

# YOUTH COLLECTIONS IN THE ASIAN CENTURY



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The white paper, *Australia in the Asian Century*, published by the Commonwealth of Australia in October 2012 identified the need to improve 'Asian literacy' through cultural knowledge, awareness, and responsiveness. ALIA's submission to the Government notes the opportunity for

can make this call a challenge for Australian libraries.

In *Voices for Experience: Promoting Acceptance of Other Cultures*, published in *Diversity in Youth Literature: Opening Doors Through Reading* (2013), Carol A Doll and I argue that books for any child representing any culture should

include five main qualities: honesty, accuracy, reality, imagination, and appreciation. Author and educator Ann Nolan Clark also identified these qualities while working with diverse groups in North and South America including immigrants and indigenous peoples, recording them in her book *Journey to the People* published in 1969.

Each of these qualities raises certain questions in considering the portrayal

of the cultural groups depicted in the title. Roxanne Mills and I have developed a framework to offer a useful and practical lens to library professionals for evaluating youth literature, potentially outside of their own personal experience and knowledge. It is based on a set of questions and, if the answer to any of these questions is no, you should do more searching and selecting until you can find a title that answers yes to all.

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## Accurate cultural representation

### Honesty

Does the title reflect a truthful and sincere image of the cultural group without sensationalising their historical or contemporary experiences?

### Accuracy

Does the title include factual information based on research and reputable sources? Is there a bibliography or reference list you can evaluate?

### Reality

Does the title portray real life for this cultural group (eg extended families living together) while addressing more universal experiences relatable to many different cultures (eg family in general)?

### Imagination

Does the title depict an engaging and creative story through text and illustrations? Will children want to read it?

### Appreciation

Does the title convey a respectful understanding and awareness of the cultural group as well as the more universal experiences depicted?

Extract from *Evaluating Multicultural Literature Made Easy!* By Kasey Garrison and Roxanne Mills, in *Library Media Connection*, March/April 2012

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library professionals to be integral players in helping our communities navigate and interact with the cultural landscape of the so-called 'Asian Century'.

This call holds strong implications from a collection development perspective for those of us working with children and young adults.

In order to promote Asian literacy in the Asian Century, library collections must include honest and accurate representations of Asian cultures. Library professionals should evaluate their youth collections for the inclusion of quality resources and materials reflecting the rich, cultures of Asia. However, inexperience with our northern neighbors