or organizations dedicated to that activity)?
- How prevalent versus idealistic are the safety guidelines for that activity? For example, wearing a helmet while riding a bike is more common than wearing goggles while mowing the lawn.

7.2.3 Environment

Show responsible treatment of the environment, such as the following:

- Use of trash containers and recycling bins
- Cultivation of plants, trees, and flowers
- Conservation of energy
- Respect for natural resources
- Respect for and humane treatment of animals

Show changes in attitude toward the environment over time and in different places, where relevant and appropriate.

8 Localization

This section seeks to raise awareness of common regional differences and definitions. It is an overview and not to be deemed as a comprehensive summary of the intricacies expressed in each region outlined. It is informational in its intent and is not written to be prescriptive.

8.1 International Views

Some hand gestures that are common and acceptable in the Western hemisphere may be perceived as U.S.-centric or as offensive in other parts of the world. For example, the thumbs-up gesture is considered obscene in some areas. Product Managers and Learning Architects will need to balance these considerations for each product.

Showing the soles of shoes is considered offensive in Arab cultures and the Middle East (Gammell, 2008; Crile, 2011). Both shoe soles and the bottoms of feet are considered unclean in India, China, and other Asian countries (Bryant, 2014).

Also, be aware that cultures attach meaning to colors and that these associations are found in political, social, religious, and cultural references. For example, white symbolizes purity and marriage in Western cultures, but connotes death in Asia and peace in Latin America.

In general, when selecting images, be aware of possible international use of HMH products in addition to the diversity of cultures and norms within the United States. Ideally, images should reflect a wide array of global diversity and respect the norms of many cultures.

8.2 United States

The United States has plenty of variance regarding what certain gestures, terms, and contexts imply. It is important to be cognizant of how content will be received, not just across different countries but within different parts of the U.S. as well. Regional diversity extends to language use, demographics, geography, history, and economy. Strive to avoid regional stereotypes or assumptions that may appear in content, and represent the diversity of daily life in the U.S.

Balance depictions of urban, suburban, and rural areas, especially when portraying students and schools in text and images; be aware of the various types of schools that students might attend.

8.3 Animals

Some animals are problematic in certain cultures and regions of the U.S., and we should be considerate about how we represent them. Consider if there is a pedagogical basis for including these animals, and consider what aspect may be problematic—for example, an anatomical diagram of a pig may be used in a science lesson, but it would not be appropriate to depict a Muslim family eating pork in a fiction story. In New Mexico and other regions of the U.S., some native students may be uncomfortable with depictions of

owls or snakes. That may not necessitate removing these animals from lessons, but be especially careful on high-stakes content like covers, landing pages, or display materials.

Special Topic: International Hand Gesture Meanings

Special Topic: Diverse School Types

9 Mental Health

Mental illness and trauma are prevalent, and these situations must be treated without stigma. Any treatment of these topics should strive not to stereotype or diminish these conditions.

Specific content areas (health, psychology, sociology) and social and emotional learning curricula will require in-depth guidelines for handling the presentation and discussion of mental health.

9.1 Mental Illness and Disorders

9.1.1 Overview

According to the Child Mind Institute (2015), an estimated 17.1 million children have or have had a psychiatric disorder. Half of all psychiatric illness occurs before the age of 14—the most common being anxiety disorders, ADHD and disruptive behavior, depression and bipolar disorders, and eating disorders. Mental disorders and illnesses vary in nature, severity, and visibility. When creating content related to mental health, avoid stigmatizing.

9.1.2 Text Considerations

Do not use emotionally charged language. Instead, be objective, descriptive, and ultimately neutral.

In order to focus on the individuality and wholeness of people, use people-first language (e.g., *an artist who has schizophrenia*) and avoid prejudicial adjectives (e.g., *a schizophrenic artist*); that is, avoid using a term for a mental health condition as an adjective placed before a person or group.

Consider avoiding language with negative connotations when broaching mental illness. For example, the verbs *has* or *lives with* are neutral as compared with *suffers from* or *is challenged by*. Avoid language that can be construed to blame mental illness or disorders on those who have them.

Whether writing about fictional characters or historical figures, try to avoid euphemism or overgeneralizing. Aim to be candid, specific, accurate, and kind. And finally, make sure that mental illness is relevant to the topic being covered and is both properly grounded and contextualized. Do not include elements of mental illness merely to provoke curiosity or interest.

Avoid the phrase *committed suicide*, which stigmatizes a mental health issue as a criminal act. The preferred term is *died by suicide*. Use the term *attempted suicide*, rather than *unsuccessful suicide*, which connotes judgement.

Preferred words and phrases	**Words and phrases to avoid**

people with mental illnesses	mentally ill people
person with a psychiatric disability	a schizophrenic
person receiving mental health services	mental health patient
experiences, encounters <symptom>	crazy, insane

For more information on avoiding stigma related to illness or ability, **see Disability**

9.1.3 Image Considerations

There are two main approaches to depicting people with mental illness or disorders and their experiences.

Metaphorical imagery For example, a picture of gloomy rain clouds could accompany a discussion of adolescent depression. This method can be used to avoid undesirable associations or correlations. However, as mental illness is so unique and subjective, metaphorical imagery may be alienating or discordant to some viewers. Use discretion.

Literal imagery For example, a picture of a teenager with depressive body language could accompany a discussion of adolescent depression. This method can be used to communicate diversity by including a wide demographic, but risks creating undesirable associations or correlations. Use discretion.

When developing content substantially focused on mental health, determine an appropriate strategy for the product, content type, and grade level. If depicting people experiencing mental illness, show demographic diversity in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity.

9.2 Traumatic Experiences

9.2.1 Overview

Examples of traumatic experiences can include car accidents, natural disasters, violent crime, gun violence, extreme poverty, domestic violence, sudden or violent loss of a loved one, and war. Be aware that many students are likely to have experienced trauma of some sort—according to one study (SAMHSA), two-thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by age 16. Always make sure that there is a strong pedagogical reason for including any content coverage of traumatic events. For example, it might be appropriate to cover changes in weaponry in content about the Industrial Revolution and the American Civil War. It would not, on the other hand, be appropriate to use firearms to illustrate parabolic motion.

When difficult content is being covered, it may be helpful to include teacher support so that teachers can determine how best to prepare students (e.g., before reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* or Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*).

- 1 in 7 children experienced abuse or neglect in the last year (CDC).
- 1 in 5 high school students reported being bullied at school in the last year (CDC).

- About 7% of students had not gone to school at least 1 day in the last 30 days because they felt they would be unsafe at school (CDC.gov).
- 26% of children in the U.S. will experience a traumatic event before they turn 4 (recognizetrauma.org).
- 4 of every 10 children in the U.S. say they experienced physical assault in the past year (JAMA pediatrics).
- 19% of injured and 12% of physically ill youth have post-traumatic stress disorder (SAMHSA.gov).

For considerations relating to traumatic historical events, **see Global and Social Issues**.

9.2.2 Image Considerations

Typically, images should not show the effects of natural disasters on people, cars that have been in accidents, gun violence or assault, or other depictions of traumatic events unless there is a strong instructional purpose and availability of teacher support. There may be additional discipline-specific or state requirements. Note that it is acceptable to show the effects of natural disasters on populated areas, for example homes or buildings that have incurred damage, but avoid showing people who are injured. If people must be shown, it is best to show them in the context of helping others after a natural disaster, for example volunteers handing out supplies.

9.2.3 Traumatic Topics in Assessment Content

For assessments in particular, avoid difficult or negative topics that might be distracting or upsetting to students. The higher the stakes for the assessment, the more negative topics should be avoided. Topics and situations that might be perfectly acceptable in other contexts can adversely affect students taking a test on their own, with no classroom discussion or caretaker guidance.

10 Religion, Morality, and Politics

It is advisable to avoid unnecessary references to religion, morality, and politics in K–12 content unless necessary for instruction.

10.1 Religion

10.1.1 General Guidelines

Content about religion and the role of religion in history, literature, science, and other endeavors should promote neither belief nor disbelief.

When writing about religion, present coverage that helps students understand the following:

- Religions are internally diverse, not homogenous.
- Religions are dynamic and change over time.
- Religions are both shaped by and give shape to culture.
- Not all people have a belief system founded in religion (e.g., agnosticism, atheism, secularism).

Present the beliefs, practices, traditions, and members of religious communities in respectful and accurate ways. Be mindful that some students don't celebrate birthdays or holidays, including national/non-religious holidays.

When using primary sources from sacred texts, select appropriate sources and translations for the context. For example, when writing about Judaism, cite the Hebrew Bible (Torah) rather than the Old Testament of the King James Bible.

Wherever relevant to content, be specific when talking about religious groups or affiliation. For example, indicate whether Muslims are Sunni or Shia or whether Christians belong to a specific denomination. Avoid using *Black Muslim* to refer to a follower of the Nation of Islam. The preferred term is *member of the Nation of Islam*.

Be aware that religious groups may have sensitivities or standards regarding the reference to or use of names, images, deities, rituals, sacred texts, and holy days that are central to their faith. Consider how members of a religious group might read content or view an image depicting aspects of their faith.

Consider the social, political, and historical context of religious groups. In presenting religious and ethical standards of other times or places, ensure that no group is ridiculed or portrayed as inferior. Show information factually, without judgment.

Where applicable, balance the quality and quantity of coverage, both textual and visual, of the world's major religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism). Be mindful that discussing or showing negative aspects of one religious group but not others may be perceived as bias.

10.1.2 Practices to Avoid

In text and visuals, avoid content that overgeneralizes or that reinforces stereotypes or religious bigotry. For example, avoid depictions of Islam and Muslims as inherently violent, or of Hindus as worshipping cows.

Avoid implying that caste-based discrimination and social hierarchy are inherent features of Hinduism.

Be careful not to present religious beliefs and practices as exotic, primitive, or strange.

Avoid puns and jokes about and caricatures of religious beliefs and figures.

Avoid simulations, role-playing, or any activities that have students act as religious figures, reenact religious events, wear religious garments, or demonstrate religious ceremonies or practices. Also avoid asking students to write out or read aloud selections from prayers or sacred texts. Such activities may violate the religious liberty or freedom of consciousness of students.

Avoid activities in which students are called upon to represent and explain their personal religious traditions or beliefs to the class.

Avoid quoting literature with a strong religious message unless relevant to content.

Avoid references to the supernatural, including magic, astrology, and so forth, unless relevant to literary or historical content. Avoid showing religious symbols in imagery unless there is an appropriate context.

10.2 Morality

Avoid references to death and violence unless necessary for historical accuracy. In such cases, treat the subject sensitively and try to use images that will not upset students or cause offense to parents or teachers.

See also Traumatic Experiences

Avoid images that show full or partial nudity. Be considerate of context and grade level for images that include clothing that may be considered provocative. Be cautious about including fine art (sculptures, paintings, etc.) that show partial nudity.

If you reference famous people or depict them as role models, ensure that they are appropriate role models for the audience. Be aware that attitudes towards public figures, especially if they are living, can change quickly.

Avoid references to activities and objects associated with gambling, such as dominoes, sports betting, horse races, greyhound races, casino-style card games, playing cards, pitching quarters, lottery tickets, and dice games.

Where necessary for content, refer to dice as *number cubes*.

Exercise care in referring to raffles. Some groups consider raffles a form of gambling. If the idea of a raffle is necessary for content, note that the raffle is voluntary and that all winnings will be for charity, not for personal gain.

10.3 Politics

10.3.1 General Guidelines

If coverage of political issues or activism is necessary for content, ensure that coverage is factual, informative, sensitive, and unbiased. Strive for balance in coverage of major political parties.

Use words and phrases that accurately inform students about politics and political issues without encouraging them to take sides.

10.3.2 Practices to Avoid

Avoid quoting literature with a strong political message unless necessary for content.

Avoid stereotyping political parties or adherents of political philosophies with labels such as *liberal* or *conservative voters*.

Avoid unnecessarily polarizing language and war metaphors in discussions of political issues. For example, use terms such as *criticized, doubted*, or *challenged* instead of *attacked*, *bombarded*, or *fired back*.

11 Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status involves elements of income, wealth, education, and housing (APA). Disparities in socioeconomic status have repercussions for access to all kinds of resources at the individual, family, and community levels. Strive to be aware of the diversity of access to resources while still depicting a wide variety of occupations, housing, and lifestyles.

11.1 Representation and Inclusion

In general, show individuals and groups in environments reflecting average economic circumstances in the United States—neither rich nor poor. As of 2016, the average U.S. household earns less than $60,000 per year (Guzman, 2017). As of 2009, 35% of U.S. households could afford a median-priced home in their area (Wilson & Callis, 2013). More than one-fifth of children live in families below the federal poverty level (NCCP, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 10% of U.S. households were not food-secure throughout 2017.

- Show an equal balance of contemporary living in urban, suburban, and rural settings.
- Include racial diversity within each socioeconomic setting.
- When referring to homes, be sensitive to the diversity of housing and family situations, as well as to homelessness among students.
- Be cautious of portraying a flippant attitude toward food and basic living necessities.
- Do not assume students have their own bedrooms, bathrooms, or closets. *Brian was measuring the width of a bedroom*, not *Brian was measuring the width of his bedroom* (when possible).
- Note a simple fix that works sometimes is removing possession (e.g., change *Susie's garden* to *a garden* or *your school's drama club* to *a drama club*).
- When dealing with other societies or historical periods, depict accurate living situations.
- Use a mixture of team sports and individual activities that are popular across a wide range of K–12 students. Examples include football, basketball, volleyball, track, cycling, baseball, softball, soccer, tennis, and cross-country. Be mindful when referring to sports that may exclude some groups because they are cost prohibitive, less common, or because of geography (for instance those who live in landlocked states may not typically go surfing). Examples include skiing, golf, ice skating, lacrosse, and polo.

11.2 Socioeconomic Contexts

A key aspect of content development that HMH can control is in the contexts used (e.g., when choosing reading passages, developing writing prompts, or writing word problems). On the one hand, writers should be careful of employing too many contexts to which students cannot relate, such as activities they cannot afford or projects that demand technology they don't own. But on the other hand, content developers should have high expectations of what our students will engage with and should provide views

into a wide variety of careers and goals. Be mindful of students with limited resources without limiting student ambition.

Liberally use aspirational careers and goals:

- Careers and goals that require extensive training (surgeon, concert violinist)
- Careers and goals that expose unusual and niche endeavors (taste tester, forensic linguist)
- Careers and goals that are highly engaging (circus performer, hip-hop dancer)
- Careers and goals that are underrepresented in many places (military pilot, farmer)

Avoid references to expensive gifts and items (luxury cars, recent gaming consoles). Be judicious in referencing expensive sports and hobbies.

Special Topic: Money, Finance, and Consumption

Appendix: List of Special Topics