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Katharine Slater

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## **Introduction for #WeNeedDiverseScholars: A Forum**

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As part of the 2016 Children’s Literature Association conference in Columbus, Ohio, the Diversity Committee and the Membership Committee co-sponsored a panel titled “Needs of Minority Scholars,” with presenters Sarah Park Dahlen, Marilisa Jiménez García, Laura Jiménez, and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas. The presenters’ papers wove together theory, research, and lived experience to argue for an academic praxis that moves beyond acknowledging the value of diversity and, instead, actively works toward antiracist equity. What emerged from those presentations—and the extensive discussion with panel attendees that followed—was the conviction that our field can do more to incorporate and recognize the voices of scholars of color and Native scholars.

In recognition of that conviction, this forum derives its title from the #WeNeedDiverseBooks movement to argue that #WeNeedDiverseScholars. The contributors argue that while children’s and young adult literature scholarship has made important strides toward inclusivity in the decades since the field’s inception, there is still much more work to be done. This acknowledgment calls for a powerful organizational commitment, within and beyond the Children’s Literature Association, to active inclusion, active listening, and active awareness that we can—and must—do more for marginalized scholars and marginalized scholarship.

The papers in this forum encompass multiple disciplinary perspectives, including English, education, library science, and ethnic studies. Sarah Park Dahlen examines the systemic and personal impact of a children’s literature canon that lacks diverse representation, locating a connection between that absence and her experiences as a woman of color in academia. A call to action, Dahlen’s essay asks us to acknowledge how white fragility and other forms of silencing participate in structuring both the industry of children’s literature and the field of children’s literature scholarship. Like Dahlen,

Michelle Martin advocates for specific actions, encouraging what she terms “crossover scholarship” as an important first step toward active diversifying. This “professional cross-pollination” requires those writing outside their culture to prioritize authenticity, allyship, and the limits of their perspective. While Martin acknowledges the critical importance of other outreach efforts, she views crossover scholarship as “a short-term solution to a long-term and historically-grounded problem,” an early way for our field to make a strong commitment to active inclusion. Responding to historical accusations of having a “gay agenda”—an indictment that implicitly reifies the supposed objectivity of heterosexuality—Laura Jiménez maintains that these accusations fail to acknowledge the multiplicity of marginalized identities. She argues for the personal importance of embracing and articulating an intersectional agenda; this process includes acting as a vocal ally for the communities and identities of others. Finally, Marilisa Jiménez García notes that certain fundamental questions that guide our field have mainly been addressed through a paradigm of Anglo literature, largely eschewing non-Anglo traditions. As a scholar working simultaneously in children’s literature studies and Latinx studies, Jiménez García argues that each has historically relegated the other to the periphery, requiring her “to negotiate divisions both in the field of Latinx studies and children’s literature in order to exist in academia.”

During her Presidential Address at ChLA in June 2016, Annette Wannamaker argued that while we owe a great debt to the children’s literature scholars who have come before us, “understanding and honoring an inheritance we’ve been given is not simply a matter of slavishly adhering to a prescribed path. It involves active interpretation and reinterpretation, sifting through contradictions, re-evaluating and re-framing old debates, asking ‘what if?’ and ‘what now?’” This forum takes up Wannamaker’s call to continue this engagement: not only through our scholarship, but through considering the constitution of the field itself. We must ask, as Wannamaker does, “what if?” and “what now?” What if every marginalized scholar felt welcomed within the field of children’s and young adult literature studies? What if our community listened—truly listened—to their experiences, words, and perspectives, even when that experience of listening requires us to look uncomfortably at ourselves? And, perhaps most importantly: what now? How will we act together to make these “what ifs” a reality?

*Katharine Slater is an assistant professor of English at Rowan University, where she teaches courses on children’s and young adult literature. Previously, she’s published essays in The Lion and the Unicorn, the Children’s Literature Association Quarterly, and Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture, as well as in edited book collections. Her current book project examines*

*the co-constructions of geography and ideology in image-texts for young people, arguing that these works depend upon spatialized representations to advance belief.*

#### Works Cited

Wannamaker, Annette. "Presidential Address: On Indebtedness, Gifts, and Ghosts." *Children's Literature Association Conference*, 11 June 2016, Sheraton Columbus at Capitol Square, Columbus, OH. Presidential Address.