

*HOW DID WE GET HERE?: AN EXAMINATION OF THE COLLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY  
CARIBBEAN JUVENILE LITERATURE IN THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARY OF THE NATIONAL  
LIBRARY OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO AND TRINIDADIAN CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO  
SELECTED TITLES*

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the West Indian Juvenile collection of Caribbean children's literature housed at the Port of Spain Children's Library of the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago to determine its characteristics and contents, and to elicit the responses of a group of children, aged 11 to 13, to selected works from the collection. A variety of qualitative data collection techniques were employed including document analysis, direct observation, interviews with staff, and focus group discussions with student participants. Through collection analysis, ethnographic content analysis and interview analysis, patterns in the literature and the responses received were extracted in an effort to construct and offer a 'holistic' view of the state of the literature and its influence, and suggest clear implications for its future development and use with children in and out of libraries throughout the region.

For my grandmother Earline DuFour-Herbert (1917-2007), my eternal inspiration,  
and my daughter, Jasmine, my constant motivation.

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In light of my failed attempt at brevity, I will end here. I humbly and deeply apologize in advance to anyone I may have missed or failed to mention by name (I blame my post-dissertation brain). Please know that you are in my heart and that heart is filled with gratitude.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

*“Children’s literature works to explain to its readers what their society was, is, will, can or should be.” (Hateley, 2009; p. 288)*

When I was a child growing up in Trinidad in the 1970s, I knew all about Gulliver’s travels, Oliver’s ‘twists’ and what Katy did, did next, or did not do at all. I read everything that Enid Blyton described about life in jolly old England and I even had a fair idea about the life that Nancy Drew and her friends the Hardy Boys enjoyed. However, I did not “see” my society in the literature I read. What I knew about my society came largely from non-textual, contextual information: the stories my grandmother told me every night before bed, the trials and triumphs of the people in the neighborhood, the joyous festivals and celebrations that seemed to be never-ending, and the struggles of a generation to define itself on its own terms and shake off the residue of colonial rule. These experiences shaped my national and cultural identity in the 1970s.

In secondary school and later at the University of the West Indies, I discovered that there was in fact a body of literature that spoke to my curiosity about and interest in the state of life in my country and the wider Caribbean region. These books were accessible to children as they were humorous, clever, challenging and revealing, but adults were the intended audience. Moving forward to 2004 and my first year as a librarian assigned to the Port of Spain (P.O.S) Children’s Library of the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago; a brand new state-of-the-art building that was opened to the public the previous year. I discovered, much to my delight, a collection of West Indian juvenile literature or Caribbean children’s literature—so designated

because the titles, written just for children, were either written by West Indian authors or dealt with issues/topics/settings related to the Caribbean.

Mind you, I was told of the existence of West Indian juvenile books and even saw examples of one or two, but a collection that ran the gamut in genres and types? It was not a part of my consciousness, and to think I was an elementary school teacher for three years in the 1990s. Where did it come from? Who was responsible for it? Did the children coming to the library use it? What did they think of it? These and many other questions occupied my thoughts during the two-years that I worked there (2004-2006). I began to think about its potential role in the shaping of the national and cultural identity of the contemporary Trinidadian child, at a time when many forms of cultural expression have been lost or replaced with “imported” fare (through cable television, video games and other mass media). I also thought about the role of literature in general to contribute “to children coming to know who they are in terms of the social sameness and difference that constitute national identity”, (Meek, 2001, p. viii). I wondered to what extent it carried the historical, ideological, political, cultural and social overtones that contribute to the construction of ‘the child’ and ‘childhood’ within a given society (Hunt, 2005).

I searched for sources that would provide a direct answer and found very little direct answers. At that time in 2004, the collection consisted of approximately 122 distinct titles. That number has since increased to approximately 302 titles (at the time of this study); which accounts for roughly three percent of the wider children’s collection<sup>1</sup>. From what I could gauge, this body of literature developed as a tangential response to issues of post-colonial identity, which was a vigorous site of interrogation in the adult literary forms, particularly during and following the time that most West Indian territories gained independence (post 1960). Consequently, books for Caribbean children emerged as part of a mandate of educational reform

born out of this burgeoning national, and subsequently, collective regional identity among the various territories.

As I familiarized myself with a collection, I found that the quality was often inconsistent (in format and literary merit), folktales appeared to dominate (as is the case with emergent ‘ethnic’ or multicultural literature for children) and the themes explored seemed to romanticize more than represent the lives of the contemporary children who had access to this collection. [See chapter four for a fuller discussion]. From observation, most of the children who frequented the library at that time ignored the collection of Caribbean children’s literature in favor of the many options available in the wider collection.

I tried to find ways to actively promote the collection by incorporating titles into dedicated displays, while featuring others in programming—such as “Poet Tree” which featured a different Caribbean poet every week or incorporating a West Indian component on the recommended list of reads during the holiday reading program. Though there were some gains, the reception was lukewarm at best. According to the official circulation statistics for 2004 to 2006 (the duration of my tenure there), West Indian juvenile fiction titles were checked out an average of approximately 32 times per month (384 times per year), while non-fiction titles were checked out an average of approximately 44 times per month (529 times per year).

These preliminary ruminations and middling statistics gave rise to even deeper questions: how is the literature being used? What role does it play in education at the elementary level? How is the collection sustained? Who are the writers and how are they constructing their messages to Caribbean children and in turn constructing Caribbean childhood? Most importantly, what do the children themselves think about and make of this literature? What sort of impact might it have on their burgeoning sense of identity and overall reading tastes? Are they more

aware, like I was, of the British, American, even Canadian, society through the literature and the other forms of ‘neocolonial interference’? What is the role of the library and the children’s librarian in mediating and ensuring that all Caribbean children are able to see their societies and themselves in the mirror provided by the literature created for them?

A collection that presumably speaks to the nature of Caribbean societies that are individually and collectively fraught with complexity is of vital importance. As Brown (2008) asserts of such ‘developing’ societies: the "rapid cultural change [that it undergoes] militates against the preservation of cultural identity and may lead both parents and therefore children to see their own language and stories as unnecessary relics of a way of life at odds with global criteria for success" (p. 35). As a contribution to this embryonic area of scholarship, this study will focus on answering just a few of these questions by exploring the breadth and depth of the West Indian juvenile collection held at the POS Children’s library.

Central to this investigation, is an attempt to discover the perceptions and ‘responses’ of Trinidadian children—one nationality within the milieu of ‘Caribbeanness’— to that collection. This study will serve as a pilot study for a deeper examination of the state and relevance of West Indian Juvenile literature to Caribbean children as determined by its actual audience, rather than the implied one. The significance of this research at this time lies in its attempt to gauge the ‘impact’ and trajectory of an ‘indigenous’ body of literature that serves as a repository for cultural collective consciousness in a post-colonial society within an era where the lines of national identity are blurred by impending global assimilation through technological and market forces.

This study, in its attempt to look closely at the books to which Caribbean children have access and, in turn, to garner their responses, serves as a step towards assessing the importance,

the approach, the presentation and the preservation of the cultural capital that children's literature is said to embody, and to understand the extent to which it effectively defines, or does not, this, and subsequent, generation/s. As McGillis (2006) notes:

Children "read" their culture through books and films and shop windows and magazines and video games. Culture and the market place are connected. Any of us involved with children's literature needs to be informed about cultural production for the young as it manifests itself in what I'll call the literate and secondarily literate array of textuality. (p.86)

My methodology and analysis selected attempts to construct one view of what obtains rather than what might be hoped for and to reflect on the process/es as well as the content of the range of data collected. This introductory chapter is divided into a discussion of the preliminary conceptual framework for this emergent approach, the statement of research questions, an overview of methods employed, and a discussion of validity issues related to the research design and execution.

### **Conceptual Framework**

To set the stage for an investigation of Caribbean children's literature, there must be some discussion of the theoretical concepts associated with the socio-historical context out of which the literature emerged (mainly colonialism and post colonialism). Additionally, a brief account of the development and importance of the adult forms of literary expression, including dominant thematic sites of interrogation, would provide some context on which to extrapolate the development of the juvenile form. Finally, it is useful to examine the relevant scholarly research conducted specifically on the literature produced for children across the region and the points of intersection with or departure from this study. An overview of applicable aspects of reader response theory will also be explored.

## Some Theoretical Considerations

Any discussion of Caribbean literature, whether for adults or children, necessitates a definition of key terms/concepts. The first of these is *colonialism*, which is a term that describes “an activity among peoples that involves one group assuming priority and authority over another group”, that is most often associated with imperial expansion of European countries. In addition to it being a political or economic activity, it is a more insidious cultural trope that assumes that the colonizer is more ‘advanced’ and ‘civilized’ than the colonized, and therefore intrinsically dominant (McGillis, 2000). Elleke Boehmer (2005), a novelist and professor of Literatures in English, asserts that:

Readings of imperial texts suggest, therefore, how it was possible for a work system which provided over the lives of millions to legitimate itself by way of myth and metaphor while at the same time masking suffering. Colonial writing is important for revealing ways in which that world system could represent the degradation of other human beings as natural, an innate part of their degenerate or barbarian state. (p. 21)

In the world of British children’s literature in English, some of the more familiar and ‘obvious’ colonial writers include Rudyard Kipling, R. M. Ballantyne, G.A. Henty, Captain Marryat, Bessie Marchant and Hugh Lofting. These works have spread as widely as the British Empire and has provided fodder for maintaining the feelings of superiority of generations of the Empire’s children and for preserving the misconceptions of the children of colonial occupation.

The second concept that requires clarification is *post-colonialism*; which is defined by Simon During as “the need, in nation or groups which have been the victims of imperialism, to achieve a national identity uncontaminated by Universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images.”<sup>2</sup> The term post-colonial can be applied to the literary work itself (produced by writers who are members of the former colonial powers) or to provide commentary on that work (produced by anyone capable of empathizing and appreciating the experiences of those who were

denied their voice). Notable post-colonial writers of children's literature include: Mordecai Richler (Canada), John Marsden (Australia), Diane Hofmyr (South Africa), Satyajit Ray (India), James Berry (Jamaica), and Floella Benjamin (Trinidad).

Thirdly, there is the concept of *neo-colonialism*, defined simply as “a renewed drive on the part of the dominant social and cultural forces to maintain their positions of privilege...popular culture is an important site of neo-colonial activity” (McGillis, 2000, p.xxiv). In books for children, neo-colonial discourse stresses the ‘otherness’ and inferiority of minority cultures or ‘reshapes’ and ‘digests’ minority culture into the mainstream. Peter Hunt identifies texts such as Richard Adam’s *Watership Down* and the adventures of characters like Paddington Bear and Olga da Polga as examples of neo-colonialist thought in children’s literature. Apart from the increased awareness of multicultural issues and the need for greater sensitivity as previously imperialist societies become more diverse, there is still an overwhelming, though perhaps more creative, campaign for assimilation and acceptance of the way of life of the majority.

### **Caribbean Literature for Adults**

As mentioned earlier, there is a deficit of scholarship in the area of Caribbean children’s literature. On the other hand, there is a preponderance of material on the emergence and importance of Caribbean or West Indian literature for adults. It is often argued that because of its sophistication, the Caribbean novel in English can be considered “the crucible of the most extensive and challenging post-colonial literary theory”<sup>3</sup>. This form emerged in the 1930s when writers began to challenge colonial structures and conceptions rather than emulate them. The Caribbean novel then assumed a level of “urgency and importance because of its central role in the attempt to construct new cultural identities that escape the domination of the colonial past”.

It is clear that this drive and urgency occurred outside of existing patterns of literacy and available literature at the time—especially during the colonial period—and so attention was duly paid to the genesis of this new body of literature, which did not directly consider children as its audience.

Many theorists have explored and attempted to encapsulate the major themes and narrative lines that pervade the literature. Though a detailed exposition of these theories is beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to examine at least one of the more commonly held perspectives. Professor Emeritus Edward Baugh (2007) in his article “Word Travels: The Journeys of Anglophone Caribbean Literature” succinctly, yet comprehensively, observes and connects the patterns that had the most significant impact on the development of the literature. He identifies four issues around history, identity, gender, and language that characterize the literature:

1. *The emigration of the Anglophone Caribbean writer* in the form of his (and later her) “migration to the metropole of London” primarily in the late 1960s. Once established, these authors were being published by the “metropolitan publishing houses” which later became quite predisposed to their writing (p. 48-9). Initially, many of these authors migrated as adults and eventually extended their ‘reach’ to the United States and Canada. However, Baugh notes that the concept of Caribbean writer “now includes, more or less problematically, a generation of writers who left the Caribbean in their youth and became writers in their new metropolitan places of domicile and citizenship. The concept even now includes writers who were born ‘abroad’” (p. 49).

2. These ‘migratory patterns’ ultimately give rise to what Baugh describes as *issues of identity in the Diaspora*. He observed that writers who migrated to or were born in England or Canada tend to identify with both nationalities (e.g. James Berry refers to himself as Jamaican/British); or one or the other (e.g. David Dabydeen self-identifies as Guyanese although he has resided in the U.K. for most of his life); although this is seldom an issue for those who emigrate to the United States as they generally identify with their Caribbean place of origin. Baugh believes these patterns “suggests the reductiveness of categorization and notions of fixed identity” (p.49).

Invariably, these various forms of identity within the Diaspora influence and are influenced by the perceptions, directions and reception of Caribbean literature in these societies. The ‘journey’ in essence is both symbolic and practical as “the ancestral roots of all Caribbean people are outside of the actual geography of the Caribbean”<sup>4</sup> The example of poet Valerie Bloom is especially salient to this study, as Baugh recounts “her observation that she is able to delineate her native Jamaica more clearly than would otherwise have been likely by virtue of being distant from it”. He goes on to insightfully state that “the reality she represents is largely a remembered reality, which may or may not adequately represent the reality [of the Caribbean] now” (p. 52). Another dimension of the “journey” is the Caribbean writer’s return to the ancestral homeland of Africa or India; again, as thematically symbolic or literal.

3. Baugh (2007) posits that these various literary “journeys” are “attempts to come to terms with history...with the enormity of what happened and with the idea of History [sic] as an overbearing force, sweeping by the Caribbean backwater” (p. 54). This

preoccupation with history sometimes takes the form of direct historical works, many of which “seek to correct colonialist histories or to bring into the light of day the tangled web of blood lines, ethnicities, and power relationships that went into the making of the society” (p. 55). Other iterations of this preoccupation can be found in writing that seeks to engage with the lived history, “in an effort to represent the Caribbean and their own relationship to it. They have found that there are still many stories to be told, and many ways of telling those stories” (p. 55).

4. The use of the range of language registers available to the Caribbean writer is crucial to the significance and ‘location’ of the story. Baugh explains that “the interplay and friction between English and Creole, between oral and scribal continues to be a rewarding area of artistic exploration for the Anglophone Caribbean writer” (2007, p. 57).
5. Baugh (2007) also devotes a section to the emergence and ‘ascent’ of women writers over the last 25 years and “their female protagonists have enhanced the imaginative representation of the Caribbean, including its overseas diaspora” (p. 58). These works have the significant effect of calling attention to the “voice of the woman, to the fullness of recognition at hearing itself, and the exhilaration of claiming its right to be heard”.

Zohar Shavit (2006) notes that: “children’s literature as a distinct system began to develop in West European society long after adult literature had become an established institution”. The same can ultimately be said for Caribbean children’s literature, as it is still in a state of emergence at this present time. The forces that contributed to its beginning, however, do follow the more general British pattern to some extent, but also contain unique elements and

challenges as a consequence of the historical, linguistic and socio-economic composition of these societies, and the notions of the child and childhood within them. The extent to which similar patterns and preoccupations that exists in the adult form have trickled down to the juvenile form will be addressed to some extent by the findings of this study.

### **Existing Studies on Caribbean Children’s Literature**

Of the few studies identified that specifically tackle publishing for Caribbean children, some are produced by those within the region and others go beyond its geographical parameters. For example, in a recent publication, professor and author Karen Sands-O’Connor (2008) examined depictions of West Indians in British Literature for children. Her motivation to pursue this research grew out of a comment made by her husband (who was originally from Jamaica) in response to a question about his childhood reading. His response: “I wasn’t in books...so why should I read them?” (Sands-O’Connor, 2008; p. xv). Her historicized account, that makes reference to approximately 110 titles (20 of which can be found in the West Indian Juvenile collection at the POS Children’s Library), covers the earliest depictions of the West Indian during the enslavement and colonization of the ‘new world’ in books for adults and later for children (by the 1700s) to the “warm nostalgia” evoked by contemporary writers of West Indian descent in post 1970s, and up to 1990s, Britain. As she describes:

This book, then, is an attempt to begin a dialogue about a history that has been elided and ignored for centuries. Traditionally, children’s literature does not “count” as part of the official historical record; children’s literature about the West Indies is even less visible, to the extent that many children’s literature critics have left it out of other histories entirely. (p. xvi)

Her focus in the latter half of the book (chapter 6 to be more precise) is on the various texts that exemplify the connection between Britain and the West Indies; in essence the literature produced by authors who ‘journeyed’ to England from the Caribbean or were born to parents of West Indian descent and who choose to maintain these cultural associations in their writing. Her

sample does not include, as she explicitly states, “many works written by West Indians who emigrated to places other than Britain and many works written by black British authors about something other than the West Indies” (p. xvii). This focus was criticized in a review by Hateley (2009) for presenting a perspective that was strictly that of the ‘metropole’—situated firmly within the developed world—and the lack of a theoretically defined position or a close reading of the texts chosen undermined the political efficacy of the work.

While this was the first comprehensive study of its kind to undertake an exploration of the West Indian in British literature and it does provide keen insight on the perspective of the ‘West Indian British’ author (including the challenges they faced as well as their motivations for writing), this study goes beyond that limited perspective to look at the breadth of publishing that falls under the label of Caribbean children’s literature and the range of perspectives and contexts that influence its development and reception among children.

Alternatively, Dr. Cherell Shelley-Robinson, Professor Emerita of the Department of Library and Information Studies at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, has spent the last few years travelling through the Caribbean and its most immediate Diaspora (Canada, United States and the United Kingdom) attempting to identify and collect all instances of the titles that can be classified as Caribbean Children’s Literature. In a personal correspondence via email, she revealed that she traced and/or acquired over 1,000 titles, many of which she has donated to the Resource Centre for Caribbean Children's Literature at the university.

So far her findings are unpublished but she is actively working on the completion of a book that she describes as “a critical historical review of Caribbean children’s literature from 1900 to 2004” (personal communication, May 10, 2010). In this book she will address the

categories and genres of works discovered with “some critical comments on certain aspects and issues in the literature” (personal communication, May 10, 2010). Such a publication will certainly serve as a much-needed resource to further our understanding of the breadth of the literature produced. While this study is not so far-reaching in its sample size, it does provide clear insight into the characteristics and patterns of usage of a circulating collection of West Indian juvenile literature.

In what can be deemed the most insightful account (that I have found) of the emergence or existence of a body of Caribbean literature for children, author and Language Arts professor, Cynthia James, traces the evolution of the oral tradition to a literary one in Trinidad and Jamaica from the beginnings of West Indian society, which she sets as the 1970s to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In her exposition, James identifies three distinct phases of this evolution: “the documentation-literacy phase”; the reclamation of voice phase (marked by “respect for an evolving Creole orality”) and the third phase that results in the “fusion of oral and literacy agendas” (James, 2005).

She references approximately 34 texts, most of which are collections of folklore from Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, published as early as 1954, coupled with a more limited and contemporary selection of picture books and novels (up to 2002) that “include a variety of folk-based materials” (p. 166). James’ focus on Trinidad and Jamaica, however, while understandable given their status as sites of publishing and the prolific adult Caribbean literature that comes from these territories, fails to give a sense of the true breadth of the literary trajectory, even within the Anglophone Caribbean. While her study provides invaluable context and informs the understanding of folk literature within the collection, it does not go beyond this limited scope to

describe other types/genres of Caribbean literature which exists for children; which this study attempts to do.

Apart from these accounts and overviews, there are quite a few scholarly articles that focus on specific aspects of the literature itself: Shelley-Robinson (2005) looked at representations of the immigrant experience in eight (8) picture books and six (6) chapter books representative of authors/perspectives from the Anglophone Caribbean; Logan (2005) looked at the six titles, specifically written for children, by James Berry and the role he occupies as a “Diasporic Griot” within the realm of literature for the young; while Lazú (2004) analyzed the “trope of the islands” and the ways in which select works of Hispanic-Caribbean writers in the U.S. employ a dialogic stance to respond to these images and metaphors in the construction of a hybrid identity. Although these studies all provide useful literary critiques of some of the prevailing themes, authors and sites of critical inquiry; none of them provide any insight into how the works are received and/or interpreted by the child reader (the implied or intended audience). I believe that this is an integral dimension of our understanding of how the literature shapes and is shaped by the perceptions and realities of Caribbean youth.

The only response study I have identified so far (by title only) is a dissertation by Marguerite Brown (2003) entitled *"I will not look at books the same way again": Teachers' opinions about the use of Caribbean children's literature*. This study was based in Jamaica and as the title implies, the goal was to elicit the opinions of the teachers who either used or were asked to use Caribbean children's literature in their classrooms. Again, the perspective of the child is noticeably absent.

An encouraging development, nonetheless, is the sustained discussion and promotion of Caribbean children's literature through dedicated blogs, listservs and online magazines which

promote the perspectives of authors, editors, publishers, and children's literature scholars and enthusiasts. Examples of the more prolific blogs are: 'Caribbean Children's Literature Diane Browne' [<http://dianebrownblog.blogspot.com>] created and maintained by author Diane Browne from Jamaica; and 'Caribbean Children's Fiction' [<http://jambooks-fiction.blogspot.com>] featuring the work, and opinions, of Jamaican author Hazel D. Campbell.

One e-zine in particular, *Anansesem*, founded in 2010 by Summer Edwards, an expert in the disciplinary area of reading, writing and literacy, is dedicated to soliciting and 'publishing' works for and by Caribbean children in the form of short stories, non-fiction essays, poetry, and artwork produced by children from eight to sixteen. While careful study of this material would enhance the data gathered in this research, at this time it must remain on my agenda for future study.

### **Children's Literature and Reader Response Criticism**

*"Reader response criticism accommodates both the reader and the text: there is no area of literary activity where this is more necessary than in the literature that defines itself by reference to its young readership."* (Benton, 1993)

Of more direct relevance to this study is the body of literature and theoretical assumptions that form the basis of reader response criticism. According to Benton (1999), its importance lies in its facility to address two fundamental questions: "Who is the implied child reader inscribed in the text?" and "How do actual child readers respond during the process of reading?" (p. 86). These two elements are reflected in the contrasting influential theories that underpin most of the research in this area and will be explored to some extent in this overview. The one that is particularly salient in conceptualizing and articulating the negotiation that takes

place between the reader and the text in the construction of meaning is Rosenblatt's (2005) transactional theory of reading and writing.

She delineates the phases of evocation and response during the reading process as an "organizing, synthesizing activity, the creation of tentative meanings, and their modification as new elements enter into the focus of attention", while interpretation "can be understood as an effort to report, analyze and explain the evocation". (Rosenblatt, 2005). This process of evocation, response, and interpretation is most closely related to what this study hopes to capture. The extent to which it succeeds at this task can be determined by comparing and contrasting the results to the findings of related studies that incorporate or intersect with these concepts.

**The reader's response to children's literature: Reader response as process.** This category of reader response research is perhaps the most often pursued. With direct implications for pedagogy and a solid grounding in Rosenblatt's transactional theory, analyzing the child reader's response to literature is exemplified by a conscious attempt to theorize practice in the following ways:

1. An emphasis on process as a means of categorizing the nature and quality of responses (Benton, 1993)
2. A focus on small-scale inquiry with attention to and incorporation of collaborative elements (Benton, 1993)

***Process Studies.*** Many of the studies described or discussed by Benton (1993) and Bracy (2001) suggest ways in which student interaction, talk, and observable responses can be categorized and potentially theorized. I have reproduced a very brief sketch of various categories here to demonstrate the breadth of interpretations; some of which I found to be relevant to a

similar investigation of Trinidadian children's responses. They served as useful frames of reference and/or points of entry into the process of collection and analysis.

Squire's (1964) and Purves & Rippere's (1968) psychoanalytic categories of response by adolescent readers was a useful framework on which to observe and analyze the process exhibited by the children in this study (in spite of the fact that the types are indicative of a more mature reader and predicated on strong emotional involvement with the text). All examples of the following were noted [See chapter 5]:

- Literary judgments
- Interpretational response
- Narrational reactions
- Associational responses
- Self involvement
- Prescriptive judgments

Protherough's (1983) developmental dimensions of response (increased use of multiple modes as a direct result of maturity); was thought to best characterize individual styles of reading which occur before a peer discussion:

- Projection into a character
- Projection into a situation
- Association between the book and the reader
- The distanced viewer
- The detached evaluation

Again, these characteristics were exhibited by the participants of this study to varying degrees; the most common of which was ‘the distanced viewer’ and ‘the detached evaluation’. [See chapter 5]

Benton and Fox’s (1985) process where the reader creates a second world seems more indicative of individual reading styles. The stages of their model were less obvious in this research’s findings but served as guide during the observation of group discussions in order to gauge the level of engagement with the text:

- Feeling like reading
- Getting into the story
- Being lost in a book
- Having an increased sense of ending

Hickman’s (1983) ethnographic study across three age groups where developmentally appropriate responses acts were identified; gives perhaps the best exemplification and description of observable actions during collaborative discussion; the first four of which were routinely exhibited by the participants in this study:

- Listening behaviors
- Contact with books
- Acting on the impulse to share
- Oral responses
- Actions and drama
- Making things
- Writing

The latter three acts were not specifically required of the participants but my general sense is that the willingness to perform these acts would have been heavily dependent on the levels of engagement with the texts.

Sipe's (2000) article, "The Construction of Literary Understanding by First and Second Graders in Oral Response to Picture Storybook Read Alouds" suggests levels of literary understanding specifically triggered by the act of listening to stories. After seven months of collecting and analyzing data from 83 read-alouds, his findings suggested the following levels of understanding:

- Textual analysis
- Intertextual connections
- Personal connections
- Becoming engaged in the story to such an extent that the story world and reality blend
- Using the text as a platform or pretext for creative expression.

These findings are for the most part, consistent with other theories of response as a process, but Sipe goes on further to label and elucidate three basic literary impulses and their enactments: the hermeneutic impulse; the personalizing impulse; and the aesthetic impulse.

*Collaborative elements.* As previously mentioned, a recurring dimension of most reader response process studies is the inclusion of a collaborative element to facilitate the development of reasoned opinions through discussion. This process can be described or facilitated in a number of ways including collaborative reasoning, 'free-form' discussion or literature circles (to name a few). The idea of collaborative reasoning, as put forward by Anderson et al (1995) is "intended to stimulate critical reading and thinking and to be personally engaging" (p. 5). The discussion is centered on a 'big question' that can be framed so that two or more positions are available and is

an important strategy for teaching the consideration of alternative perspectives. Free-form “talk” about books can be an important strategy for young children to construct literary understanding. Sipe (2000) cogently articulates the role played by children’s talk before, during and after the oral reading of picture books and the teacher’s role in scaffolding their emergent understanding.

**The reader’s response to ‘culturally-oriented’ literature: Reader response and context.** Another sub-group of studies identified in the reviews by Benton (1999) and Bracy (2001) are ones that can be loosely defined as “culturally-oriented studies”. These studies attempt to extract children’s concepts and social attitudes through their literary responses. It is premised on personal connection between the literature and the reader much more so than an understanding and appreciation of its literary merits. Within the general types identified—feminist and multicultural studies, whole-culture studies, and cross-cultural studies—this study falls within the parameters of the whole-culture enquiry, the basis of which is the child’s response in the context of the broad range of their interests. One example is Beach & Freedman’s (1992) investigation of responding as a cultural act. In the study, they focused on the cultural practices of adolescents within their peer groups and noted the influences on these practices. They then discussed the practices evident in the responses of these adolescents to magazine ads and short stories.

I believe that this is a crucial layer to any exploration of the responses that Trinidadian children will have to their literature because of the potential dichotomy between the childhood culture constructed by the author and the childhood culture created as the child experiences childhood. Further, the imposition of and variations among the cultures of the home, school, gender, media and other societal agencies all played a part in the connections made or ignored.

For example, Egan-Robertson's (1993) study documents the presence of parental voice in the responses of Puerto Rican children to culturally reflective books (Bracy, 2001).

This framework also hints at the significance of self-selection in capturing the responses that are most personally meaningful to the reader. Smith (1995) looked at the responses of three African American students to texts selected by the teacher, texts that were self-selected and texts that contained themes and cultures that most closely mirrored their own, and found that the students gravitated toward the texts that served as cultural mirrors and echoed specific cultural practices (such as call and response) during sessions and all seemed to share a common frame of reference (Bracy, 2001). The findings of this study both corroborate and contradict the Smith study.

As a byproduct of this investigation, it is hoped that the results would serve as a basis for generating theoretical constructs about the relationship/s between Caribbean children and the literature 'created' for them, which, very possibly would have its strongest implications in this branch of reader response research. Brooks and Browne (2012) article "Towards a Culturally Situated Reader Response Theory" provides a useful framework that can be applied to the outcomes of the reader response portion of this study. The data sets used to generate this theory illustrate four cultural positions assumed by middle grade students in their responses to African American novels.

Within the model, the concept of 'Homeplace' is used to describe the cultural position they believe to be the most dominant stance of the reader. Homeplace is informed by various supporting positions such as the ethnic group position; the community position; the family position; and the peer position. They also emphasize that the "textual features embedded in ethnically diverse books should not be ignored even when respecting the reader's role in

constructing meaning” (p. 79)—a point that is salient to the interpretation of the student responses in this study.

### **The ‘Implied’ versus the ‘Actual’ Reader: Reader response and textual analysis.**

Yet another form of reader response criticism is based on the construct of the implied reader or “hypothetical figure of the reader” (Baldick, 1990, p. 108). The term was concocted in an attempt to offer “the opportunity of writing about child response to literature while still focusing upon texts” (Cocks, 2004, p. 93). Although Iser (1974) is credited for his early conceptions of this construct, it is Chambers (1977), in his tome “The Reader in the Book”, who advocates for its central importance in children’s book criticism (Benton, 1999). The ‘implied reader’, according to Chambers, is identified and exemplified through specific textual features such as narrative voice and indeterminacy gaps which must be filled by the reader in order to generate meaning. He defines the relationship between the implied author and the implied child reader as one where “this voice and relationship are common in children’s books and identifies both with the figure of the friendly adult storyteller who knows how to entertain children, while at the same time keeping them in their place (Benton, 1993, p. 27).

One of the major critiques of this approach to reader response criticism is that it situates the reader only within the text and other texts but generally fails to account for related ideological constructs, including the reader’s disposition, familiarity with story conventions and experiential knowledge. (Stephens, 1992). (Benton, 1999) cites Meek’s (1988) approach in her seminal work, *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* as one way of addressing that limitation. In her study, Meek combines the Iserian concepts of the implied reader with the “intertext of oral and written literature” (p. 98). Benton praises Meek’s analysis for its “ability to listen to children’s responses to a book and ‘read’ these with the same effort of attention that is afforded

to the text themselves” (1999, p. 98). This position is the one that this study attempts to adopt by looking at both the content of the literature and the responses to it.

Most of these studies, however, focus on the response to fiction which is not the only focus of this study. In the article “Images of Childhood and the Implied Reader in Young Children’s Information Books”, Patricia Larkin-Lieffers (2010) investigates images of childhood in three informational texts across various sub-genres, topics, and presentation styles. Some of the images and textual cues deduced included: “the child as a co-constructor”; “the child as a cultural reproducer”; and “childhood as a time of innocence and play” (p. 76). They stress the need for greater awareness of the “politically and socially” charged nature of information books and suggest that these books can only achieve neutrality if “the images of childhood exactly coincide with the reader’s thoughts” (p. 81). They advocate encouraging the child reader to read both with and against the text.

The concept of the implied reader situated within and to some extent determined by the ideological stance of the textual discourse and the varying levels of response provided by actual readers provides a useful framework for comparison in this study. By examining the text within the framework of the reader’s interpretation, both with respect to its cultural orientation and the extent to which he or she is willing to occupy the role of the ‘implied’ reader, this study engages in what Benton describes as “the best sort of criticism of children’s literature”; or at least, one of the more ‘holistic’ methods.

### **Experiential Considerations**

In spite of the proliferation of reader response studies in developed countries and among adults and adolescents (many more than those addressed here), there is still a need for further interrogation of the approach as process and for the presentation of perspectives and contexts that

are not represented. As we have noted, most reader response studies take place in the classroom, where, regardless of the acknowledgment of an aesthetic-efferent continuum as espoused by Rosenblatt (2005), overall there is an institutional bias toward efferent learning. The public library, on the other hand, is a more ‘appropriate’ site for aesthetic reading and for capturing the range of responses it might elicit. Bracy (2001) outlines the implications of reader response studies on reader’s advisory services to young people.

I contend that as librarians we should not only implement these findings but recreate them ourselves within the culture and ethos of the library setting. The goal of this study is to explore one specific context and setting by utilizing what has been suggested and discovered and comparing and contrasting those findings and techniques to reflect the realities of the Trinidadian child reader of West Indian juvenile literature in a public library, thereby contributing to the prevailing body of knowledge in this area.

## **Research Methods**

### **Research Questions**

Based on the limited scholarship available to date on the body of Caribbean Children’s literature, and the theories and frameworks deduced from reader response criticism, the following questions are investigated:

1. What are the characteristics and contents of the West Indian Juvenile collection housed at the Port of Spain Children’s Library of the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago?
2. How do children in Trinidad perceive and evaluate this collection of literature to which they have access at the Port of Spain Children’s Library?

The first part of question one is answered in chapter 3 while the second part is answered in chapter 4. Chapter 5 is devoted to an exploration of question 2.

## **Research Context**

**The Country.** Data gathering for this study took place in Trinidad over a two month period (June and July, 2011). Trinidad is the southern-most island of the Caribbean archipelago; located just off the coast of Venezuela. Trinidad is considered to be one of the more ethnically diverse and the most economically prosperous nation of the Caribbean; due largely to the presence of petroleum and natural gas. Together with its political ward, Tobago, the population is currently estimated at 1.2 million, with 19.5% of the population between the ages of 0 and 14 years. English is the official language, but the linguistic repertoire of the island includes an English-based Creole, Hindustani (a dialect of Hindi), French and residual French Creole, Spanish and Chinese.

Approximately 98.6% of the total population is considered literate (defined as individuals over the age of 15 that can read and write), with the youth (15-24) rate of literacy quoted at 100% for the period 2005-2010 (UNICEF). Additionally, Trinidad is one of two major sites of publishing in the English-speaking Caribbean—the other is Jamaica. However, although it boasts a rich literary tradition, especially for adults—serving as a site of creation and inspiration for two Nobel Prize laureates—the emphasis is on textbook publishing for elementary-aged children, much more so than literature and trade books. [See map in Appendix A – Map of Trinidad & Tobago]

**The Library.** The specific site of data collection was the Port of Spain (P.O.S.) Children's Library of the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago. Located in the heart of the capital city, the National Library building also houses three additional public libraries (the P.O.S. Young Adult Library, the P.O.S. Adult Library, and the Heritage Library) that invariably serve a population of approximately 50,000 people in the capital city and its environs. The building also

functions as the administrative headquarters of the National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS); the statutory authority responsible for “the development and co-ordination of all library and information services in Trinidad and Tobago and related matters” (NALIS website, 2011). In addition to the four public libraries that comprise the National Library, NALIS oversees 19 additional public libraries located throughout the island; 497 primary schools and over 137 secondary schools (under the direct supervision of the School Library Services Unit) and 30 governmental and non-governmental special libraries.

**The Collection.** The rationale for choosing the Juvenile West Indian collection at the Port of Spain Children’s Library lies in the fact that it is the largest circulating collection of its kind in any public or school library to which all children within the urban catchment area of the capital city, or beyond, have access. The majority of the collection was acquired in 2002-4 during the first two years of the library’s existence. The draft collection development policy elucidates its central directive to all of its libraries, for both child and adult collections:

NALIS is mandated by Act no. 18 of 1998 Part II, Section 4 to: ... (b) maintain, develop and make easily accessible to the members of the public, a comprehensive collection of material and information, with particular emphasis on that produced within and about Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region whenever and wherever they may be produced. (NALIS, 2006; p.1)

This has the effect of guaranteeing (at least on the face of things) that a concerted effort is being made to maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date juvenile collection.

### **Research Design**

In line with the goals of the research, a qualitative approach was adopted for the design of the study. This approach allowed for an inductive, reflexive, emergent, dynamic, subjective data gathering and analysis process that was inclusive of participant perspectives and involved the researcher as a data gathering instrument (Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2005, Olson, 1995). More

specifically, the study can be situated within constructivist and interpretative paradigms that reflect the epistemological stance that reality is subjective and socially constructed. Multiple methods of data gathering and analysis within this approach and paradigm are utilized, including observation, interviews, group discussion and document analysis.

The data analysis process also incorporates a ‘mixed methods’ approach by including basic quantitative elements to answer the question “how much?” when and where it arises and to add more precise levels of interpretation to the descriptive narrative. Employing an array of methodological techniques facilitated the discovery and generation of theoretical assumptions based on the social reality of the context and afforded constant comparison and co-constructions of meaning. Given the specificity of the context and site of inquiry, the research design can also be described as a case study.

### **Research Relationship**

In my capacity as the primary data collector, I acknowledge my dual role as insider and outsider. My familiarity with the country, the cultural context and the research site served to inform my interactions with participants and my subsequent interpretation of data. This was advantageous in gaining trust and common ground with adult and child participants. Many of the stakeholders and participants approached appreciated my awareness and experience with procedures, institutions, and practices. Conversely, my insider knowledge also potentially served to challenge credibility, neutrality, or present threats to validity (discussed in the subsequent section). I have tried to incorporate multiple data gathering and analysis techniques to balance or constrain any tendencies to rely on intuitive or experiential knowledge only. Instead, through constant reflection, I have attempted to document and resolve these issues when they arose.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection took place over a two-month period (June 3<sup>rd</sup> to July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011). This was the only time available to travel to Trinidad and the only opportunity to recruit student participants for the reader response component of the study at this time prior to their graduation from elementary school. The process took place in two major phases:

- a. Phase 1: Recruitment and student group discussion sessions from June 3<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011
- b. Phase 2: Collection analysis, observation, and interviews with practitioners from July 1<sup>st</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Apart from visits to neighboring elementary schools, both phases took place onsite at the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular the Port of Spain Children's Library during the normal hours of operation. Being onsite brought with it many challenges and constraints along the way, all of which will be discussed where relevant.

**Phase 1 - Recruitment process and student group discussions.** Because of the attendant ethical and logistical issues involved in any form of participatory research with children and the limited time frame for data collection, child participants were recruited through the elementary schools within the immediate vicinity of the library; as opposed to onsite recruitment at the library. Recruitment would have been difficult to accomplish directly through the public library as patrons older than seven are often unaccompanied by parents and securing parental consent through the child is unreliable and could raise potential ethical issues.

Letters were delivered in person to the principals of twelve elementary schools asking them to identify at least two students from their post-Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) class who would be willing to participate in the study [See Appendix B: Letter to Principals]. The SEA examination is a formative examination administered yearly during the month of

March or April to determine the secondary school in which a student will be placed. Upon completion of the exam, students return to school while awaiting their results but have greater flexibility with regards to curricula offerings. It is during this time (from mid-May to mid-June) that these students are invited to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities organized by a variety of organizations, including the library service.

Principals who elected to participate were asked to select two potential participants, or to solicit feedback from the appropriate teachers, to ensure that there would at least be one representative from each school type. Recommendations were based on the following criteria:

- He or she must be an articulate, avid reader in possession of a valid library card who visits the library regularly
- He or she must be between the ages of 11 and 13 (Standard 5 in Trinidad; Grades 6/7 in the U.S.)
- He or she must be comfortable sharing his or her thoughts about the books read with unfamiliar peers.
- He or she must be available to participate over five non-consecutive days

To ensure an adequate variety of student input, an effort was made to select schools, not only based on proximity to the library, but also according to the composition of the school population, and its governing structure. Ideally, six students were preferred (3 male; 3 female) one from each school type to maintain the optimum size for literature discussion group and to encourage diverse opinions and perspectives from home and school.

The school types targeted were as follows:

- All-female government primary (x2 participants)
- All-male government primary (x2 participants)

- All-female denominational or private (x2 participants)
- All-male denominational or private (x2 participants)
- Co-ed government primary (x2 participants)
- Co-ed denominational or private primary (x2 participants)

During the face-to-face meetings, principals who expressed a willingness to assist were asked to convey letters of consent to the parents of potential participants. [See Appendix C: Letters of Consent - Parents]. Participants' assent was subsequently secured before or during the first proposed session. It is important to note that I was not familiar with nor did I have any input in determining the participants chosen, as selections were based solely on principal nomination/teacher recommendation and the willingness and consent of the parent and child participant. The school served as the intermediary institution and there was no attempt to obtain or review the official school records of the student participants. However, some challenges did arise and alternative arrangements were implemented, as subsequently explained.

Unfortunately, many of the schools approached declined to participate due to scheduling conflicts and other commitments. Students identified from the schools that did confirm participation, however, did not attend all of the sessions required—in which they were well within their rights to do. In fact, participants from two schools attended the first session only, while attendance by the other confirmed participants was variable at best. In the end, the following school types were represented:

- All-female denominational or private – [St. Catherine's AC x 2 girls]
- All-male denominational or private – [Belmont Boy's RC x 2 boys]
- Co-ed government primary – [Tranquility Primary x 2 boys]
- Co-ed denominational or private primary – [Moulton Hall Methodist x 2 boys]

Given the fact that gender is thought to play a significant role in the group dynamics of children of that age range, “as boys and girls tend to segregate from each other” (Chen, 2009; p. 151), this composition was thought to be too skewed to proceed as planned. To compensate for this, two female participants that met most of the requirements were recruited by meeting with their parents directly. Seven to nine students attended each meeting.

## **Phase 2 – Collection analysis, observation and interviews with practitioners**

*Collection Analysis.* In order to ensure that the most accurate information was sourced, each item was examined and the relevant bibliographic data was extracted and entered into an electronic database. The inspection was carried out within close proximity to the shelves on which the collection was housed so that physical movement of the items would not disrupt patron access. Apart from the physical inspection of each volume, the assessment process encompassed gathering information about the collection from a variety of methods and sources; more specifically: general observation of usage; semi-structured interviews with library professionals responsible for its acquisition, classification, promotion and circulation; and the perusal of any additional relevant documents and records to which I was granted access at the research site.

*Unobtrusive observation.* During the time dedicated to assessing the collection, approximately four weeks, I observed and noted patterns of patron usage of the collection. This added layer provided a ‘qualitative’ perspective on circulation statistics and served as a means of determining (albeit in a limited way) who is more likely to use the collection (boys, girls, parents, teachers, etc.), which items are most likely to be accessed (folktales, poetry, picture books, non-fiction, etc.), and any distinctive patterns of use (in house aesthetic reading, in house efferent reading, casual browsing, etc.). This can be categorized as a “complete observation”

exercise (Hatch, 2002) with no patron-researcher interaction as this would invariably influence/change their behaviors (and require a significant adjustment to the approved IRB protocol).

***Interviews with practitioners.*** Librarians and library associates related to some aspect of collection development, maintenance or promotion were interviewed once for no more than 30 minutes in order to determine information about the West Indian Juvenile collection that is not otherwise documented. This strategy is also thought to reduce instances of “systematic bias” that invariably arises during the assessment process (Maxwell, 2005). The four librarians who consented to participate represented were assigned to the executive administration, the POS Children’s Library; the technical services department; and the institutional technology department.

Questions asked fell within the purview of their professional duties as information providers only, including acquisition issues related to the West Indian Juvenile collection; patterns of circulation; strategies of collection promotion; and historical significance/records. [See Appendix D – Questions for Practitioners] Adult participants received no inducements or rewards before, during, or after participation. Interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the library professional during the period May 22 to July 15, 2011. Interviews were transcribed and coded to extract the relevant information. In the reporting of the data, subject identity was revealed only in cases where consent was granted to do so.

***Interviews and discussion with student participants.*** Selected students participated in five non-consecutive sessions (from June 17; 21; 22; 24; and 27, 2011--due to the intervention of two public holidays): one focus group discussion on their general reading tastes/interests and four literature discussions (specific dates are given in chapter five). All sessions took place in

the multi-purpose room at the Port of Spain Children's Library during the morning period of the school day (approximately 10 am to 11:30 am). Lunch was provided at the end of every session. Each session lasted no longer than 90 minutes (1.5 hours), for an approximate total time commitment of 460 minutes (7.7 hours) over the five-day period.

***Focus group discussion.*** During the first session, the primary objective was to attain assent from each student, determine their reading preferences, and select the literature and obtain consensus on the texts to be explored in the subsequent sessions.

***Literature discussions.*** The literature discussions began on day two of the research period and continued for up to four sessions. Each session focused on a specific genre or type—picture books, folktales, informational books, and chapter books. The format of the discussion changed according to the length of the books, the type of book being investigated, and the composition of the group, and included read-alouds, individual reading and group response, small-group peer-led discussion, student-led group discussion. At the end of the discussion, each participant completed a short written evaluation briefly summarizing their thoughts on the process. As a reward for their participation, all students who participated in two or more sessions received a book voucher worth TT\$50.00 (approx. US\$8.00). A total of ten vouchers were purchased at the start of the research process and distributed at the final session or presented at the participants' school if they were not at that session.

***Recording and transcription.*** All four literature sessions were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Analytic memos of observations during these discussions were made and used to supplement these recordings. Coding keys were established during transcription to facilitate the level of confidentiality assured and required under the approved IRB protocol. The code used combined the first initial of the participant, the first initial of their gender, a sequential number

indicating the order in which they initially spoke during the discussion, for example, SM1(Sam/Male/first person to speak or respond during the discussion) or CF3 (Connie/Female/third person to speak or respond).

### **Data Analysis**

**Collection analysis.** The physical inspection of the collection provided data about (1) the total number of specific titles on the shelves; (2) the ‘quality’ or ‘condition’ of the books on the shelves; (3) the types/genres of the titles on the shelves; and (4) the bibliographic and acquisition information from each title on the shelves. I created an electronic database to maintain a record of the information collected and reports were generated to facilitate the number counts, averages, and other quantitative elements as required. [See chapter 3 for a discussion of results].

**Textual analysis.** All extant and elicited texts were analyzed in accordance with pre-determined criteria and the nuances of the document type. Selected content of the body of literature was the most dominant text under investigation. To minimize the effect of a subjective literary analysis or reading of the texts, I used a technique based on ethnographic content analysis (See Altheide, 1987). By using this approach, I was able to extract both quantitative facets, for example, number of female protagonists versus male protagonists, number of countries represented, and many others, and qualitative elements; for example coding and description of various themes; identification and discussion of various settings, and others relevant to the genre or type under investigation.

**Interview analysis.** The analysis of transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions was both data driven and concept driven. Because the interviews with adult practitioners were semi-structured, the responses obtained corresponded to specific pre-defined themes and topics for which I sought further elucidation. In most cases, each interviewee provided one piece of the

puzzle with respect to the multiple perspectives of the same issue (classification from the point of view of the librarian, cataloguer, and systems manager). The analysis of the transcripts of student participants varied significantly and tended towards more traditional conceptions of data coding and categorization. Codes and categories generated from the data were supplemented by the existing reader response models that facilitated a more seamless extraction of data related to process, collaboration and cultural attitudes.

### **Validity**

The following potential threats to validity were identified. Each threat is accompanied by a suggestion that would minimize the effect of the threat.

**Length of involvement.** This posed a moderate threat to validity as the data collection period was restricted to two months. Since it is generally felt that “repeated observations and interviews, as well as the sustained presence of the researcher in the setting studied can help to rule out spurious associations and premature theories” (Maxwell, 2005; p. 110), I consciously engaged in continuous analysis through note-taking and self-reflection and actively sought to include participant input as part of the data collection design. I believe that this did allow for adjustments to be made to the processes throughout the limited period of data collection.

**Data quality.** In the absence of long term involvement, detailed individual interviews, or multiple groups of different ages for comparison, I attempted to ‘crystallize’ the quality of data collected by maintaining reflective notes on my role as participant in the literature discussions and also as an observer of the process in action. The data archive compiled consisted of these notes, the texts discussed, the verbatim transcript of the recording analyzed as discourse and coded at the level of each utterance; with a comparison of all three sources and techniques.

While these data will still be susceptible to researcher bias and reactivity during collection and analysis, it is hoped that the various ‘layers’ mitigated these effects.

**Effect of intervention.** Given the fact that a specific format of discussion was imposed on the student participants, I was mindful of the extent to which this might inhibit their level of comfort, the conversational flow or the interpretation of the textual content. By asking students to reflect on the process and observing the effects firsthand, I was able to incorporate their input to facilitate/accommodate their suggestions, while maintaining an adherence to proven strategies.

### **Conclusion**

The study as executed was heavily dependent on context, reliant on established modes of investigation of the reader’s relationship to the text, and situated in a wider framework of literature as a cultural artifact. While other disciplinary orientations, cultural studies in particular, interrogate the “preeminence of the book as a cultural object” (Rudd, 2006); children’s books are nevertheless essential sites of inquiry. McGillis (2011) asserts that “children’s books, even books for very young children, signify in complex ways, and we learn things about books, children, adults, economics, politics—in short, culture in a broad sense—when we study these books (p. 347)”.

In the study of these books, I have attempted to trace their historical development and present an overview of the context in which the literature has emerged and is currently in use, as reported in chapter 2. In chapter 3, I answer the first part of my first research question in my reporting on the characteristics of the West Indian Juvenile collection at the Port of Spain Children’s Library, with respect to its composition, currency, place of publication, authors, access, and promotion (as gleaned from the physical inspection of the books, interviews with practitioners, a direct observation).

The second part of question one is addressed in chapter 4, where I take a closer look at the content of the picture storybooks, folktales, informational books and chapter books present in the West Indian Juvenile collection, because they are the most prevalent types/genres and the ones from which selections were made for the reader response component of the study. The exploration of content in this chapter is limited to providing a more complete ‘description’ of the themes, characters, settings, and other characteristics that appear in Caribbean children’s literature. In chapter 5, which addresses my second research question, I discuss the activities, literature, and levels of response provided by the child participants to the 13 selected texts across the four aforementioned genres/types. Finally, I conclude that the collection of West Indian Juvenile literature is worthy of inquiry and outline the implications of this study for the practice of librarianship, Language Arts teaching, the publishers and writers of children’s books, and the self-esteem and identity of the children themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> The total collection examined is comprised of 302 volumes across fiction, non-fiction, reference, board books/easy readers, Spanish/bilingual collection, Braille books, and the West Indian Juvenile collection.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by McGillis from During, Simon. “Post Modernism or Post-Colonialism Today,” *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995. 125-129.

<sup>3</sup> A quotation taken from Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (1989, 145) as cited in Booker and Juraga.

<sup>4</sup> A quote by George Lamming from an unpublished transcript of a video-taped conversation reproduced in Baugh (2007), p. 51

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONTEXT

In the chronology of the development of children's literature in Britain and the United States, there is a clear sense that the conception and manifestation of the literary product evolved as the schematic and societal notions of children and childhood evolved. Generally speaking, as the infant mortality rate decreased and the later recognition of children as more than cheap sources of labor increased, these societies became preoccupied with shaping and molding the young ones into potentially useful members. Literature became one of the primary means of inculcation and indoctrination, as well as a vehicle for entertainment and pleasure for the young (Noodleman, 1992); all the while capitalizing on the profit from this new child-based market. Throughout the British Empire, however, these 'adjustments' were far less timely and, in very tangible ways, much more insidious. Literature assumed different meanings and forms to the oppressor/colonizer and to the oppressed/colonized.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to identify and 'deconstruct' the historical underpinnings of Caribbean children's literature. To do so effectively, it is necessary to explore the socio-economic structures of the British West Indies (again, used interchangeably with the Anglophone Caribbean) and to delineate the path to literacy in these regions and then to literature. Three distinct phases will be highlighted: (1) the oral tradition; (2) formal education and the emergence of English literacy; and (3) the earliest forms of writing specifically for children.

## **The British West Indies Defined**

Before delving further into the complex interplay of these theoretical constructions on the development of Caribbean Children's literature, it would be useful at this point to identify the nature of the territories that comprise the Anglophone Caribbean (formerly the British West Indies). These territories can be 'physically' categorized into three discrete types [See Appendix E – Map of the Anglophone Caribbean]:

- Those occupied by the British from their earliest arrival, but later gained independence from Britain [St.Kitts, Nevis (nee St. Christopher), 1624; Barbados, 1625; Bahamas<sup>1</sup>, 1629; Antigua, 1632; Belize (nee British Honduras), 1638; Jamaica, 1655; St. Lucia, 1664]
- Those occupied by the British from their earliest arrival and remain dependants of Britain to date [Bermuda, 1609; Monsterrat, 1632; Anguilla, 1950; St. Helena, 1659; Cayman Islands, 1670; British Virgin Islands, 1672]
- Those captured by the British from other European settlers, but later gained independence from Britain [Dominica, 1761; Grenada, 1762; St. Vincent, 1762; Tobago, 1763; Guyana, 1796; Trinidad, 1797]

Between 1662 and 1807, approximately 3.1 million Africans were brought to British-owned colonies and forced to work as slaves under the plantation system.<sup>2</sup>

The governance and attention invested in each of these territories would have been dependent on various factors such as the size, location, economic viability of the land and its resources; as well as any residual policies established by previous occupiers. It follows also that population size and composition would have also influenced policy; particularly because the African slaves brought to the region during the height of slavery generally outnumbered the

European settlers at ratios of approximately thirty to one in larger territories. Table 2.1, taken from the online article “Slavery and Economy in Barbados” by Dr. Karl Watson<sup>3</sup>, provides an example of this progression.

British society under the plantation system, therefore, was predominantly obsessed with maintaining control and making a profit. ‘All things African’ were systematically suppressed; especially language and communal organization and slaves were denied their most basic rights. In 1833 when slavery was officially abolished, the conditions under which the majority lived continued to be deplorable. However, to maintain the stronghold within the region, the British moved into a period of colonization, where they sought to establish ‘mini-Britains’ and to continue to enjoy the remaining economic spoils.

### **The Precursors to and Earliest Forms of Literacy and Literature**

**The oral tradition.** As previously noted, an intrinsic part of the plantation system was the active suppression of the culture, language and traditions of the African peoples who were captured and traded as slaves. Within this system also, there was no separate category for children; they were smaller adults whose value was ascribed as “potential usefulness to the workforce” (James, 2005, p.165). The absence of a familiar family structure and the need for some level of community, brought old and young together in the evenings on the plantation for the sharing of stories; a tradition which survived the transatlantic displacement. These stories were tales that were told in Africa, and in some cases, they were adapted to suit the new environment.<sup>4</sup> These were not, however, stories that were specifically intended for young listeners, which gave rise to creative manipulation of language and the storyteller’s employment of several linguistic devices such as the double-entendre, innuendo and wit; devices which

feature prominently in many forms of cultural expression to this day that contribute to what Abrahams (1983) described as a “West Indian aesthetic”.

Stories from many British territories were initially recorded through the incidental ‘ramblings’ of the casual travelers and the slightly-more astute journal-keepers who came to the region during the time of slavery and expansion. Towards the end of the 19th century and following the official proclamation of emancipation, however, noted American anthropologists/folklorists sought to actively collect and document these stories in order to reveal to their audiences “the dedicated and fabulous people through their stories” or to present the lore “for their simple narrative and entertainment value” (Flowers, 1980, “Preface” para. 3). Among some of the major published collectors were Elsie Clew Parsons, Martha Beckwith, Melville J. Herskovits and George E. Simpson.

**The introduction of formal education.** The second phase in the emergence of literacy and literature details the activities that led to the establishment of formal education from the end of slavery to the implementation of colonization. Prior to emancipation, missionaries were allowed to provide some literacy instruction to slaves and apprentices. With the advent of emancipation, the British settlers, confronted with the need to maintain control of their settlements and extend their empire, thought to build upon the missionary practices with the approval of the Negro Education Grant. This ushered in the age of colonialism and more specifically, the spread of English literacy through more formal means of education. What was once solely the domain of the planter class was now an exercise in ‘mass instruction’. Gordon (1963) explained that many slaves, ex-slaves and apprentices “in the first optimistic years of freedom” perceived this opportunity as “a means of establishing their credentials as self-respecting free men and women”.

Schools were nevertheless limited and continued to be largely run by missionaries. The curriculum assumed the form of religious instruction in English, in the hopes of preparing the ex-slave population for “an industrious, moral and well-ordered life in agricultural labour” (Gordon, 1963). At this time, many parents—at least those who were able to absorb the loss of income from their children’s labor—seized the opportunity to have their children receive instruction in the available day schools<sup>5</sup>. The knowledge acquired was then shared with the working adults within the community. Texts used for instruction included alphabets, primers, spelling books, bibles, prayer books, religious tracts, Watts psalms and hymns, catechisms, and special editions of the New Testament bound with the psalms; the learning method imposed was rote learning and memorization.

As time wore on, however, additional material was needed to fuel the demands of English instruction. Many of the stories, songs and riddles that were collected by foreign anthropologists and folklorists began to make their way into West Indian texts, which were designed more specifically for use with children. Critics maintain that the retellings “lacked the cultural and stylistic features that are inherent in their Creole orality” and emphasized alphabetic and functional literacy objectives encoded in Standard English (James, 2005). The most notable of these texts was produced by the Englishman, J.O. Cutteridge in the form of the Nelson West Indian Reader—a six volume series of reading textbooks which were first published in the mid-1920s and dominated the scene for three decades.

Established works of literature, enjoyed by and fashioned for children in Britain (and later from America, during and following the Second World War) were also readily available at this time to further supplement and promote the colonial perspective. The Caribbean children, who were essentially forced to absorb a world and culture completely alien to theirs, often

experienced a warped and confused sense of self and linguistic self-consciousness; as their faces were never seen and their voices never heard or expressed in the books and textbooks to which they were exposed. Novelist and educator Merle Hodge recalled her experiences growing up in colonial Trinidad:

[We] never saw ourselves in a book, so we didn't exist in any kind of way and our culture, our environment, our climate, the plants around us did not seem real, did not seem of any importance—we overlooked them entirely. The real world was what was in books.<sup>6</sup>

**The impetus of independence.** The third phase of this process was the transition of the British territories into independent states. Far from the desire of the British authorities, an aura of dissatisfaction with the unfairness of the colonial regime increased in volatility in the 1930s with the rise of the trade union movement, particularly in islands such as Trinidad and Jamaica. This period ultimately culminated in the avid campaign for self-governance. The earliest manifestation of this campaign came from the West Indian Federation, formed on January 3, 1958, a united political unit comprised of ten British territories: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, the then St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and Trinidad and Tobago.

When this unit failed to achieve sovereignty and disbanded in 1962<sup>7</sup>, it was left to each territory to achieve their objective; which they each systematically managed to do. The new dispensation of self-governance brought with it many challenges. Most of the colonial infrastructure remained, especially with regards to the groups in control of the majority of the resources, but there was an increased emphasis on education. The West Indian intellectuals of the time (many of whom acquired tertiary level education in the United Kingdom), believed that this was the most viable determinant of social and economic mobility.

Dr. Eric Williams, the first prime minister of the newly independent Trinidad and Tobago, was one of the region's leading proponents of a curriculum that considered the needs/vision of the West Indian citizen and the creation of a university that supported these needs. In his pre-independence speech in August, 1962, he pronounced to the children: "You carry the future of Trinidad and Tobago in your schoolbags."

Increased access to primary and secondary levels of schooling in the years following the acquisition of independence brought with it an increased sensitivity to the nature of the material that was being used for instruction. Some effort was made to revise the curriculum and to source or encourage the production of indigenous reading material. By 1972, for example, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) was established by an agreement among 15 Anglophone territories to create an internationally recognized secondary school level examination, comparable to the British equivalent that was in use up to that time. Issues of language were much more contentious to resolve, however, as English remained the official language of these territories, but an English-based Creole was the first language of the majority of these populations. Grenadian-born poet Merle Collins in her chapter "Writing and Creole Language Politics: Voice and Story" recalls:

Early in my existence, I knew that some people talked 'bad', deep Creole, and some talked 'good,' a lighter Creole or even English. When I entered pre-primary school, my teacher spoke English, although she also communicated in Creole sometimes. Whatever language she chose to communicate in, she made us young people aware that there was such a thing as 'proper' English, which wasn't the same as home English. (1998, p. 89)

Creole languages nevertheless found a place in the creative literature for adults and children, especially through the voices of its characters.

## **The Literature: Types, Themes and Trends**

### **Folktales**

It is indeed little surprise that the genre of folktales, originally for people of all ages, developed into one of the more ‘accessible’ outlets for writers who began to consider creating works specifically for children. These collections and re-tellings were very much a part of the creation of a West Indian identity. By reclaiming these tales, the writers were able to authenticate the ‘voice’ and more accurately and effectively pass on the traditions of forefathers and foremothers. James (2005) cites Paula Burnett’s assertion that “‘inevitably, where there is an oral tradition alongside a written tradition with literacy [as] the norm, distinctions become blurred and a good deal of cross-fertilization from one tradition to the other occurs” (p. 164).

Thematically, most West Indian folktales for children centered on Anansi the Spider man—often depicted as a no-good lazy trickster who possesses an uncanny ability to manipulate both the weaker and stronger creatures around him. This transplantation from West African folklore became even more ubiquitous in the West Indian context and assumed larger-than-life status within the oral tradition (Flowers, 1980). When initially employed by the colonial educators in their literacy ‘campaigns’; the character was used to demonstrate ‘how not to be’ (James, 2005).

In the later Creole context, Anansi was portrayed with much more humor and a ‘mental dexterity’ that was unparalleled. Commentators argued that these stories are far from simple narratives and are much more inherently allegorical, as the trickster is also occasionally, but ultimately, outwitted (Flowers, 1980). The repertoire nevertheless included other animal tale types and motifs (such as ‘Tar Baby and Rabbit’ and ‘The raven in borrowed feathers’) as well as creation stories, legends and ghost stories or ‘duppy tales’. One pioneer in this arena was Sir

Phillip M. Sherlock, a prominent Jamaican historian, educator and folklorist, who contributed at least 15 titles including *Anansi the Spider Man* (1954), *West Indian Folktales* (1966), and *Iguana's Tail: Crick Crack Stories from the Caribbean* (1969). He also formulated tales that were included in new readers; inevitably produced to supplement (or in some cases replace) the British texts that served as standard fare.

Andrew Salkey, another Jamaican and esteemed novelist—also considered to have forged the way for the formulation of Caribbean children's literature—employed the folk tradition in unique ways; having the ability to “approximate the spontaneity of the live storyteller in print form” (James, 2005; p. 166), as evident in his young adult novel *Anancy's Score* (1973); or weave folk material into his fiction reflective of contemporary Jamaican life at the time: *Hurricane* (1964); *Drought* (1966); *Riot* (1967) and *Jonah Simpson* (1969). Other writers, from Trinidad—in particular author and illustrator Albert Ramsawack who focused on “rural East Indian life” (James, 2005; p. 170), and other West Indian territories also began to add to this growing body of literature and its representation of the increasing diversity of the region.<sup>8</sup>

### **Fiction**

Although the folktale continued to occupy a prominent place in ‘school literature’, increasing availability and access to secondary education in the post-independence societies of Jamaica and Trinidad (after 1962) increased the demand for indigenous literature that could be used at this level. In response to the call, the works of adult writers were appropriated for use with younger audiences and subsumed into the new literary sphere. Trinidadian writers included: Michael Anthony, whose writing was semi-autobiographical in nature with many focusing on the life of a young male protagonist in Mayaro, Trinidad [*The Year in San Fernando* (1965); *Cricket in the Road* (1973); *Sandra Street and Other Stories* (1973); *Green Days by the River* (1973); *All*

*that Glitters* (1981)]. Another Trinidadian author, Merle Hodge, whose germinal, largely biographical coming of age novel *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) still resonates, and is used, with contemporary audiences.

Also from Trinidad were the master storyteller, Earl Lovelace, that creates riveting commentary about the conflict between traditions and ‘progress’ (*The Schoolmaster*, 1979) and Samuel Selvon, who specialized in bringing the West Indian culture and language to the fore, whether his novels were set at home or abroad [*The Lonely Londoners* (1972); *Moses Ascending* (1975); *Turn Again Tiger* (1979)]. These novels continued the discourse of identity, displacement (both physical and emotional) and provided a commentary on the more familiar, communal existence that pervaded. What was interesting and somewhat coincidental was the fact that in many of these books the main issues were explored from the perspective of adolescent (or younger) protagonists.

Creative writers in other spheres of literature wrote specifically for a younger audience. Among them: Jamaican-born C. Everard Palmer and his series of novels that explore rural life in Jamaica [*The Cloud with the Silver Lining* (1966); *Big Doc Bitterfoot* (1968); *The Sun Salutes You* (1970); *The Wooing of Beppo Tate* (1972); *The Hummingbird People* (1971); *A Dog Called Houdini* (1978); *Crab Hunt* (1980); *Beppo Tate and Roy Penner: The Runaway Marriage* (1980); *Houdini Came Home* (1981)]; Trinidadian newspaper editor, Therese Mills (*A Kite for Christmas*, 1974); Jamaican Linguistics professor Jean D’ Costa [*Sprat Morrison* (1972); *Escape to Last Man Peak* (1976); *Voice in the Wind* (1978) and Trinidadian-born, but American-raised, Rosa Guy who wrote “unflinchingly direct novels for young people about black life in urban America”<sup>9</sup>, examples of which are *The Friends*, (1973); *Edith Jackson*, (1979)]

Ironically, many of the aforementioned West Indian authors were either educated in or migrated to the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom at various times in their lives. They nevertheless managed to successfully ‘capture’ the fabric of Caribbean life by drawing on their personal experiences of life in a colonial setting. However, James (2005) believes that some were more successful than others in truly engaging in post-colonial discourse (which may or may not have been intentional on their part). For those who were unsuccessful or unwilling to do so, there was at times, a subtle or overt perpetuation of the “human villager with negative stereotypical features”. She elaborates:

It can only be surmised how much British colonial schooling has contributed to this poor self-image and disrespect for regional identity. In the early development of children’s books, ambivalence about the portrayal of the folk prevailed...But the negative representations of folk never really abated. In the 1970s, detachment, mock-indulgence, and semi ridicule in the portrayal of folk deepened to an ambivalent endearment, alongside humour of a different sort. (2005, p. 168)

In spite of these justified criticisms, the world of Caribbean children’s literature was certainly moving towards reflecting the world of Caribbean children with a marked increase in publishing throughout the 1970s (when publishing dates are considered). Possible factors that accounted for this, as previously mentioned, include the new state of independence and the desire for relevant educational material; and the increased publishing for children in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. [See Appendix F – Bibliography of Caribbean children’s literature from 1950-1989]

## **Poetry**

Another obvious by-product of the oral tradition was, and still is, the preponderance of poetry. The songs, proverbs, riddles and games that are so much a part of early childhood in the West Indies, found a willing outlet in children’s publishing. Initially, however, they remained components of the readers and primers and anthologies for secondary schools (that were

constantly being introduced and revised), and really were not found in trade book collections until the late eighties, early nineties through the works of poets like John Agard [*Say it Again Granny!*, 1990; *No Hickory, No Dickory and No Dock* (1991)]; Grace Hallworth (*Down by the River*, 1994) and James Berry (*Isn't My Name Magical?*, 1990).

### **Other Publishing Formats and Types**

From an inspection of older works for children, the following observations were made: illustrations were often used in the earlier books for children—especially Anansi stories, but usually these were confined to line drawings in black ink. Color and gloss paper spreads were rare and even the binding used was questionable. Again, because of what appeared to be the greater emphasis on academic texts, regional publishers opted for lower cost and quality and higher yield; almost ignoring the need for aesthetic appeal. For the few local authors or for those living in the ‘developed’ world in the 1980s, these constraints were less significant; although there continued to be a marked difference between books designated as West Indian and those from the United States, Canada or the United Kingdom. Coloring books, comic books, and general non-fiction round out the gamut, but were produced in far less quantities for reasons that either reflected ‘deference’ to the foreign products or a lack of interest on the part of local writers and producers.

### **The Present Landscape**

The conditions that sparked the need to create a ‘new voice’, in the midst of the many imposing ones, and to ensure that a requisite sense of self and belonging was communicated to Caribbean children still exist in residual colonial structures (competitive entrance examinations, socio-economic and racial stratification) and new forms of neo-colonial imposition through greater access to various forms of media originating beyond the region (cable TV, video games,

the Internet and social media). The use and perceptions of the existing literature is limited and the availability and variety, even more so, as Hodge (1990) notes:

One of the reasons why Caribbean literature has not yet fully invaded the school curriculum is that there is not a sufficient body of good fiction suitable for all age groups. Children in secondary school are exposed to Caribbean literature that is aimed at an adult audience; and at the primary school level, teachers seeking to bring Caribbean literature into the curriculum tend to rely heavily on folktales. (p. 207-208)

It is not an exaggeration, therefore, to state that Caribbean Children's literature still has a very long way to go.

### **Constructions of the Contemporary Caribbean Child**

The extent to which Caribbean children's literature succeeds at speaking to or reflecting the lives of contemporary Caribbean children depends on the author's conception/understanding of the state of childhood throughout the region. One point of entry that allows us to glean a modicum of understanding of the contemporary landscape is to briefly examine the statistical and policy data across nations in an attempt to contextualize the life of the child within the ambiguity and heterogeneity of the 'Caribbean'. Since doing so comprehensively would require another dissertation, commonalities and averages will be summarized, with a greater focus on Trinidad & Tobago in each of the key areas such as population, literacy and education, economic activity, social issues, and technology and media.

**Population.** The contemporary definition of the Anglophone Caribbean encompasses 17 countries. In keeping with the delineations noted earlier in the chapter, these countries are divided into 12 independent nations (Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago), and five (5) dependent territories (Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Turks & Caicos Islands). According to the statistics provided

by the *Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook*<sup>10</sup>, the total population of these islands combined is approximately 6,527,338 (an average of 383,961 per country).

Jamaica (2,889,187), Trinidad & Tobago (1,226,383), and Guyana (741,908) are among the larger land masses and consequently the most populated countries; while Anguilla (15,423) and Montserrat (5164)—following the devastation caused by the volcanic eruption in July, 2003—are among the lowest. It is worth noting that 51.1% of the total population across the 17 nations lives in urban areas (as defined by the country).

Demographically, approximately 68.75% of the population of 16 countries identifies as black or of African descent (no numerical breakdown was available for Montserrat but the composition was described as 'black' and 'white'). 'Mixed' was the second largest racial group at 13.18%; East Indian at 5.8%; white at 3.5%; 'other' at 3.25%; while Mestizo, Mayan, Garifuna (all from Belize) and Amerindians (in Dominica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Guyana) comprise 4.93%.

As a subset of the total population, children (defined by the statistical source as ages 0 to 14 years) account for approximately 27% or 1,759,631 (895,118 males and 864,513 females). It follows that Jamaica (863,271), Trinidad & Tobago (238,903), and Guyana (237,635) also have the largest concentration of children. However, while children comprise over 30% of the population in Guyana and Jamaica, they comprise only 19.5% of the total population of Trinidad & Tobago; a ratio that can have implication for expenditure and services provided to children in the different contexts. As a predictor of population growth, the average birth rate among all countries is 15.29/1,000. In this area, Belize leads the pack with 26.02 live births per 1,000 persons, while Jamaica (18.89/1000) and Turks & Caicos (17.44/1000) have the second and third

highest rates respectively. Countries with the lowest birth rate, which will still accounts for steady growth, are Montserrat (11.62/1000) and British Virgin Islands (10.69/1000).

Conversely, infant mortality is a significant concern at an average rate of 14.51 deaths per 1,000 live births across the 17 countries (a difference of 0.78/1000); with extremes in Guyana at the highest end of the spectrum (35.59/1000) and the Cayman Islands (6.49/1000) at the lower end. When these statistics are contrasted with the percentage of health expenditure (at an average rate of 6.25% of the Gross Domestic Product or GDP for the region), there is no clear correlation between what is spent on healthcare and the rate of infant mortality. However in countries like Belize, it is not difficult to extrapolate that a health expenditure amount of 3.3% of GDP might be a contributing factor to the infant mortality rate of 21.37 deaths/1,000 live births. The average life expectancy across the Anglophone countries is 74.7 years.

**Literacy and education.** According to calculations based on the statistical data provided by the *CIA Factbook* (2012), the average percentage of literacy across the total population of the Anglophone Caribbean is 93.9%. Barbados (99.7%), Trinidad & Tobago (98.6%), Turks & Caicos and the Cayman Islands (both at 98%) are above the average, while Jamaica (87.9%), Antigua & Barbuda (85.8%), and Belize (76.9%) are significantly below average. In all but one case, literacy is defined as “age 15 and over [who] has ever attended school”. (In Anguilla, it is defined as “age 12 and over who can read and write”.) Generally, there is no disparity between the levels of male and female literacy, as they are either identical in number or the latter exceeds the former by a few percentage points. However, in Jamaica, the gender divide is at its widest, with a male literacy rate of 84.1% and a female one of 91.6%.

Since most definitions of literacy are linked to formal schooling, another important statistical average to note would be what the *Factbook* refers to as “School Life Expectancy”

(SLE) which is “the total number of years of schooling (primary to tertiary) that a child can expect to receive, assuming that the probability of his or her being enrolled in school at any particular future age is equal to the current enrollment at that age”. For the Anglophone Caribbean, the average SLE is 15 years which, given the most common educational model in the Caribbean would be equivalent to 7 years of elementary school; 5-7 years of secondary school –5 for the completion of O’ Level (Ordinary level) examinations; an additional 2 years for the completion of A’ Level (Advanced level) examinations as well; and/or 1-3 years of tertiary level education (A’ level qualifications are required for university enrollment while other technical vocational or paraprofessional programs require only O’ Level qualifications).

Inextricably tied to literacy and SLE is the total education expenditure of each country as a percentage of the GDP. On average, this is 4.92% across 15 countries (no data is provided for The Bahamas and Turks & Caicos); with St. Kitts & Nevis ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the world at the rate 9.6% of GDP. The literacy rate in St. Kitts & Nevis is 97.8% and the SLE is 13 years. The Cayman Islands on the other hand, has an expenditure of 2.6% of GDP (ranked 145<sup>th</sup> in the world); a literacy rate of 98% and a SLE of 12 years. Of course, to make complete sense of the numbers, one would also have to have a more thorough understanding of the nuances of their education systems and their total GNP. Since the Cayman Islands remain a British dependency, as will all such territories, they are less likely to have control over their expenditure in many areas of governance.

**Economic and social issues.** A quick review of the data provided on economic activity in each of the islands reveals that tourism is by far the leading industry in approximately 14 countries. More surprising is the prevalence and increasing contributions of offshore financial services to the GDP of at least 10 countries. Agriculture has played a progressively smaller role

in the earning power of these countries but features somewhat prominently in the exports of Belize (citrus, sugar, bananas); Dominica (bananas); and Guyana. Trinidad is the outlier in the group as it is considered to be a major investment site for the manufacturing and petrochemical industry due to its reserves of oil and natural gas. The average unemployment rate across all 17 countries is approximately 11.3%<sup>11</sup>. Countries with the highest unemployment rate include Grenada (25%), Dominica (20%), and St. Lucia (20%), while those with the lowest rates are St. Kitts & Nevis (4.5%), Cayman Islands (4%), and the British Virgin Islands (3.6%).

Poverty is a significant issue in many of these countries and the average rate of persons living below the poverty line of 13 countries (no data was available for the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, and Turks & Caicos) is approximately 24.71%<sup>12</sup>. The most extreme cases of poverty are evident in Belize (43%), Grenada (38%), St. Vincent & the Grenadines (37.5%), and Guyana (35%). The Bahamas is the only country (for which data is provided) with poverty levels significantly below the average at 9.3%. Coupled with levels of poverty are issues of illicit drug trafficking and use, as all 17 countries are implicated as major or minor transshipment points (according to the *CIA Factbook*) for a range of narcotics and cannabis mainly from South America en route to the U.S. and Europe.

**Technology and media.** Given the ubiquity of mobile technology and the Internet in this the digital information age, statistical data was also culled from the *Factbook* on the number of mobile users, Internet users, and broadcast media houses. In a surprising twist, the total number of registered mobile subscribers across the 17 countries is approximately 7,482,400, which exceeds the total population of these countries by 955,062 users. In Trinidad & Tobago alone, mobile users comprise 154.43% of the population. One possible reason for such a skewed statistic is the presence of two telephone companies; one state-owned and for many, many years

maintained its monopoly on the market and the other a regionally dominant company that eventually made its way into the market (much to the chagrin of the former). Since their competition for market share has been plagued by licensing and inter-connectivity issues, most mobile phone users have two phones—one from each company. Overall, there appears to be no dearth of mobile technology in the Anglophone region. Whether or not the infrastructure and capabilities are comparable with the “4G” world is an area of investigation that is beyond the scope of this brief overview.

Internet usage appears to be much more limited than mobile technology as the total for the region is approximately 3,089,200, which is just under half (47%) of the total population. Invariably this gives rise to issues of information access and global competitiveness in this arena (for example, e-commerce, e-governance, and so on). It may also have direct implications for the education and preparation of youth in the area of computer and information technology. If however, most citizens are able to obtain access to the Internet through their mobile phones (which I have no way of confirming), this might account for the relatively low rate and ameliorate some of the other effects. Part of the reason could also be the nature of the dominant industry and reluctance on the part of the older members of the population to embrace the technology.

Finally, most countries have terrestrial, government-owned or privately owned television and radio stations (approximately 36 of the former). In areas where no such television station exists (as in Dominica, Montserrat, and Turks & Caicos), cable and/or satellite TV subscriptions are available there and in the majority of the other territories. Guyana is the only country among the 17 where cable TV is not available. One consequence of this pervasive phenomenon is a strong familiarity with American society, as represented in the broadcast media, which could

possibly exert an undue influence on Caribbean youth exposed to this form of media, leading them to identify with a culture and habits outside of their own; wanting products and services that might not be readily available; and confusion about their self-identity as Caribbean youth<sup>13</sup>. This effect is somewhat assuaged with the presence of consistent and prolific local programming in each country; again, this has not yet been addressed in existing research that I have encountered.

### **The Case of Trinidad & Tobago**

In recognition of the issues, challenges, needs, and potential of children, the Ministry of Social Development (2006) of Trinidad & Tobago has developed a policy document entitled *National Plan of Action for Children 2006-2010* which identifies and prioritizes four areas for “action”:

- Promoting healthy lives by addressing issues related to: infant and under-five mortality such as gaps in immunization, poor identification of high-risk problems during the perinatal period; child malnutrition and low birth weight; and child and adolescent health (2006, p. 14-32)
- Providing quality education by: expanding and improving early childhood care and education; increasing attendance and enrollment at primary and secondary schools; improving safety and security to reduce incidences of violence in schools; meeting special needs in the mainstream education system; and creating access to health and family life education, values education, non-formal educational opportunities; and parenting education (2006, p. 34-55).
- Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence by codifying and enforcing laws affecting children and families; increasing services such as counseling, monitoring of

homes, sensitizing and educating the public through lectures, programs, and radio broadcasts; formalizing foster care; examining children in institutions; reviewing existing policy with regards to children in conflict with the law; and preventing and eliminating the worst forms of child labor (2006, p. 57-73)

- Combating HIV/AIDS by: developing and implementing national policy to build and strengthen support systems; reducing the proportion of infants infected with HIV by at least 50%; and strengthening strategies of educating and guiding children (2006, p. 75-79)

Emphasis on these areas was derived from careful investigation and research and, as stated, reflects the significant challenges a child could potentially face. Unfortunately, there is little found on the positive aspects of children's lives in policy or anecdotally.

Perusal of the programme of presentations at a 2009 conference organized by the Department of Liberal Arts of The University of the West Indies, and held in St. Augustine, Trinidad, titled "First They Must Be Children: The Child and the Caribbean Imagi/Nation", again showed that much of the emphasis seemed to be on the "traumatic", "troubling", "marginalized", "problematic", "violent" spheres of childhood in the region and the literature produced by adults for adults. In very few panels and papers was there any mention of the creativity, vibrancy, interests, or abilities of the child in reality or in its literary counterpart<sup>14</sup>. It seems that advocacy on behalf of children should focus equally on 'righting the wrongs' AND telling the stories of what we get right.

### **The Role of the Library in Connecting Children with Books**

On the other hand, children's librarians are perfectly poised to inspire, direct, document, and disseminate the 'positive' stories of children throughout the region, and particularly in

Trinidad and Tobago. When the state-of-the-art Port of Spain Children's Library, and the other state-of-the-art libraries housed in the National Library building, opened its doors to the public in 2003, there was a general aura of awe and wonder but no clear sense, in the minds of the general citizenry, of the role and potential of this library. Although public library services were introduced in the capital city as early as 1891, its subsequent progression was fragmented and disparate at best as services were governed by three distinct organizations, the Public Library Service, the Carnegie Free Library, and the Central Library Service attached to the Ministry of Education.

The National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS) was established in 1998 and charged with the task of "integrating the existing library services"<sup>15</sup> Under new governance and a flagship library building, the population of library goers, especially children, gradually increased if only out of curiosity, the promise of air-conditioning, and the promise of free access to computer technology. On the most recent promotional brochures available on the NALIS website, the 'promise' is that children from birth to twelve (12) can:

- Discover fun ways to learn
- Become familiar with books
- Learn to read
- Develop social skills
- Become computer literate
- Develop healthy expression

The range of children's services highlighted to accomplish these objectives include: access to books and other materials (examples given are board books, picture books, chapter books, audio books, games, CDs and DVDs, books in different languages, Caribbean books,

books on local folklore, Braille books, fiction and nonfiction); available programs and activities (specified as storytelling, arts and craft, computer literacy classes, baby lapsits, book clubs, group tours, vacation reading programmes [sic], Internet services, and photocopying services); and free access to technology (in the form of free Internet access, wireless access, software applications, and databases).

The current lending policy allows for young cardholders to borrow up to six (6) books at one time for a period of 28 days; two (2) items from the audio visual collection at one time for up to 4 days; and Braille books (no number specified) for up to 28 days. In order to obtain a card, the child's parent or guardian must complete a registration form and present the child's birth certificate, a passport sized photograph, and proof of address to a member of staff at the library. In spite of the fact that there is a definitive vision and structures in place to provide exemplary service, its implementation is only as successful as the professional practitioners charged with the task, a big part of which is capturing the attention of the child long enough to encourage his or her potential.

Children whose parents can afford it, have the option of purchasing books from one of the many bookstore chains throughout the country (at cost of anywhere between TT \$ 45.00/US \$7.00 to TT \$120.00/US \$19.00) thereby reducing the necessity to visit the library to obtain books. Computer access has become more available through the school system with a government initiative to supply laptops free of charge to 11 and 12-year olds entering secondary schools, which many children use for personal rather than academic reasons, reducing the appeal of computer access at the library.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, many children are enrolled in supplementary classes at the end of the school day to prepare them for the compulsory secondary entrance

examination, and those who are not are exposed to a plethora of other distractions, both positive and negative, that can potentially command their attention.

### **Conclusion**

This brief overview of the history and present state of the Anglophone Caribbean, its people; the emergence and access of its literature; and the often documented ‘problematic’ state of children in the region, merely hints at the complexity and subsequent ‘impossibility’ in truly delineating the most accurate description and representation of this context. Much has been written and said in some areas, yet so much remains unsaid and unwritten in others.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that the ensuing discussion captures and sheds more light on what is being written for children, what they think of it, and the ways in which this dynamic is formed and informed by the unique characteristics and constraints evident in the region, and more specifically, Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Table**

Table 2.1: Reproduction of table showing the shift in population in Barbados during slavery

| Year | White  | %   | Black  | %   |
|------|--------|-----|--------|-----|
| 1629 | 1800   | 97% | 50     | 03% |
| 1643 | 37,200 | 86% | 6000   | 14% |
| 1684 | 23,624 | 34% | 46,502 | 66% |
| 1724 | 19,295 | 25% | 55,206 | 75% |
| 1786 | 16,167 | 21% | 62,115 | 79% |

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<sup>1</sup> The Bahamas is not strictly considered to be a Caribbean territory now because of its geographical position.

<sup>2</sup> Cited from the British National Archives' overview to the exhibit on "Caribbean Histories Revealed", <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/caribbeanhistory/slavery-negotiating-freedom.htm>

<sup>3</sup> This article was accessed on August 11, 2012 from BBC History online: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire\\_seapower/barbados\\_01.shtml#three](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/barbados_01.shtml#three)

<sup>4</sup> Usually there were noticeable changes for flora and fauna.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon (1963) elaborated that in the last days of slavery, parents purchased freedom for their children to ensure that they were able to continue with daytime schooling.

<sup>6</sup> Quotation from a radio interview that was later cited in Gerschel, Liz. (1988). "Merle Hodge: Crick Crack Monkey". *A Handbook for Teaching Caribbean Literature*. Ed. David Dabydeen. London: Heinemann, 71-85.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Caricom Secretariat, there were a number of reasons for the demise of the federation. "These included: the governance and administrative structures imposed by the British; disagreements among the territories over policies, particularly with respect to taxation and central planning; an unwillingness on the part of most Territorial Governments to give up power to the Federal Government; and the location of the Federal Capital." Source: [http://www.caricom.org/jsp/community/west\\_indies\\_federation.jsp?menu=community](http://www.caricom.org/jsp/community/west_indies_federation.jsp?menu=community)

<sup>8</sup> Most notably, Kenneth Parmasad's collection *Salt and Roti: Indian Tales of the Caribbean* – a first collection. Trinidad, 1984

<sup>9</sup> Fox, M. (2012). Rosa Guy, 89, Author of forthright novels for young people. New York Times obituary: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/07/books/rosa-guy-89-author-of-forthright-novels-for-young-people.html>

<sup>10</sup> The World Factbook can be accessed through: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

<sup>11</sup> Percentages given are from various years ranging from 1997 to 2011.

<sup>12</sup> No data was available in the CIA Factbook for nine countries. Percentages for St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Barbados, Antigua & Barbuda, and the British Virgin Islands was obtained from ECLAC statistics cited in the report "Nutrition, Gender and Poverty in the Caribbean Subregion" published on 18 December 2006: <http://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/2/27672/1.105.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> This is an extrapolation and gross oversimplification based on the history of U.S. imperialism in the region and anecdotal evidence of the effect of the U.S. media on the typical Trinidadian child.

<sup>14</sup> These presentations fell under the panels: "Carnival Children: Performance and Industry" and "Voicing the Child: Making Stories"

<sup>15</sup> Source: Annual Report to CDNL 2002-2003 delivered by the first Executive Director of NALIS, Pamela Benson [Word Document]

<sup>16</sup> One article written by Asbida Allaham declares it the "Free laptops nightmare". The article was published on June 11, 2011 in the Trinidad Express: [http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Free\\_laptops\\_nightmare\\_-123700084.html](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Free_laptops_nightmare_-123700084.html)

## CHAPTER 3

### THE COLLECTION: CHARACTERISTICS

The collection evaluation process took place on-site at the Port of Spain Children's Library over a period of four weeks, from Monday to Friday between the normal operating hours of the library: 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.<sup>1</sup> As this was the busiest time of year for a children's library—the month of July—I was able to observe the collection in 'action' and note a range of activities associated with its maintenance and use, such as the daily shelving routine; patron use, etcetera. The data collection process specifically consisted of the physical inspection of each title in the collection; direct observation of its use by patrons of the library; interviews with various librarians and library associates connected to the collection (in particular its development and use); as well as an analysis of any related documents to which I was given access. Needless to say, the physical examination of the items was the most 'involved' part of the process and the results were constrained by what was on the shelves at any given time, as opposed to items that may be listed in the official catalog records but were checked out, or new items that were not yet checked in to the collection.<sup>2</sup>

For each item examined, I recorded the following information into an electronic database: title; author, illustrator; copyright year; genre; sub-genre or type; publisher; place of publication; binding; number of pages; call number; edition; International Standard Book Number (ISBN); date of purchase; place of purchase; purchase price; number of copies; additional notes (including synopses, website addresses etc.). I scheduled and conducted interviews with four members of staff: the Executive Director of the library system; the Librarian I assigned to the POS Children's Library; one of the systems librarians assigned to the Network and Information

Systems department; and the Librarian I responsible for the acquisition of West Indian materials. Questions asked were specific to the WIJ collection; some devised prior to the shelf inspection and others that arose during the course of the inspection. [See Appendix D – Questions for Practitioners]. In this chapter, I will discuss the location, composition and characteristics of the collection; the information/feedback obtained from practitioners; and the observations made with regards to its usage and promotion (in that order).

## **Physical Inspection**

### **Location of the Collection**

The WIJ collection has occupied three different sites within the POS Children’s Library since its opening in 2001. Initially, it occupied one shelving unit positioned against the wall of the Parent-Teacher-Librarian (PTL) Room just off to the left of the designated area for babies and toddlers. From 2008 to mid 2011, it was prominently positioned to the right of the main circulation desk; making it evident to everyone who entered the library [See Figure 3.1]. The new location, however, is the least ‘intuitive’ one, which could have an impact on finding the collection easily.

As one enters through the main door, one must proceed directly ahead, traversing the width of the library. The shelves are arranged to the left of a group of computer carrels—which appear to no longer be in use for that purpose—and are closest to the first of two reference desks in library —also not used for the intended purpose. The identity of the collection is also obscured by its closeness to the Spanish language collection, and the noticeable absence of any clear, hanging signage. [See Figure 3.3] Prior to the move to this location, the entire WIJ collection occupied one shelving unit with three shelves. With this move, the collection is now more evenly spaced, occupying three shelving units: one ‘free standing’ unit with four shelves for non-fiction

and two ‘supported’ units (positioned against the wall), with three shelves each, housing the fiction collection. The on-shelf signage, however, gave no indication of this new arrangement [See Figures 3.4 and 3.5].

### **Classification and Scope**

After identifying and subsequently eliminating a number of items that were inadvertently filed in the juvenile collection but were labeled for the adult library as well as those that were classified as ‘WIJ’ on the spine label but were clearly meant for the adult library by virtue of their format and content, I counted a total of 302 discrete titles. According to the shelving arrangement and the Dewey classification system employed, 146 of those titles were categorized as works of fiction and 156 as works of non-fiction. Items labeled as reference (non-circulating), of which there were 21 (three fiction titles and eighteen non-fiction titles), were interfiled with circulating items as opposed to being grouped separately on the shelves.

On the spine labels, fiction was further sub-divided into ‘WI E’ for easy readers (three titles) and ‘WI J’ for general fiction (142 titles). One title included in the final tally, however, bore the label WI F, indicating that it was a general work of fiction that should have been shelved in the adult library. Because the author of this work, James Berry, writes for both children and adults, it is unclear whether this selection was deemed appropriate for upper level users of the collection, hence the retention, or whether it was simply there in error. The range of formats and types of fiction included will be discussed later in this section and more fully in chapter four.

The non-fiction end of the spectrum covered a range of twenty-one (21) Dewey categories (preceded by the WI J marker). Table 3.1 approximates the range of Dewey categories represented in the collection. Unsurprisingly, folklore and poetry were well represented in this

section (a combined total of 35% of the non-fiction selections), as were informational history books (14%). The somewhat limited coverage in other areas, in terms of categories and title counts, seemed to be consistent with the publication trends noted in chapter two, as well as the overall emphasis on textbook publishing.

In some cases, there appeared to be quite a number of alternatives that would perhaps not be as intuitive to the casual observer. To exemplify: the title *Jim Braithwaite: Entrepreneur* was classified both as a biography, which it is, and also under the category of business/money in the social sciences, which reflected the subject's field of endeavor, which is not typical of the titles one would expect to find in this category (perhaps in keeping with current classification trends), but there was also no consistency to this pattern.

Apart from the shelving and classification distinctions, I found it useful to distinguish among the variety of formats and types across classification categories in order to gain a better sense of the foci of publishing in Caribbean literature and to ascertain whether or not these align with trends and recognized appeal factors in the wider world of children's publishing. [Table 3.2 summarizes the major formats identified.]

Picture books outnumbered any other format/sub-type at 91 titles, with an understandable dearth in board books (possibly due to the extensive general collection of board books and the expected age of the child who would consult the WIJ collection); coloring books; handbooks; and workbooks. Most of the titles designated as picture books met the requisite criteria of being approximately 32 pages long (or up to 48 to 64 pages), although, in some cases, they were much shorter, but contained a pictorial narrative as well as a textual one. To delineate its composition even further, there were 62 picture storybooks, classified and shelved in the fiction section; ten (10) folktales in picture book format; five (5) titles classified as poetry, rhymes and songs; six (6)

filed under the Dewey category of ‘Language Arts’; four (4) picture book biographies; and five (4) titles spread across four Dewey non-fiction categories (animals, music, social sciences, and writing systems). The literary content of the picture storybooks will be discussed in chapter 4.

As within the wider world of children’s literature, picture books are not to be confused with illustrated books, which contain, according to Van Orden and Strong’s (2004) definition, “occasional illustrations [that] serve a decorative purpose rather than extending the text” (p. 65). I identified 30 titles—20 fiction and 10 non-fiction—that fit the definition above, although quite a few of them (approximately two thirds) may have been originally conceived as picture books, but by virtue of being self-published works they invariably fell short of that goal. I thought it best also to not include illustrated chapter books and collections (of folktale, poetry or short stories) in the category of ‘illustrated book’ as the aforementioned descriptors seemed more accurate.

Overall, collections/compilations comprised 52 titles across fiction and non-fiction, with 12 designated as fiction and 40 as non-fiction. The fiction offerings consisted of six illustrated titles that could have potentially been classified as folktales or were ‘folk-tale inspired’ in subject and form; and six titles without illustrations that seemed most appropriate for older independent readers.<sup>3</sup> At 20 titles, folktales were by far the most common type of illustrated collection found in non-fiction. I noted one title that was not illustrated, and apart from its name *Pappi Pappi Please Read Me a Story*, there was nothing else to imply that the work was intended for children. Poetry was the second most prevalent type of collection at 13 titles, with religious stories (3); miscellaneous writings (2 anthologies of stories and poetry); music (1); and rhymes and games (1) rounding out the offerings.

In the area of fiction chapter books: there were considerably fewer titles than I anticipated for a dedicated collection of this size. These publishing trends to eschew fiction for elementary

aged children in favor of folktales and picture books are hardly surprising, as noted in my commentary in chapter 2. This trend certainly holds true in our analysis thus far. Consequently, of the 28 chapter books identified, 12 of them were illustrated, indicating that they could be more accurately described as early chapter books or transitional books; leaving 16 titles that can be primarily categorized as fiction for older children. In chapter four, we will discuss these assumptions further.

On the other hand, controlled vocabulary or graded readers appeared to be the ‘creative space’ where fiction writing now seeks to find a natural home. The preponderance of these readers type seemed to be indicative of yet another trend; the educational ‘slant’ that writing for children in the Caribbean commonly assumes. The 41 titles identified were representative of eight reading series published in five different regions; four from the United Kingdom—*Get Caught Reading* (5), *Hop, Step, Jump* (12), *Ready Go* (4), and *Cambridge Reading Series* (2); one from Jamaica— the *Doctor Bird Reading Series* (4); one from the United States—*Read and Share* (1); One from Suriname—*Children’s Reading Fun* (2); and one self-published series from Trinidad—*Hop Along* (11). One thing I found curious about these books was the classification decisions, and by extension, shelving choices made.

Twenty-four titles were classified by the author’s last name and shelved in the fiction section; while 16 were designated WI J 428.2, suggesting that the focus is on the structure and use of Standard English. One was classified according to the subject matter of the stories, cricket, with the designation WI J 796.358. Looking more closely at the distinctions made between those shelved in fiction and nonfiction, I realized that all of the titles in the *Hop Along* series, at least, focused primarily on early phonetic and spelling development. [See Table 3.3] However, in the case of the six anomalies noted, five of them were titles of series also filed in fiction, and the one

with no counterpart in the fiction section was not comparable in content to the aforementioned *Hop Along* series.

Lastly, within the nonfiction section, trade books and textbooks complete the collection. The former books, by their very nature, primarily encompassed the majority of information titles—i.e. “books written to inform, to lead the child from a fact or facts to a concept or principle”, (Van Orden & Strong, 2004, p.149)—across the following Dewey categories: biography (5); customs (4); ecology (1); English usage (1); food and drink (1); geography (2); history (18); libraries (1); medicine/health (2); music (1); religion (1); social sciences (4); and sports (3). The latter type comprised titles related to education (2); history (2); English usage (1); religion (2); and miscellaneous writings (1).

### **Currency of the Collection**

The National Library was opened to the public in 2002, so the WIJ collection, like the wider collection, is a relatively current one; i.e. physically acquired over the last decade. Closer inspection of the publication dates, however, revealed 97 titles that were published prior to the year 2000, with one dating as far back as 1956. This number accounts for 32.2 percent of the collection, and is comprised mainly of fiction (in chapter and picture book format); folktales; some poetry; and other categories of non-fiction that relate to religion, history, sports, and customs; in essence, items that are not necessarily required to be up-to-date.

Based on what was found on the shelves, during the year 2000 to 2010 (which was the most recent date of publication noted), there was a reasonably steady average of 20 published titles per year (with a low of two in 2008 and a high of 29 in 2006). Thirty-three percent of the collection was acquired during 2002 and 2003—which coincided with the opening of the

library—with acquisition ‘spurts’ occurring in 2005 (49) and 2007 (63). [These and other numbers are summarized in Tables 3.4. and 3.5]

### **Publishers and Authors**

Despite the fact that most titles either contained the word “Caribbean” or explored some theme, images, or characterization, etcetera related to the Caribbean, it became quite obvious during the examination of titles the bulk of publishing took place outside of the Caribbean region. Items published outside of the region originated from 70 publishing houses or printing presses located in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, representing a combined total of 140 authors. These numbers are in stark contrast to the 26 publishing/printing presses representing 54 authors across five regions of the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada and Suriname; Table 3.6 summarizes these numbers.

These numbers are hardly surprising when again we consider the significant waves of post-world war II migration from the West Indies to the ‘mother country’ England—commonly termed ‘colonization in reverse’<sup>4</sup>, which together with subsequent waves of migration to the United States and Canada, resulted in the creation of a Caribbean Diaspora. These ‘transposed’ authors in an effort to address the inequalities faced by West Indians in the metropolis were compelled to produce texts for the first and second generation children born into these societies (which often included the tendency to romanticize their former lives in the West Indies) (Sands-O’Connor, 2008).

Additionally, the general disinterest of regional publishers (especially in Trinidad) in literature for children, forces authors who reside in the Caribbean to either self-publish or solicit foreign publishers. In terms of the number of titles in the collection, the ratios are roughly the same [See Figure 3.7]. As can be noted from the graph, a moderate 32% of the items in the

collection originated in the Caribbean, with 60 items from Trinidad; 27 from Jamaica; and a combined total of six from Barbados (3), Grenada (1), and Suriname (2). By contrast, 134 titles from the United Kingdom; 54 from the United States and 19 from Canada constituted the remaining 68% of items in the collection. Let us now take a closer look at the publishing houses and most prolific authors across these locations.

**Publishing in the United Kingdom.** Of the 26 publishers represented in the collection, the most dominant by far was Macmillan. Not only did Macmillan account for 66 titles in all of its iterations: Macmillan Education (53), Macmillan Caribbean (11 titles); and Macmillan Children’s Books (2), but that number alone exceeds the total publishing output from all other countries. [See Figure 3.7] According to its website, this long-standing company (150 years) has built a global reputation by working with “local teachers, students, institutions and educational authorities to develop high-quality course books, supplementary materials and digital products to suit the needs of classrooms around the world.” In fact, they pride themselves on being “global publishers with a local presence”. Macmillan Caribbean, founded in 1843, is touted as being the “world’s leading publisher for the Caribbean.” Their offices are located in London, Basingstoke and Oxford with local representatives, distributors, and editors throughout the Caribbean region.

The focus of Macmillan Caribbean is divided into two major publishing areas, ‘educational’ books (that can be used in classroom instruction) and ‘general interests’ books (that can supplement the curriculum). These two areas are further divided into twelve subject areas: art; biography and autobiography; children’s story books; children’s picture books; fiction, literature and poetry; food and drink; guides; general interest and reference; history; natural history; photography; maps and atlases. However, not all of these areas are reflected in the WIJ collection, as the titles that fall under some categories are more relevant for use in schools or

target the young adult audience. When compared to the designations on the Macmillan catalog, the titles that are included fall into the areas of:

- a. Picture books (29 in total including 21 storybooks, two concept books, three poetry books; and one folktale; one collection of sheet music; and one illustrated book—my assessment);
- b. Children’s story books (34 altogether including 16 leveled readers from the *Hop, Step, Jump* and *Ready, Go* series; ten chapter books; six folktale collections; two anthologies)
- c. General interest and reference (*the book World Class: An Illustrated History of Caribbean Football*);
- d. Educational textbooks for the primary level (one copy of the textbook *Caribbean Social Studies*)
- e. One title that is no longer in the Macmillan catalog, classified in the WIJ collection as a history book, but one that I would more accurately describe as an art book, *Bequia Reflections: An Artist in the Caribbean*.

Other publishing houses within the U.K. with more than four titles in the WIJ collection appear to be similarly varied in scope. According to the websites, Heinemann (seven fiction titles and five non-fiction) and Pearson-Longman (two fiction titles and four non-fiction titles) are committed to providing quality fiction that can be used in English Language instruction, while Tamarind (one fiction title and seven non-fiction titles—all biographies though not classified accordingly) and Frances Lincoln (two fiction titles; one folktale collection) express a commitment to increasing diversity in children’s books; in the former case, its tag line is “see yourself in books”. Puffin Books (two fiction titles and four non-fiction titles—all poetry) is dedicated to making “children into readers”.

Macmillan also accounts for 41 (51%) of the 81 published authors in the United Kingdom; nine of whom have two or more published works with the company: Sir Philip M. Sherlock, noted author and scholar (3); Valerie Bloom—poet and novelist of Jamaican birth (4); C. Everard Palmer—one of the first Jamaican writers for children (6); picture book authors Peter Laurie (3) and Nancy Rogers Yaeger (2); illustrator Frane Lessac (2); and authors Joanne Johnson (5) and Barbara Applin (4) who write primarily for the leveled reader series. It appears to be common place within the region for authors to have works published with more than one publishing company. Bloom and Palmer, for example, have published with Bloomsbury Press and Jamaican Publishing House respectively, while other prominent authors, such as Michael Anthony, John Agard, Grace Hallworth, Floella Benjamin and Benjamin Zephaniah publish variably with Frances Lincoln, Puffin Books, Longman, Cambridge University Press, and Heinemann. [Please refer to Appendix I - Authors by Place of Publication for additional details.]

**The United States.** Books from the United States account for 18 % of the total WI J collection. [See Figure 3.8]. Though no one publishing company dominates these selections as we saw with Macmillan in the U.K.—the closest in this case is Mason Crest—47% of these titles are trade books (20 are from the U.K., five from Trinidad and one from Jamaica). In addition to Mason Crest Publishers (9); these trade books are published by Raintree Steck-Vaughn and its related imprints (3); Gareth Stevens Publishing (3); and six other presses, Raintree (Chicago), Children’s Press, Blackbirch Press, Thomson Gale, Carolrhoda Books, and PowerKids Press. Picture books were the second most common format with 20 titles, comprised mainly of fiction and folktales, from a mix of larger and smaller publishing houses: Scholastic (4), Children’s Book Press (2); Carolrhoda Books (2); Boyds Mills Press (2) and ten others. Other

genres/formats represented include three folktale collections; two collections of poetry; one leveled reader; three short-story collections; and one self-published booklet.

Authors with two or more titles include a few that are well-known beyond the world of Caribbean children's literature but are 'tied' to the literature by heritage, as in the case of Julia Alvarez who was born in the United States but returned with her parents to the Dominican Republic when she was three-months old (3) or choice of subject matter, as with the inclusion of two of Virginia Hamilton's works, *A Ring of Tricksters* and *The Girl Who Spun Gold* both of which feature West Indian folktales.

Other authors have more recent or direct ties with the Caribbean, for example Jamaican-born Monica Gunning (2); and three Trinidadian-born authors: Vashanti Rahaman (2); Enid Kirton (3); and Colin Boothman (2). The informational book authors are not as recognizable by name but some names do recur on more than one title in a given series, especially related to books classified in the collection as history: Bob Temple (*Dominican Republic* and *Guyana*); Colleen Williams (*Jamaica* and *The Bahamas*); Romel Hernandez (*Caribbean Islands* and *Trinidad and Tobago*).

**Trinidad and Tobago.** Although the number of titles originating from Trinidad (60) exceeded the total number of titles sourced from the United States (54), these titles only account for 20% of the total WIJ collection. This is particularly jarring in an acquisition environment mandated to collect every title produced by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. From the graph in Figure 3.9, and as previously mentioned, it is clear that the necessary support for children's literature is conspicuously absent from established publishing houses, forcing authors who are interested in this form of writing to self-publish. In fact, outside of self-publishing, the names

listed in the chart consist of organizations or printing presses, not the publishers who routinely publish and market textbooks.

Within the fiction section, there are 17 illustrated books, six picture storybooks, and one chapter book by the author Michael Als that does not appear to have been written for children in spite of the title *Children's Feet*. The 36 titles shelved in non-fiction include two folktale collections; four poetry collections (two of which are better described as booklets); twelve books classified as English usage (one picture book and 11 titles from the series *Hop Along*); four biographies; nine books on religion; and one each in the Dewey categories sports, mathematics, customs, food and drink and education.

**Jamaica.** Publishing in Jamaica is characterized by a few publishing houses that possess a strong commitment to creating literature for children. [See Figure 3.10] The 27 titles in the WIJ collection consists mainly of fiction (four short story collections, three chapter books, four leveled readers, six picture books and one illustrated book); with six folklore collections; one collection of poetry; one informational book, and one book assigned the Dewey category elementary education. LMH Publishing was responsible for most of the picture books and collections, but did not account for any chapter books (Jamaica Publishing and Carlong Publishers) or leveled readers (namely the *Doctor Bird Reading* series published by Ian Randle Publishers). Website information was scarce for these publishing houses, so it was difficult to ascertain whether each might have a different focus.

**Canada and others.** Canadian titles account for a mere 6% of the total WIJ collection, but their offerings are of comparable printing quality to those sourced from the United States and the United Kingdom. [See Figure 3.11] Most of the selections are fiction titles (9 picture storybooks; two chapter books; and one short story collection). Titles found under non-fiction

include four classified as folklore (two collections and two picture books); one classified as English usage and another as elementary education. Notable authors of Caribbean origin include Richardo Keens-Douglas (a playwright, actor, storyteller and author originally from Grenada); Itah Sadu (Canadian storyteller and owner of an independent bookstore); Gale Henry (from Trinidad), and Ramabai Espinet (an Indo-Trinidadian author). The combined totals from Barbados, Grenada and Suriname account for less than one percent of the entire collection and feature the work of Jason Cole (illustrator); Eon Mars; and Soecy Gummels.

### **Perspective of Practitioners**

Having determined the scope of the collection, the classification trends, the range of formats, the currency of the collection, and the sites of publishing from inspection of the material in the collection, let us now turn our attention to the opinions offered by the practitioners who oversee its development and maintenance. As previously mentioned, four structured interviews were conducted with the Executive Director of NALIS, the Librarian 1 assigned to the Port of Spain Children's Library; the Librarian 1 responsible for the acquisition of West Indian materials; and one of the system librarians responsible for overseeing the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC). The responses selected will elaborate on some of the areas previously discussed and provide new information on the promotion and general usage of the collection.

### **On Classification and Scope**

In defining the scope of the WIJ collection with respect to the library's mandate and the limited availability of materials produced within the Caribbean region, the Executive Director (ED) elucidated the necessity for an expanded definition of Caribbean literature, and by extension, that of the collection policy established by NALIS, to include works published beyond the geographical region:

[We do not call it] West Indian any more we call it Caribbean because it comes from much more than the West Indies we always take the West Indian islands but the Caribbean will take you to Argentina the Hispanic countries Latin American countries, so we now call it Caribbeana so the policy still has to collect all as much as possible that you find all the work, every work so we probably... [maybe] sometimes it's difficult to access the literature published abroad by West Indians and because of that we were having discussions because we prepared the national bibliography and the old policy was to publish in the national bib[liography] works by Trinidadians in Trinidad but we missed too much literature so I said the one thing we must do we must change that because we have to capture all those Trinidadians in the Diaspora who write so we have to change that, collect all.

It appears that some of the attendant issues faced when classifying and cataloguing West Indian juvenile items—by which they are still referred— could be attributed to this expanded notion of Caribbeana, which extends beyond the geographical boundaries of the West Indies. Having noticed what appeared to be inconsistencies and anomalies across the Dewey categories in particular, clarification was sought. The L1 assigned to the acquisition of these materials, explained that more often than not, the cataloguer must create a record using the criteria that may or may not be entirely relevant to the context. She elaborated:

How they go about doing their [West Indian catalogers] stuff because a lot of WI material is not on OCLC or WorldCat, you will find that they have to do original cataloguing and a lot of the [off the shelf] material that is first time publishing or first time authors, do have to get original cataloguing, which we submit to OCLC anyway, but a lot of the time, yes, original cataloguing, West Indian material, unless it's a V.S. Naipaul or, you know, basically we just do original cataloging [and some of it may not fall within the hard and fast rules].

### **On Publication and Acquisition**

As can be extrapolated from the previous section, the rate of acquisition is constrained by the limited pool of available WI materials or Caribbeana from which selections can be made. According to the L1 of West Indian acquisitions, and corroborated by the numbers, this is especially acute in the areas of fiction and reference books for children. She elaborated:

So you would get a wide range of stuff non-WI, but the WI is very, very [miniscule]. And that is reflected in my purchases as well because if I were to, I'm just estimating, if I were

to put all my material together, I would say that maybe less than 10% of it... will be allocated to the children's library because of content... because the WI materials hardly ever caters to the young children. If it is not a textbook, other than a textbook, it's so limited, I mean what am I to purchase if there isn't anything produced?

The bulk of purchasing takes place through local booksellers and distributors and under special but rare circumstances would she order directly from publishers. Locally, as noted, a significant number of purchases in other areas of fiction, poetry, folktales, across a range of formats, are what is termed “Off-the-shelf” purchases—where the self-published author approaches the library directly, as the L1 further explains:

What we do is off the shelf purchases. Off-the-shelf purchases would be people who come in with some published work, usually it's first time authors, it could be people who have done work before, with another piece of material they have done, but they would come in themselves because Trinidad does not have a publishing industry per se, we have printers, but we don't have publishers. You would find a lot of them do their work, have it printed and bring it in themselves, so that service of a publisher in this country is poor because we don't have them<sup>5</sup>.

Invariably, the sheer expense of the printing process in the absence of editorial guidance and marketing and promotion is a deterrent for most, resulting in the dearth that we see. The Executive Director offered a further assessment of the situation:

Local publishers do not, as a rule, publish too much children's literature here. Most of the time people have to do it themselves... and that accounts sometimes for the really poor standard you find in some of the children's literature, because if it goes to a publishing house, somebody will evaluate [it] and see if it meets a certain standard for publishing, because some of them I would not publish at all. But there is so much vanity publishing; I don't know how you could spend good money on some of these books. I think maybe there is not an interest and a knowledge and a real love for it as such. They don't seem to as much trade publishing, there is an obsession with school books and what brings in the revenue.... I have seen some lovely books written, the writing is high and the style is good but sometimes all of this jumbled in one book... you could write about four books.

The vast differences in quality—size, color, illustrations, binding, layout, and so on—between low-budget, self-published local Caribbean books and the vast array of internationally published

books, within the collection and in the wider collection, ultimately play a part in patron appeal and usage. Additional observations about literary quality will be offered in the next chapter.

With regards to the publishing scenario in Jamaica, it is somewhat clear that the 27 titles found in the collection may not be representative of the wider availability of children's books produced. The selections are instead reflective of the judgment calls that have to be made by the librarian responsible for acquisitions even within what is available, and that decision could supersede the wider mandate to collect Caribbeana. She gave an account of this process of deliberation:

There is a lot more to be acquired but then you can't select all because what happens is that Jamaica has a big publishing industry and a lot of the material published there is...while it is West Indian, it may not necessarily be unique to Trinidad, even though we acquire it, how useful is it going to be to our young children in the Children's Library. So those are the things we would consider as well [when] we are purchasing, because sometimes the language in the Jamaican books is a bit 'off' compared to what our Trinidadian local jargon is, you know, the children may not catch [on] so much. So in that area, there is a lot to be purchased, in terms of WI material but it does not necessarily mean that we acquire all of it... Well, like I say, it is really basically up to judgment, subjective judgment...it is really subjective. It's me deciding okay we'll take this or we'll [skip] this.

This scenario certainly speaks to the issue of perception and appeal and the most relevant notion of the construct of Caribbeana, not only on the part of children but also on that of the selector.

### **On Access and Usage**

Apart from its new less-than-obvious location and the incorrect signage, noticeably absent were any other overt attempts to promote the WIJ collection and its contents. Granted, I was told, off the record, that this arrangement is a temporary one (with no indication as to when a permanent site will be determined), but given the significance of the collection, one would expect some sustained attempt at connecting the material to its potential audience. The Librarian I assigned to the children's library was of the belief that by virtue of having a separate collection

dedicated to West Indian Juvenile literature was promotion enough, while simultaneously admitting that this strategy had been largely ineffective. She explained:

When they [staff] were shelving in the children's library, we wound up with several different collections and several different areas for these different collections: the Braille collection, the Spanish collection, the West Indian collection, the baby collection, and I think at some point they were thinking that it makes sense for children ...[if] they are looking for a book to just send them to one particular area and while it may work well for the easy readers and the babies and for Spanish, it certainly doesn't seem to have done much for the West Indian collection. As I said, it would seem as though the only time anybody goes to it is when they have to go to it. Just for that one title and then they forget about it again.

The Librarian I (LI) in reiterating that “practically no one goes to [the collection] unless they have to,” provided examples of the rare occurrences when use of the collection is fueled by necessity:

...there are instances where the child would come [in] needing information for whatever assignment the teacher has given them and we actually don't have the information to provide. Whatever it is they want, it is not in any of the books we have.

When the information desired is not available or cannot be answered by items in the WIJ collection—she could not think of examples of such questions/topic at the time of the interview—the young patrons are referred to the Heritage Library, which is strictly a reference library that serves as a repository for all things Trinidadian, and many aspects of Caribbeana.<sup>6</sup> Part of the issue, the LI admits, is the lack of a better relationship with neighboring schools that would facilitate the timely and accurate preparation of information files to address assignments related to the local context. Beyond that dimension, she could not recall a single instance when there was a particular demand or rush for a local or West Indian title.

Other attempts at promoting the collection included author visits (“Meet the Author”) and book launches, which, according to the LI, did not necessarily translate into increased circulation of those titles or authors. She also indicated that West Indian juvenile folktales and some works

of fiction are generally included among the choices given to the adults who volunteer to read aloud to children in the annual Tale-a-Thon, which marks the beginning of National Library Week in September of each year. The LI believes that this is the most successful strategy employed “because afterwards you have people coming back asking if we have any books on West Indian folklore and Trinidadian folklore”.<sup>7</sup>

When asked how the patterns of promotion differed from that of the wider collection, the LI reflected:

That's the thing, I don't think we really do much promotion of the collection in general other than word of mouth; somebody comes asking for a good book x, y and z, and you say, okay fine, what about this, what about that, what about the other? Even the whole idea of when you put the books on display on the shelves and you line up the books and you turn one out. That seems to have gone by...they used to do that way back for all of the collection, that seems to have gone away. I think it died off when they started getting more and more books, so the shel[ves] became packed and there was no room to turn the books face out] and it just has not continued.

So what is the real purpose of a collection that is rarely used and largely ‘unpromoted’ (according to the anecdotal reports)? Is it enough to acknowledge the importance of having a literature that is reflective of our national and regional identities without actively creating opportunities for children of the society to encounter and experience it? Are there other opportunities and sites beyond the library where children might have the opportunity to encounter the literature? The Executive Director felt that children would, or should, develop an awareness of and appreciation for the literature at school through its integration and use in the curriculum. She elaborated on her observations:

Maybe they leave it up to the children to drift into the local literature and don't make it...part of the curriculum and say we are going to do this book or anything like that. It doesn't seem to be so because they always, the [primary school] teachers always seem to be always so surprised when you introduce them to or share a local book with them or a good West Indian book, and it amazes me because they are all here in the library and they never stop to think [about] that.

However, given the fact that school libraries at the primary level remain a work in progress and works of literature are generally not considered required reading, this was most likely not the case.

### **Researcher Observations**

All accounts of low usage were indeed corroborated by direct observation. For the most part, that general area of the library was used as a ‘hiding place’ during games of what I assumed to be Hide and Seek or Tag. These games were quite common during the times visited as there were very few programs and directed activities for the majority of patrons beyond an endless stream of movies on DVD (some based on works of literature while others were the general Hollywood fare aimed at children). To avoid being reprimanded by a member of staff or the security officer on patrol, some of the more ‘spirited’ youngsters would sit at one of the vacant ‘nooks’ of the carrel closest to the collection (where I was based), yank books off of the nearby shelves, and pretend to read. However, on many such occasions they were not aware of the types of the books in the collection and questioned me about them at various times. Noticeably, this fleeting curiosity seldom translated into the reading or borrowing of the books.

I also observed that, more often than not, the patrons who deliberately sought out, browsed, and/or borrowed books from the WIJ collection, were parents who were either nostalgic (or optimistic) about West Indian stories or specifically wanted their children to become familiar with ‘local’ books. I recorded at least three different instances of parents coming to the shelves in search of folktales—on two occasions they were accompanied by their children. On one such instance, I overheard a female parent acknowledge to a library associate that she likes to read the stories to her young children. Another specifically asked me to help his

daughter find titles that she would like in the folklore section.<sup>8</sup> The third stood in the stacks and read-aloud to her daughter from a collection of Anancy stories.<sup>9</sup>

### **Discussion**

The breadth and currency of the WIJ collection appears to be reflective and representative of the wider body of existing Caribbean children's literature discussed in chapter 2. The preponderance of picture books, an emphasis on folktales and poetry, and a dearth in chapter books and informational books are not only indicative of the presumption/assumptions made about the child audience and their possible preferences, but also of the priorities in publishing in various locations. The patterns in the place of publishing and the 'origin' of the authors are largely consistent with the 'journeys' of the writer to the 'metropolises' of England, the United States, or Canada, as explained by Baugh (2007). [See chapter 1]

What was more surprising were the issues related to the acquisition and promotion of the WIJ collection. The commendable mandate to collect all works produced and published by local Trinidadian authors is undermined by its variable quality and persistent lack of interest in this sphere of publishing by local publishing houses. The spate of 'vanity publishing' with little regard to current standards in the field, also undermines the librarians' desire and ability to encourage children to read these selections when more 'attractive' and 'thoughtful' options are available. Based on the interviews, it appears that librarians assigned to the Children's library need to assume a more proactive role in the selection process and work with authors and interested publishers towards establishing some basic criteria and standards.

The apathetic response to the collection by the children, who frequented the library during one of the busiest times in its yearly cycle, was generally disheartening. However, their disinterest can be easily explained by the odd placement of the collection, the mislabeled shelves,

the absence of signage, and the competing books from the United States, Canada, England, and many other countries available in the general collection. Nevertheless, as we will see in the reader response portion of this study, there are ways to encourage children to engage with the literature if someone at least draws their attention to it.

### Figures and Tables

Figure 3.1: Floor plan of the Port of Spain Children’s Library [not drawn to scale]

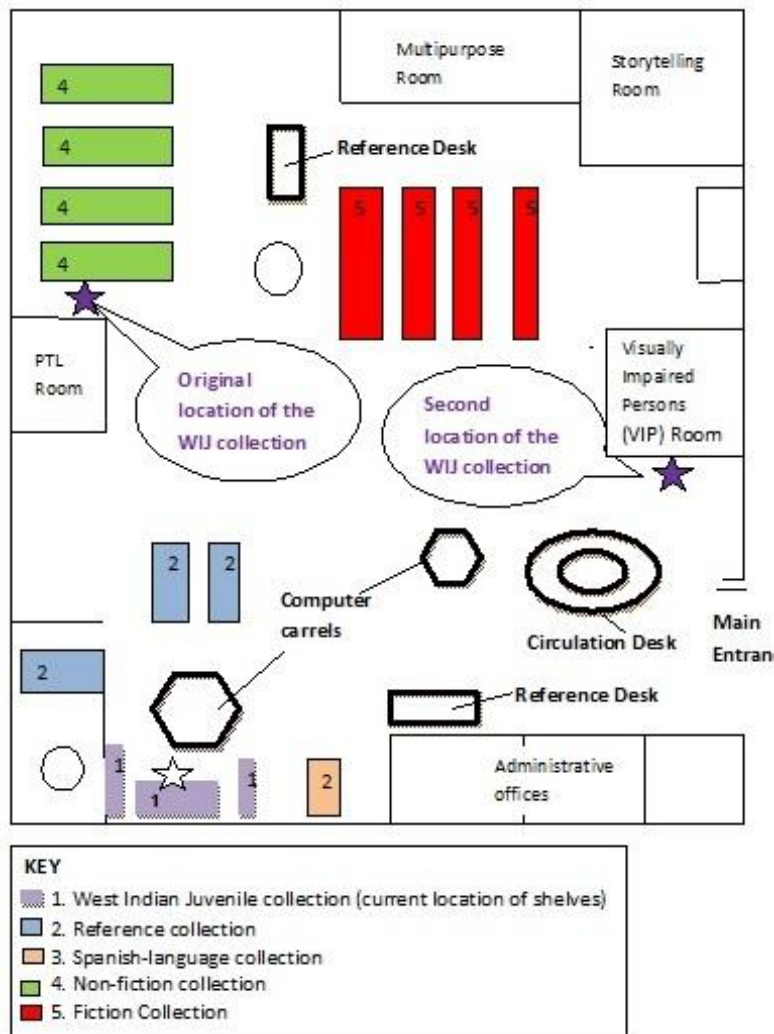


Figure 3.2: 2008 to mid 2011 location of WIJ collection



Figure 3.3: Most recent location of WIJ collection

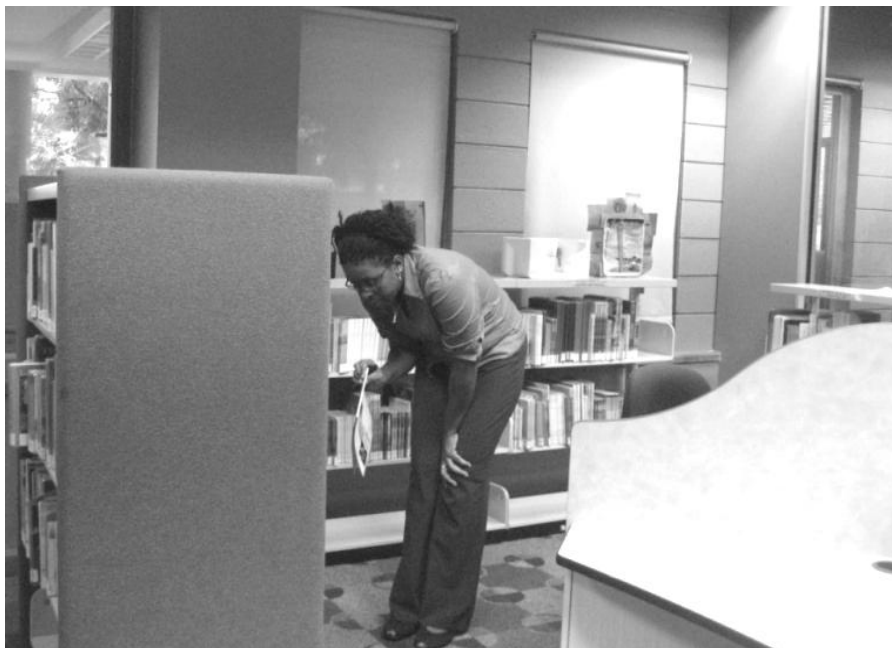


Figure 3.4: No signage on non-fiction shelves



Figure 3.5: Incorrect signage on fiction shelves



Figure 3.6: Items in the collection according to place of publication.

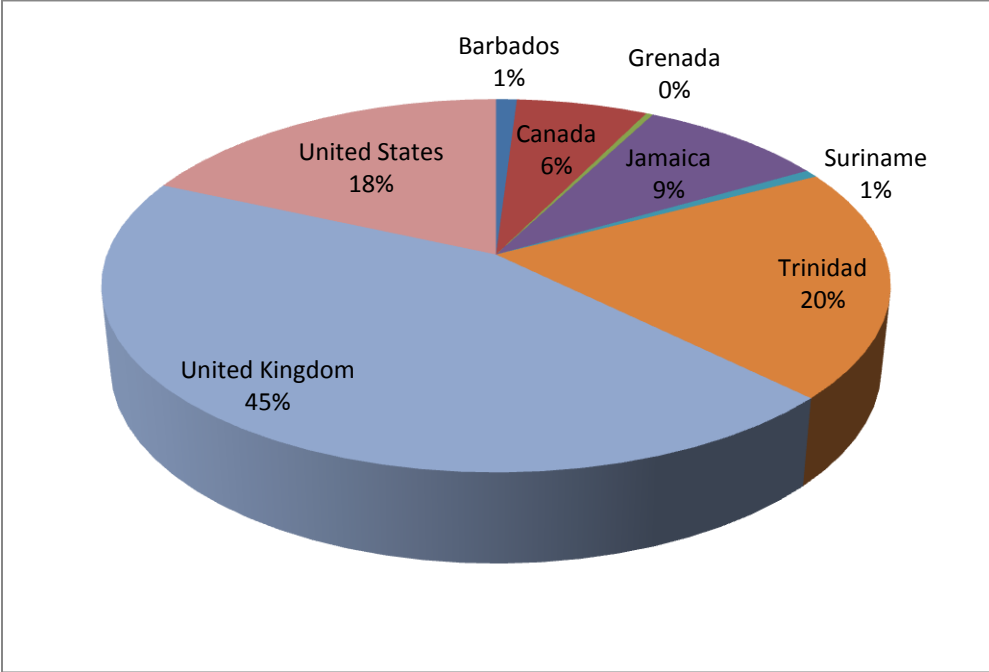


Figure 3.7: Number of titles published in the United Kingdom

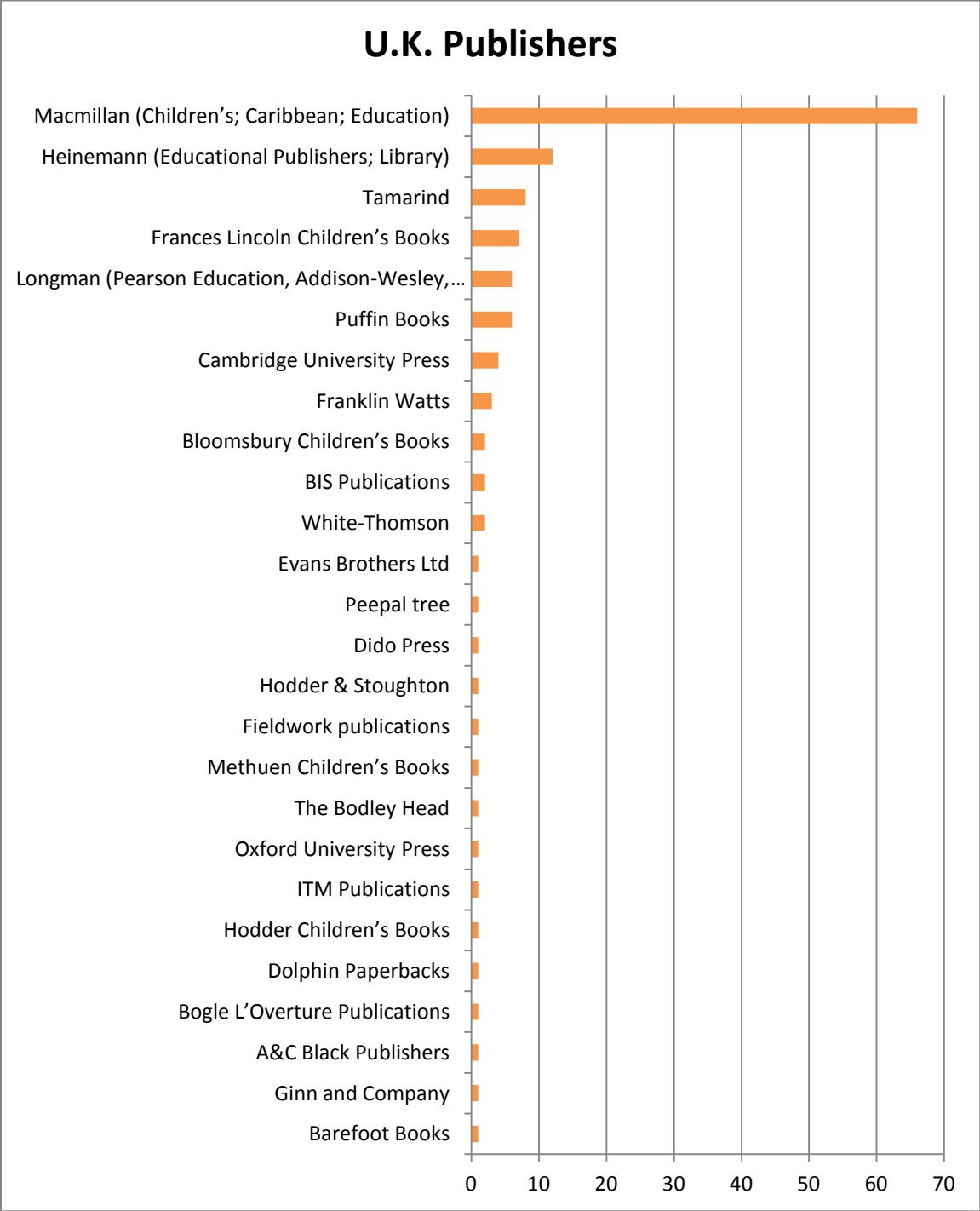


Figure 3.8: Number of titles published in the United States

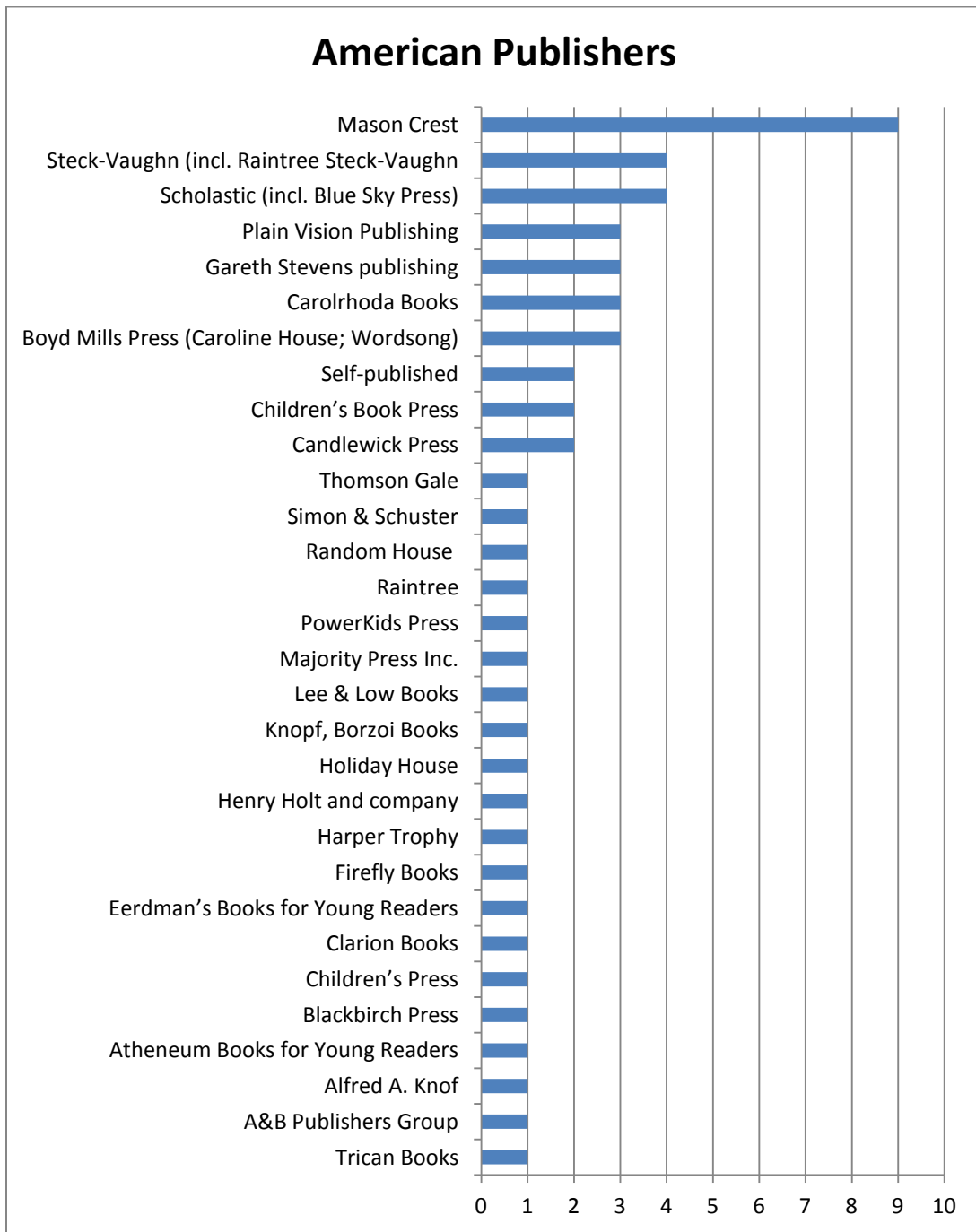


Figure 3.9: Number of titles published in Trinidad and Tobago

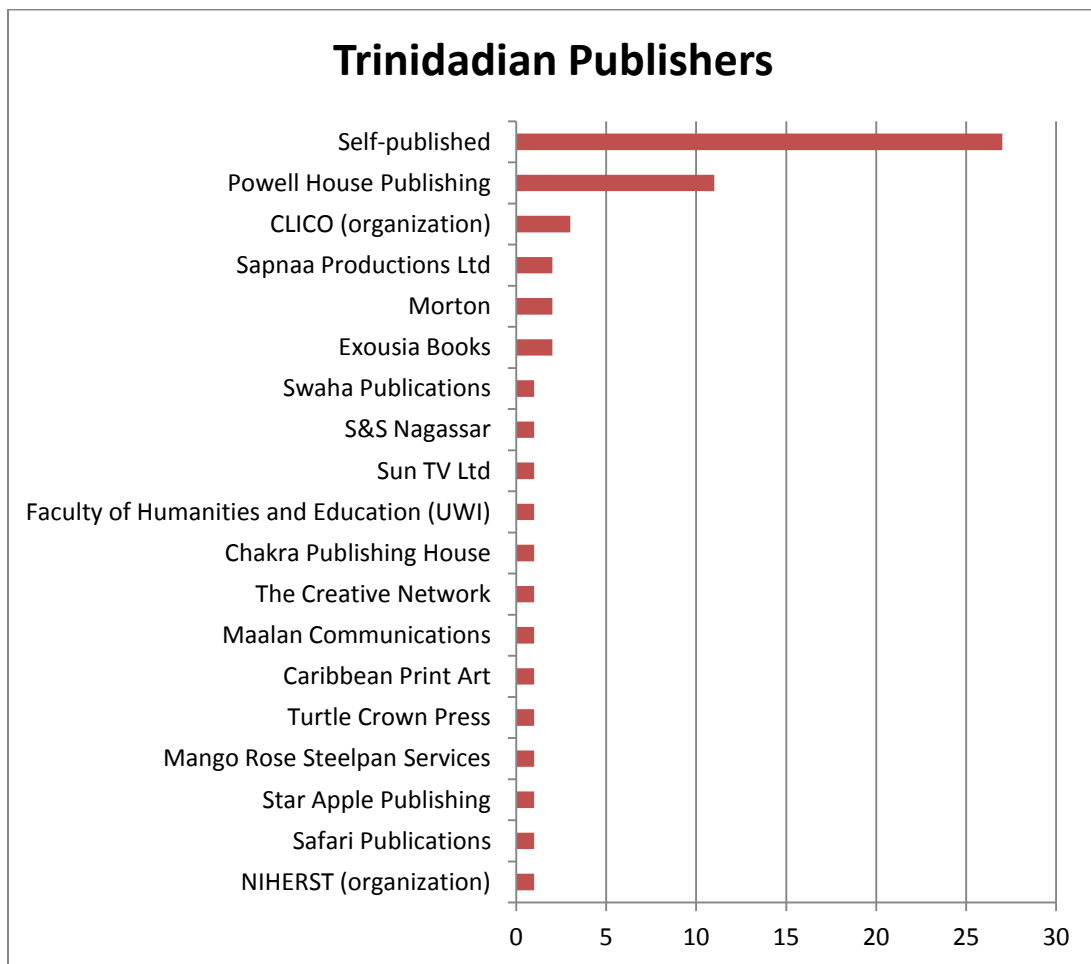


Figure 3.10: Number of titles published in Jamaica

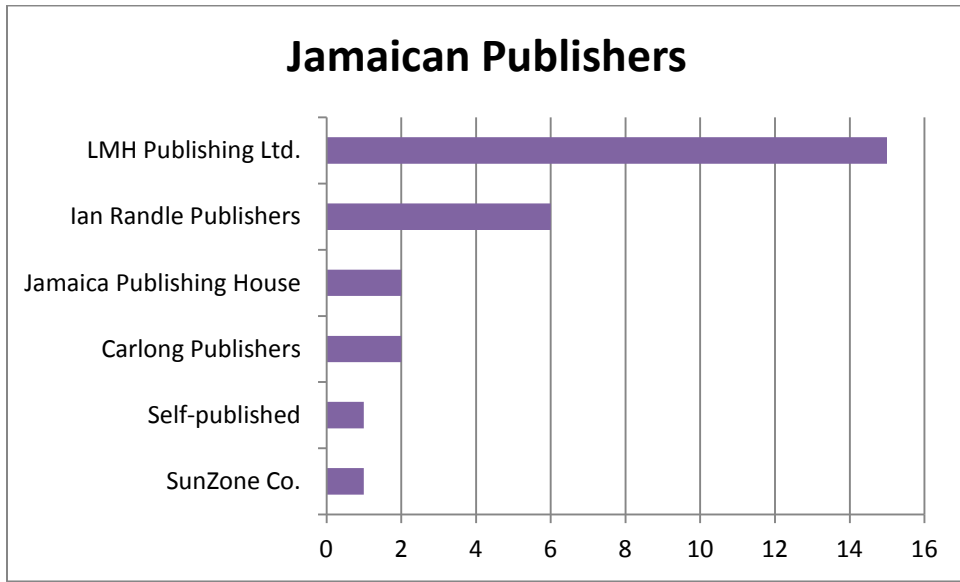


Figure 3.11: Number of titles published in Canada

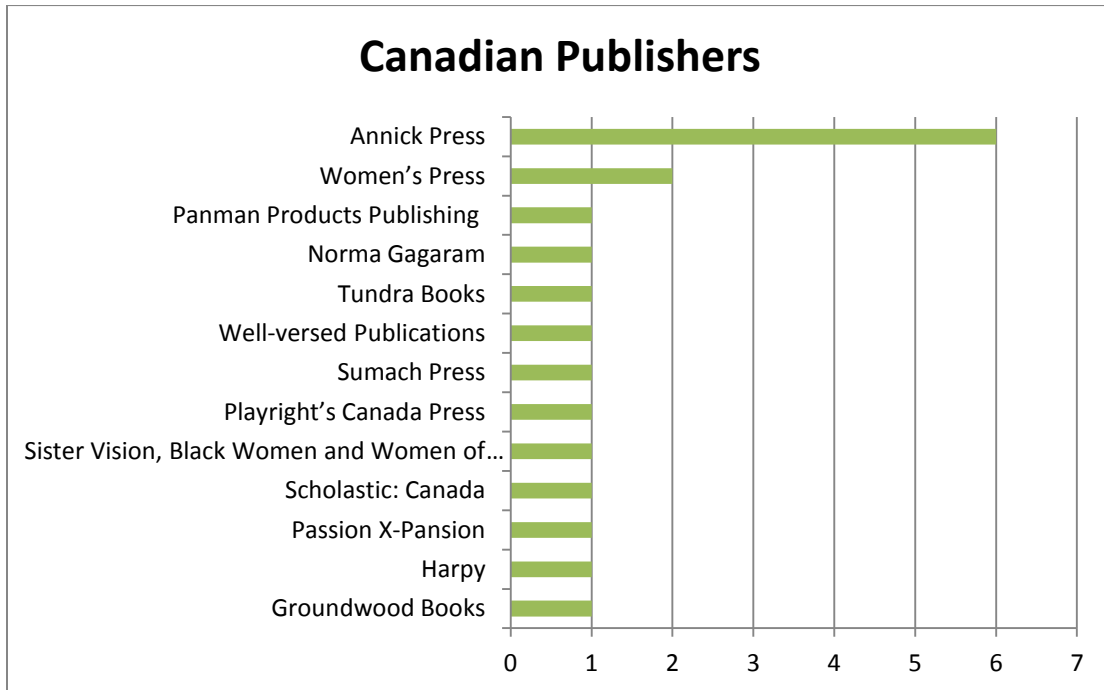


Table 3.1: Dewey categories represented in the WIJ non-fiction section

| <b>CATEGORY</b>        | <b>DEWEY RANGE</b>      | <b>COUNT</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Animals                | 590                     | 1            |
| Biography              | 920; 923; 927; 928; 929 | 9            |
| Customs                | 394                     | 5            |
| Drama (American)       | 812                     | 1            |
| Ecology                | 577                     | 1            |
| Education (Elementary) | 372                     | 4            |
| Fiction (English)      | 823                     | 1            |
| Folklore               | 398.2-8                 | 33           |
| Food and drink         | 641                     | 2            |
| Geography              | 917                     | 2            |
| History                | 972; 973; 988           | 21           |
| Language/grammar       | 411; 418; 428           | 25           |
| Libraries              | 025                     | 1            |
| Mathematics            | 513                     | 1            |
| Medicine/Health        | 610; 617                | 2            |
| Miscellaneous writings | 818                     | 2            |
| Music                  | 781; 782; 786           | 3            |
| Poetry                 | 810; 811; 821; 823      | 21           |
| Religion               | 220; 241; 242; 294      | 10           |
| Social Sciences        | 305; 328; 338; 340; 362 | 4 (5*)       |
| Sports                 | 796                     | 7            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           |                         | <b>156</b>   |

\*Duplicated titles

Table 3.2: WIJ collection by formats and types

| <b>FORMAT/TYPE</b> | <b>NUMBER OF ITEMS</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Picture books      | 91                     |
| Collections        | 52                     |
| Trade books        | 42                     |
| Leveled readers    | 41                     |
| Illustrated books  | 30                     |
| Chapter books      | 28                     |
| Booklets           | 8                      |
| Textbooks          | 6                      |
| Workbooks          | 1                      |
| Handbooks          | 1                      |
| Coloring books     | 1                      |
| Board books        | 1                      |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>302</b>             |

Table 3.3: Classification of Leveled Readers

| <b>SERIES TITLE</b>             | <b>NUMBER LABELLED FICTION</b> | <b>NUMBER LABELLED NON-FICTION</b> |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Cambridge Reading Series</i> | 2                              | --                                 |
| <i>Children's Reading Fun</i>   | 2                              | --                                 |
| <i>Doctor Bird Reading</i>      | 4                              | --                                 |
| <i>Get Caught Reading</i>       | 4                              | 1                                  |
| <i>Hop Along Series</i>         | --                             | 11                                 |
| <i>Hop Step Jump</i>            | 11                             | 1                                  |
| <i>Read and Share Series</i>    | --                             | 1                                  |
| <i>Ready Go Series</i>          | 1                              | 3                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>24</b>                      | <b>17</b>                          |

Table 3.4: Copyright years represented in the WI J collection by decade

| <b>DECADE OF PUBLICATION</b> | <b>NUMBER OF ITEMS</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1950s                        | 1                      |
| 1960s                        | 2                      |
| 1970s                        | 5                      |
| 1980s                        | 16                     |
| 1990s                        | 73                     |
| 2000s                        | 203                    |
| 2010s                        | 2                      |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>302</b>             |

Table 3.5: Breakdown of the acquisition of the WIJ collection (2001-2010)

| <b>YEAR OF PURCHASE</b> | <b>NUMBER OF ITEMS</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 2001                    | 1                      |
| 2002                    | 48                     |
| 2003                    | 53                     |
| 2004                    | 20                     |
| 2005                    | 49                     |
| 2006                    | 20                     |
| 2007                    | 63                     |
| 2008                    | 13                     |
| 2009                    | 24                     |
| 2010                    | 8                      |
| Unknown                 | 3                      |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>302</b>             |

Table 3.6: Geographic distribution of publishers and authors

| <b>PLACES OF PUBLICATION</b> | <b>NUMBER OF PUBLISHING OR PRINTING HOUSES</b> | <b>NUMBER OF AUTHORS PUBLISHED</b> |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Barbados                     | 1  | 1                                  |
| Canada                       | 13   | 13                                 |
| Grenada                      | 1  | 1                                  |
| Jamaica                      | 5  | 20**                               |
| Suriname                     | 1  | 1                                  |
| Trinidad                     | 18   | 31**                               |
| United Kingdom               | 26   | 81                                 |
| United States of America     | 31   | 46**                               |
| <b>TOTALS</b>                | <b>96</b>                                      | <b>194</b>                         |

\*\*includes self-published authors

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<sup>1</sup> Actual times varied according to weather conditions, transportation issues, personal responsibilities, and activities taking place within the library. On average, no less than 4 hours was devoted to data collection.

<sup>2</sup> Some records found in the catalog are marked as “in transit” because they have not yet been delivered to the library from the acquisitions department.

<sup>3</sup> The titles are *Cricket in the Road* by Michael Anthony and *A Thief in the Village* by James Berry.

<sup>4</sup> As immortalized in the poem “Colonization in Reverse” by Louise Bennett.

<sup>5</sup> Publishers that publish children’s literature as opposed to textbook publishing.

<sup>6</sup> Caribbeana literature was defined by the Executive Director as going beyond the West Indian islands to include parts of Latin and South America, as well as those writing in the Diaspora.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, there was no documentation available to determine which folktales and works of fiction were selected from the West Indian Juvenile collection.

<sup>8</sup> Because of my constant presence in the WIJ collection, many patrons assumed that I worked at the library and would often ask for help finding materials there or in another part of the library; in the latter case, I was forced to refer them to the librarian or one of the library associates, as I could not leave my equipment unattended.

<sup>9</sup> For purposes of this study, I am using this spelling variant of Anancy, unless otherwise stated in the title of an item in the collection.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE COLLECTION - CONTENT

This chapter will look more closely at the ‘content’ of the body of West Indian literature in the Port of Spain Children’s Library found across the genres and types previously discussed in chapter three, with particular attention paid to the formats and types discussed with the student participants: picture books, folk tales, informational books, and chapter books. The approach to this exploration of content is descriptive rather than prescriptive, in that, no literary judgments will be explicitly made. Instead, I will attempt to note the literary patterns such as characters, plot, setting, narrative types (to name a few), and repeated, consistent themes evident in the titles in the hopes of further identifying the prevailing elements/characteristics, if any, of a Caribbean children’s book.

Since picture books (as compared to other formats) comprise the majority of the overall collection in fiction and across other genres (including folktales, poetry, and informational books) they formed the basis of the detailed analysis presented in the first section of this chapter; specifically the 61 picture storybooks shelved in the fiction section. An overview will be given of the 34 folk tale titles; the 57 titles that can be considered ‘informational’ in the non-fiction section; and the 28 chapter books identified. The information extracted for each type varied accordingly and will be elaborated upon at the beginning of each section.

#### **Overview of Picture Books**

The characters, themes and plot, setting, style, and cultural markers were examined for each of the 61 picture storybook titles shelved in the fiction section. These key elements were noted for both the textual and visual narratives. Patterns were assessed and reassessed and condensed into units that could be evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively.

## Characters

In the selected texts, the main protagonists varied and male protagonists far outnumbered any other type (24 in total); with animals featured in 16 titles, female leads in 10, and both male and female in six (6) titles. [See Table 4.1] It is interesting to note that these numbers are in stark contrast to the gender of the authors represented; 37 female authors and 10 male authors. In most instances, the ages of the protagonists were consistent with those of the target age group—perhaps with the exception of Jessica the mermaid in *Jessica*, who visually appeared to be an adolescent mermaid.

Most human and animal characters were named, but quite a few were unnamed (the narrator/protagonist in *Butterflies, Beatles, Bees, and Bugs* and *Learning to Surf*) or identified only by their gender labels or function, for example “the little girl” in *Poor Me One*; the boy born on a slave ship whose spirit roams the sea in *Freedom Child of the Sea*; the vendor in *Coconut Mon*; the boy listening to a conversation between two men in *Butler: Story of a Hero*; and the “steel pan man” in *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem*. In the latter instances, however, a more traditional or folk tale story structure was employed in which character development played a secondary role.

Visually, most of the main and supporting human characters were portrayed as people of African descent (30 out of 40 titles), which was expected and reflective of the statistical percentages presented in chapter two. As observed on the Figure 4.1, there were some exceptions to this dominant trend—also not unexpected—that featured children of European, Hispanic, or indeterminate descent (as evident in titles such as *Ibis Stew? Oh No!*; *Road to Santiago*; *Sergio and the Hurricane*; *Roger and his Toys* ) or a variety of ethnicities (*The Boys of Sinclair Hill*; *The Princess of Spadina*, *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem*; *The Dragon of Redonda*;

*The Treasure Hunt: Trinidad's Magnificent Seven*; and *In the Land of the Shak Shak Trees* and *The Little Island*).

In books with animal protagonists: two titles featured lizards (*A Lizard got into the Paint Pots* and *Shadows on the Moon: A Lizard and Bungle Adventure*); four titles featured cats (Mauby the cat in the trilogy, *Mauby's Big Adventure*, *Mauby's Hurricane*, and *Mauby's Quest for the Magic Flower*; and Sparrow the cat in *The Miss Meow Pageant*); four titles featured turtles (Myrtle in *The Call of the Wild*; Ptolemy in the two-volume series *Ptolemy Turtle* and *Soon Come: A Ptolemy Turtle Adventure*; Tilly in *Tilly the Turtle*; and the unnamed turtle in *Dancing to the River*); one told the tale of a goat (*Paddy, the Goat that Saved Rainbow Island*), one title focused on a lobster (*Leroy the Lobster*); one title featured a flamingo (*Oh No! The Pink Flamingo Turned Green*) and a toucan, named after Learie Constantine, a famous West Indian cricketer, was featured in two titles (*Constantine* and *Constantine Goes to School*). While most animal leads were anthropomorphized, a few of them occupied more 'natural' roles as pets (such as Constantine the toucan and Sparrow the cat).

### **Themes and Plot Structures**

Determining the theme/s of each book was by its very nature a largely subjective process. In an attempt to convey the authors' intentions as closely as possible, cues were taken from the titles, plots, back matter, and other elements of the narrative. Each thematic label was further re-evaluated and categorized according to the most common or prevailing characteristics until they were distilled into fewer options. In cases of overlapping/multiple themes, the most dominant was ascribed to each text and generally applied to four or more texts, while other less common themes applied to three or fewer texts. Only the themes that applied to four or more texts are

highlighted and presented in the subsequent narrative and graphic summary in Figure 4.2, though the less common ones are also discussed in the subsequent narrative.

As is evident from the chart, the theme labeled ‘**family relationships**’—which emphasized the bond or connection that exists between two or more family members—formed the basis of 12 books examined. This overarching theme was further subdivided into holiday traditions (*O Christmas Tree* and *Road to Santiago*); nostalgia and storytelling (*Is it True Grandfather?*, *The Chalk Doll*, *Grandpa’s Garden*, *Granny and Me*); sibling rivalry (*New Baby*, *Jump Up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*); family tension (*Why Me?*) and other related issues, such as working together (*Fish for Grand Lady* and *Soon Come: A Ptolemy Turtle Adventure*).

The stories labeled ‘**friendship**’ were those that emphasized a strong relationship between two or more non-related protagonists. Most of these stories also contained an element of courage/sacrifice. In *Constantine* and *Constantine Goes to School*, the bond between the toucan, the old man, and the children was tested by other challenges but prevailed. In *Shadows on the Moon: A Lizard and Bungle Adventure*, the bungle overcame his fears and doubts to help the lizard stage a daring rescue. *The Princess of Spadina: A Tale of Toronto* and *The Dragon of Redonda* both give accounts of three close friends ‘saving the day’; while *Saving Joe Louis* tells the story of a little boy who runs away from home with his rooster (whom he considers to be his best friend) in order to save the latter’s life.

The ‘**educational**’ label was used to describe three types of books: (1) those that were clearly informational with no prevailing narrative and mistakenly classified as fiction, for example, *My Book of Caribbean Fruits* (which contains photographs of a variety of fruits and the range of names by which they are known throughout the region); (2) explicit concept books, such as the counting book *Coconut Mon*; or (3) books that can be considered fiction but are heavily

didactic in tone or expository in style (for example, the survey of buildings of architectural significance in *The Treasure Hunt: Trinidad's Magnificent Seven*; the life cycle and hazards faced by lobsters in *Leroy the Lobster*, the nesting process of the leatherback turtle in *The Call of the Wild*; and some of the flora and fauna of Trinidad in *The Boys of Sinclair Hill: Fun in the Backyard*).

The descriptor '**individuality/being different**' pertained to stories where the main character was misunderstood, shunned, or exhibited unusual behaviors, such as the animal protagonists in *Paddy the Goat that Saved Rainbow Island* (a goat that could not "baa" and was subsequently banished from the herd); *Oh No! The Pink Flamingo Turned Green* (as a result of feeding on caterpillars because she was too slow to catch shrimp); *The Miss Meow Pageant* (an "ugly" cat that won a feline competition with its dancing ability); and the human protagonists Yohance in *Yohance and the Dinosaur* (he "saw" dinosaurs everywhere); Christopher in *Christopher Changes His Name* (a young boy kept changing his name until he was no longer sure who he was); and Lucille in *Lucille Travels at Christmas Time* (a young girl with an overactive imagination).

In keeping with the educational theme previously mentioned, four titles all conveyed a sense of '**environmental activism**' but managed to do so in a less contrived manner (for the most part). *Jessica* tells the story of a mermaid's attempt to protect the sea from the dangers of oil spills and other man-made disasters. *Circle of Hope* is a poignant tale of one boy's tireless efforts to successfully plant a tree for his ailing little sister on the highly eroded Haitian mountainside. *Ibis Stew? Oh No!* is a far-fetched account of two young boys' thwarting a pirate's plan to kill and consume the national bird of Trinidad, the Scarlet Ibis. While *Tilly the Turtle*

follows the annual journey of a leatherback turtle to the shores of a Caribbean island to lay her eggs amidst the imminent danger of ruthless poachers.

‘**Folktale adaptations**’ were easy to identify by the story structure and common motifs present, such as the disobedient children and the tricking of the ‘witch’ in the cautionary tale, *Mind Me Good Now* (similar in vein to “Hansel and Gretel”); a weaker character’s escape from danger using cleverness and wit in *Dancing to the River*; the cruel, jealous step-mother versus the young innocent child in *Poor Me One*; and the *pour quoi* tale of why parrots echo human speech in *The Parrots and Papa Bois*. Conversely, stories that dealt specifically with ‘**historically significant events or people**’, for example, slavery in *Freedom Child of the Sea* and *The Amazing Adventures of Equiano*, or the struggle for equity in employment in *Butler: Story of a Hero*, as well as those that were simply set in a specific historical period, such as time travel in *Miri and the Magic Door*, were all thematically linked.

Yet another relatively common theme was that of ‘**visiting the Caribbean**’. Within these selections, the visit was either joyfully anticipated and fully experienced as exemplified by the titles *In the Land of the Shak Shak Tree* and *The Little Island*, or met with some apprehension but then later appreciated, as in the case of *Gregory Cool*. The book *Come to my Island* which reads like an ode to, or a tourism brochure for, the Caribbean seemed to also fit this thematic description. Other topics not represented in the graph but found to be evident in at least three books included: ‘**cultural pride**’—manifested in the three titles about the steel pan: *The Adventures of the Magic Steelpan: How Grandpa Conks Got His Name*, *PanMan Presents the Sweet Sound of Steel*, and *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem* (which could also be considered a folk tale/retelling of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*); ‘**adventure**’, featuring the reluctant hero of the *Mauby* trilogy; and ‘**personal responsibility**’—Roger learning to pick up his toys in obviously

titled *Roger and His Toys*; Christopher learning to clean up his room, in the equally apparent *Christopher, Please Clean up your Room*; and Ptolemy learning a lesson in patience in *Ptolemy Turtle*.

The remaining titles in the collection of picture story books explore a range of themes including those related to ‘**social issues**’ such as homelessness in *A Shelter in Our Car*, adult illiteracy in *Read for me Mama*; and surviving a natural disaster (*Sergio and the Hurricane*); ‘**perseverance**’ as noted in *Learning to Surf*; ‘**an appreciation for nature**’, aka, bug-collecting (*Butterflies, Beetles, Bees, and Bugs*); and what could be described as a display of visual creativity in the complex, yet superficial interplay between a predator and its prey—in this case, a lizard and a mosquito in *A Lizard Got into the Paint Pots*.

In line with the themes, plots ranged from the simple—a boy likes collecting bugs and his mother hates them and so he returns them to nature or children who enjoy visiting the Caribbean and seeing all of the interesting sights—to the complex—a story within a story, time travel, encountering obstacles at every turn on what appears to be a never-ending adventure. As previously mentioned one title, *My Book of Caribbean Fruits*, had no plot at all; further evidence of it being misclassified. Consequently, the visual representations generally supported the simplicity or complexity of the plot, though in a few cases they seemed superfluous and obtuse (the *Ptolemy Turtle* books and *Shadows on the Moon*).

## **Setting**

Given the expanded definition of Caribbeana introduced in chapter three that incorporates not only the Caribbean region but also its Diaspora, the settings of these stories were not always as intuitive as initially perceived/anticipated. Beyond the notion of an island or country (discussed in the latter part of this section), there was an obvious contrast between the notions of

the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’ within and outside of the region, and the many nuances in between. Nevertheless, both visual cues and textual statements were examined to ascertain the most accurate description of all facets of the setting. The former provided a strong sense of where the action was situated while the latter corroborated the assessment with phrases such as “deep in the forest” (*Poor me One*); “...the edge of the White River” (*Ptolemy Turtle*); “a small farm in the hills of a sunny green island in the Caribbean Sea” (*Mauby’s Big Adventure*).

In other cases, I extrapolated the site based on the dominant habitat or focus of activity in the images (Jessica the mermaid who lives in the sea, or the children in *The Princess of Spadina* riding on the bus and shopping at the special store; the brothers spending most of their time fishing in the river in *Fish for Grand Lady*) or by some other stated or implied association (such as a reference to swimming in the river everyday in *Grandpa’s Garden*). Where more than one setting was visually represented or expressed (such as a non-Caribbean urban airport and a Caribbean rural village in *Gregory Cool*), the label ‘multiple settings’ was used.

From the criteria employed, the most frequent setting identified was an **urban** one. Some of the more common images associated with the urban setting across the 21 titles with this label included modern furnishings (when the action took place primarily in a house, e.g. *New Baby*); varied modes of transportation (planes, trains, automobiles, e.g. *Road to Santiago*); buildings and a range of institutions: schools, banks, churches, stores (e.g. *Christopher Changes His Name*, *Read for Me Mama*, *A Shelter in Our Car*); and densely populated areas (e.g. *The Adventures of the Magic Steel Pan* and *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem*).

**Rural** settings, ascribed to 13 books, were more commonly associated with the presence of animals (Mauby, Paddy, Constantine); a proliferation of agricultural or fishing activity (e.g. *Mind Me Good Now* and *Circle of Hope*); and the absence of modern furnishings, the presence of

more traditional housing structures, and/or an emphasis on the natural environment (e.g. *O Christmas Tree* and *Butterflies, Beetles, Bees, and Bugs*). Other settings that can be broadly considered to be rural, were discretely identified because of the dominance and literal presence of each type (to the exclusion of other rural characteristics): the **sea** (8 titles); the **river** (6 titles); the **forest** (3 titles); and the **beach** (2 titles). The label suburban (1 title; *The Boys of Sinclair Hill: Fun in the Backyard*) was based on prior knowledge of the stated location, as well as the fact that visually, the action was based only in the extensive backyard of a house, which is not typically found in an urban setting and not rural based on the absence of other markers. [See Figure 4.3]

The more common notion of the setting in these selections was the naming, or lack thereof, of specific countries within and outside of the Caribbean region that may have informed the physical or cultural preoccupations of or served as backdrops to the stories. Analysis revealed that twenty-nine (29) titles explicitly identified the country in which the story took place, namely:

- Trinidad (12 titles: *Jump Up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*, *Butler: Story of a Hero*, *Fish for the Grand Lady*, *Grandpa's Garden*, *Granny and Me*, *Ibis Stew? Oh No!*, *PanMan Presents the Sweet Sound of Steel*, *The Adventures of the Magic Steelpan*, *The Boys of Sinclair Hill*, *Tilly the Turtle/Carlton and the Dolphin*; *The Treasure Hunt: Trinidad's Magnificent Seven*, *The Call of the Wild*)
- Barbados (1 title: *In the Land of the Shak Shak Tree*)
- Cuba (2 titles: *Miri and the Magic Door* and *The Road to Santiago*)
- The Bahamas (1 title: *Oh No! The Pink Flamingo Turned Green*)
- Haiti (1 title: *Circle of Hope*)

- Jamaica (5 titles: *Lucille Travels at Christmas: A Jamaican child's story*; *Ptolemy Turtle, Soon Come: A Ptolemy Turtle Adventure*, *Saving Joe Louis*, and *The Beautiful Blue Shirt on Barry Street*)
- Montserrat (1 title: *The Little Island*)
- Tobago (1 title: *Gregory Cool*)
- Puerto Rico (1 title: *Sergio and the Hurricane*)
- The United States (2 titles: *A Shelter in Our Car*, where the family migrates from Jamaica; and *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem*)
- Canada (1 title: *The Princess of Spadina*)

The biographical book *The Amazing Adventures of Equiano* mentions several places spanning Africa, the United States, England and various territories within the Caribbean.

The remaining thirty-one (31) books made no mention of a specific country at all or used the generalization “an island in the West Indies” or “an island in the Caribbean Sea”. In a few instances, assumptions could be made based on the place of publishing or nationality of the author; for example, Jason Cole lives and publishes in Barbados, so it is not unlikely that his books *Learning to Surf* and *Butterflies, Beetles, Bees and Bugs* are based there; the same can be said of the *Christopher* books by Itah Sadu who is based in Canada. Alternatively, the assumptions can be made based on cultural references or visual cues, as previously discussed. For example, in the book *Is it True Grandfather?* references are made both visually and textually to “the mountains” and all of the characters have French names; which appears to be consistent with a Haitian setting.

## Style

General patterns and trends were identified in areas such as narrative perspective, language use and artistic style. The third person narrative perspective was found to be the most dominant perspective; used in forty-three (43) stories, while the first person narrative voice was used in seventeen (17) titles. Across these perspectives, only seven (7) titles employed the use of rhyme/verse, while the other titles ranged from fluid, lilting prose to dense exposition. Standard English was used exclusively in thirty-five (35) stories and an English-based Creole was used exclusively in a story written entirely in verse, *New Baby*. Otherwise, Creole was used liberally in the dialogue contained within ten (10) titles and used minimally (place names, terms, etc.) in twelve (12) others.

Artistically, the styles employed represented greater diversity in form, though colors were almost always bright and bold, (possibly reflecting the warmth and vitality associated with the Caribbean and its people), though the choice of media seemed somewhat limited (pencils and paintings being the most common). **Representational** art seemed to be the default style—which is not unusual in the wider world of children’s publishing and exemplary examples can be seen in the works written and illustrated by Colin Bootman (*Fish for Grand Lady* and *The Steel Pan Man of Harlem*), and Lynn Willey’s illustrations in *Yohance and the Dinosaur*. Most realistic illustrations employed standard media and technique but two titles employed photography: *Butler: The Story of a Hero* and *My Book of Caribbean Fruits*.

**Naïve and folk** art styles were also common, as evidenced by the work of Frane Lessac in *My Little Island* and *The Dragon of Redonda*. The American artist stated that her time spent in Montserrat influenced the development of her artistic art which she considers to be in the folk style. **Expressionistic** forms of illustrations (defined here as a rejection of “traditional ideas of

beauty or harmony and use distortion, exaggeration, and other non-naturalistic devices in order to express emotional states”<sup>1</sup> as those seen in *A Shelter in Our Car*, *Mind Me Good Now*, *the Miss Meow Pageant*, and *Ptolemy Turtle* stand out among all other offerings because each is unique to each illustrator.

**Cartoon art** and computer-generated images (using the computer as the primary media for the creation of the art) comfortably find their way among the other styles, and feeds well into the increased appeal of graphic novels and video games in the lives of the contemporary child. Examples of cartoon/exaggerated art include Jason Cole’s *Learning to Surf* and *Butterflies*, *Beatles*, *Bees and Bugs* and Itah Sadu’s *Christopher* books, which are illustrated by Roy Condy. There were two examples of **impressionism** that I could ascertain: *Is it True Grandfather?* and *Freedom Child of the Sea*. [See Figure 4.4]

### **Cultural Markers**

All of the literary characteristics discussed so far give some indication of the degree of cultural specificity found in these titles or provide elucidation to the question/s:

1. How is the Caribbean depicted in these books?
2. How are Caribbean people depicted in these books?

Like most of what has been discussed so far, as well, there is no straightforward answer to those questions and evaluations are based on the reader’s subjective knowledge and awareness of what these cultural markers might look like. However, within the observed characteristics, there are some patterns that emerge that are reflective of both positive and ‘questionable’ cultural representations.

The most obvious and commonly-used device to situate the stories within the Caribbean was the direct mention of specific aspects of Caribbean life, especially with respect to flora,

fauna, food, music, places, history, lore, rituals/customs, and people. While this is not unusual in children's literature from any culture or region, in many cases, the inclusion of these references seemed more deliberate and ranged from consistent references throughout the text (for example, the food, buildings, history, and famous people referenced in *The Treasure Hunt: Trinidad's Magnificent Seven*); to allusions that seemed like a mere token (brief mention of some dishes served at Christmas in Jamaica in *Lucille Travels and Christmas: A Jamaican Child's Story*).

Tied closely to the referential devices used in the text, were the 'traditional' and 'stereotypical' visual representations that frequently appeared. For instance, in the book, *Come to my Island* (1996), the illustrations create the overwhelming impression that on "the island" there are no cities, roadways, established institutions, forms of industry and commerce, etc., Instead, one would find mainly beaches, trees, fishing, country markets, animals walking along dusty tracks that serve as roads, children in uniforms with no schools in sight, steel pan and calypso music, and dancing at Carnival time. An excerpt from the text reads:

*Come to my island. Come with me  
So many wonderful things to see  
We'll sail on the blue Caribbean Sea  
We'll run on the beach from dusk to dawn  
And watch the sun rise in the early morn  
Come to my island. Come with me  
We'll eat fruit from the mango tree  
We'll feast on saltfish and fungi  
We'll take a ride on a little donkey  
And visit the shops in Radcliffe Quay<sup>2</sup>*

While these facets do exist, it is clear from both the text and the visuals that this book reinforces the predominant perceptions that Caribbean society is comprised mainly of quaint village life and happy go-lucky music-loving, beach-going people.

There were many other examples of books that feed into that stereotype within a variety of scenarios. One of the more common instances is the tale of the foreign child accustomed to the

‘big-city’ life who is forced to adapt to the slower-paced and ‘unusual’ rural circumstances while visiting relatives; as exemplified by *Gregory Cool* (“There were no toys, no books, no carpet, not even a proper door.” p. 3); and, to a lesser extent, *In the Land of the Shak Shak Tree* (‘lesser’ only because of the high level of enthusiasm displayed by the protagonist). Again, while the ‘city dweller versus country dweller’ motif is quite common in the world of children’s literature, the implication here is that the ‘country’ aspects is the totality of life on the islands.

Another less-than-stellar image is that of the shoeless child in everyday life (i.e. not at the beach), in titles such as *Saving Joe Louis* (while the protagonist rescues the chicken); *The Chalk Doll* (when the mother recounts the story of having to go to school without shoes); *PanMan presents The Sweet Sound of Steel* (throughout the book); *Constantine* and *Constantine Goes to School* (with the exception of scenes when the children go to school); and *Poor Me One* (although, technically it is a folktale that takes place “deep in the forest” in a “time long ago”). These images, while not the only ones shown across the 61 picture storybooks in the collection, fuel the overall impression of the literature being ‘inferior’ when compared to the international selections; an opinion which might be held by the contemporary Caribbean child reader.

On a more positive note, stories that visually display and explore strong intergenerational bonds (*Granny and Me*, *Grandpa’s Garden*, *Fish for Grand Lady*); use the Creole language/s consistently (and without reservation) throughout the narrative (*New Baby*); and discuss shared cultural activities and customs as a matter of course (*Jump Up Time: A Trinidad Carnival Story*, *Circles of Hope*, *The Adventures of the Magic Steelpan*; *Butler: Story of a Hero*) have the opposite effect of exposing the nuances and unique elements of Caribbean society without relying on stereotypes or nostalgic representations thereby potentially alienating the child reader within those societies by inadvertently misrepresenting the breadth of their realities.

## **Overview of Folklore**

As discussed in chapter two, folktales for children became an early staple of Caribbean children's literature as a means of bridging the gap between the oral traditions and the new literary ones that emerged; not unlike most forms of indigenous children's literature. Within the WIJ collection, the thirty-four (34) titles classified as 398.2-398.8 appear to be representative of the breadth of publishing trends in this genre—more aptly described as traditional tales, as it encompasses folktales, original tales, songs, rhymes, games, legends, myths, fables, and religious tales (Vardell, 2008; Horning, 2010). In total, there are approximately 231 stories contained within 30 of the 34 titles (some stories are repeated). This section will review some of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the format, types, publication years, and regional connections of the traditional literature found in the collection. In most cases, each table of contents, back matter, and/or author's note were analyzed as they provided a clear indication of the source, nature, and contents of the collections.

### **Publishing Formats and Types**

As seen from the graph in Figure 4.5, collections of tales—multiple stories in one text either written by one author or multiple authors, with or without accompanying illustrations—comprise the majority of the 33 titles (22 to be exact). Ten (10) titles in picture book format feature one story while two (2) longer illustrated books (also featuring one story), round out the selections. These collections can be further subdivided into: (a) those that are dedicated to Anancy/Anansi stories compiled or adapted by one author; (b) a range of folk tales, legends, myths and fables from across the region (which may or may not also contain Anancy stories among its contents) that were compiled or adapted by one or several collectors; (c) original literary tales that are loosely based on folk lore and/or fantastical or magical elements; and (d)

collections of traditional rhymes, songs, and games. The picture books are primarily retellings/adaptations of a single tale—with one original tale based on the character Anancy. Of the two illustrated books, one is an informational text providing an account of Indian folklore spirits found in the Caribbean (*Indian Caribbean Folklore Spirits*) and the other is an extended adaptation of a traditional Anancy tale (*Anansi at the Pool*). Figure 4.6 summarizes these types.

**Anancy/Anansi stories.** The five collections that contain only Anancy stories are Philip Sherlock's collections *Anansi the Spider Man: Jamaican Folktales* (1956); and *The Illustrated Anansi: Four Caribbean Folk Tales* (1995); Peter-Paul Zahl's *Anancy Mek It* (2003); David Brailsford's *Confessions of Anansi* (2003); and *Anancy and Friends: Cultural Folktales for Children* (2004) by Beulah Richmond. All of these titles with the exception of Brailsford's are based on Anancy as he exists in Jamaican folklore tradition, while Brailsford situates Anancy in Africa and describes the tales as "Anancy's journey from the interior to the coast of Africa with the captured Africans" [Backcover]. Surprisingly there is relatively little overlap in stories across these collections; the exception being *The Illustrated Anansi*, which contains the illustrated versions of four folktales previously published in *Anansi the Spider Man*.

Individual Anancy stories exist in the form of Grace Hallworth's retelling of a story originally published by Sherlock (1956), *Anansi at the Pool* (1994); De Souza and Rohmer's modernized, bi-lingual adaptation, *Brother Anansi and the Cattle Ranch/El Hermano Anansi y el Racho de Ganado* (2002); and Richardo Keens-Douglas' *Anancy and the Haunted House* (2002); an "original Anancy story with an amusing anti-trickster twist"<sup>3</sup>. Stories featuring Anancy as the central protagonist are also included in Virginia Hamilton's *A Ring of Tricksters: Animal Tales from America, the West Indies, and Africa* (1997), where all three West Indian selections are

retellings of Anancy stories from various sources: “That One Anansi”, “Magic Anansi”, and “Cunnie Anansi Does Some Good”.

Additionally, at least two Anancy stories can be found in the collections *Fables and Tales of Guyana* (2006) by Jean Norma—“A Big Red Cow for Compere Anansi” and “Who is the Strongest, Anansi or Snake”; and in Philip Sherlock’s *Ears and Tails and Common Sense: More Tales from the Caribbean* (1982)—“Lizard and a Ring of Gold” and “The Grass Cutting Races”. Other such stories include: “Bre-nancy and the 13 Plantains” in *Stories from the Caribbean* (2000) by Petronella Brienburg; “How Brer Anancy Tricked Brer Terry” in Christine Barrow’s *And I Remember Many Things...: Folklore of the Caribbean* (1992); and yet another iteration of Grace Hallworth’s adaptation “Anancy at the Pool” in the compilation *Our Favourite Stories from Around the World* (1998).

The preponderance of Anancy stories in the folklore section and in the wider body of Caribbean children’s literature is certainly consistent with the findings of Crowley (1977) and Flowers (1980) as discussed in chapter two; as the trickster tale is found to be inextricably entwined with the complex history of slavery and colonization. Zahl in the “Afterword” of *Anancy Mek It* discusses this history as well as the sources and use of these stories in the Jamaican context and suggests that: “Anancy-stories never ever will be written to an end, and will never get a definitive shape – as for example Grimm’s fairy tales. They are however, “a living ingredient in an everlasting, never-ending culture of a people” (p. 128-9).

**West Indian regional tales.** Apart from Anancy in a variety of incarnations, many other folktale characters and story-types are featured in the general collections of tales, including: myths, legends, poems, fairy tales, fables, fantasies, and religious stories. The compilers, collectors, and tellers of these tales all cite the importance of preserving the oral tradition by

passing down the stories that they remember receiving from their parents or grandparents, or telling to their children or grandchildren.

The nine titles that bear this label are either collections of ‘Caribbean folktales’ or those that are specific to a particular country within the region, as stated in the title or determined by the contents or the book’s description. Whereas most of the Anancy tales are situated in Jamaica, stories other than Anancy can also be found in collections compiled/retold by Jamaican writers, such as the previously mentioned Sherlock collection *Ears and Tails and Common Sense: More Tales from the Caribbean* (1982) which contains stories from Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, and Haiti. Seven of the nine stories focus on other animal protagonists like Capuchin Monkey in “Brown Owl Plans and Party”, and Rabbit in “Big for Me, Little for You” and “Horns for Rabbit”.

With the exception of the single Anancy story included in Barrow’s *And I Remember Many Things...: Folklore of the Caribbean* (1992), the collection contains 41 other stories described as “remembrances, myths, legends and traditional practices” that “vividly brings to life the rich heritage of ‘olden times’ much of which is unfamiliar to today’s youth” [Back cover]. The blurb further elaborates on story types that include: “reverence for old traditions” (as exemplified by the stories “Escape from Slavery”, “Nicknames”, “Jumbie Table” and others); “the importance of good manners” (in stories like “Manners”, “Dressing for Tea”, “A Saying” and “And Another Saying”); “neighbourliness” (as expressed in stories like “Sharing the Oven”); and “respect for the aged, for parents and those in authority” (in stories like “Hard Work”).

In Petronella Brienburg’s *Stories from the Caribbean* (2000), the five non-Anancy stories are categorized according to type (for example the “haunting tale” “Sunny-Limp Walks Again”); location (“Toewi and Kroemoe” and “Anana, the Maker” are both stories from the Netherlands

Antilles, while “Papa Bois” can be found in both Trinidad and Surinam); or both (as in the use of the descriptor “slave stories from Surinam” for the story “The Flying Slave”). *My Favourite Caribbean Tales* (2001) by Lystra McBurnie Brent-Harris contains nine (9) selections described as “stories and poems which are set in several Caribbean islands, [that] make reference to many interesting aspects of life in the West Indies from the days of slavery to the present” [back cover]. Another collection entitled *Tales of the Immortelles: A Collection of Caribbean Folktales* (1989) compiled by Trinidadian Norma McCartney is touted as a “collection of stories [that] transports the reader into a magical world of Caribbean folklore and legend; of heroes, princes and fairies; of animals and flowers of the Caribbean which can talk”.

In keeping with the country-specific theme, the lore of other countries like Guyana and St. Lucia are also represented in the collection. Norma Jean’s *Fables & Tales of Guyana* (2006) contains 14 stories (including the two Anancy stories previously mentioned) that Jean has “attempted to retell to the best of [her] memory” [back cover]. *The Scattered Jewels: A Collection of Children’s Stories from Guyana* (2003), compiled by Guyanese-born Evadne D’Oliveira, contains 12 stories that blend “the personality and character” of the author with the “legends and tales of ancient and primal people” [back cover].

Animal tales (for example “The Exodus of the Manatee”, “The Happiness of Little Miss Mouse”, “The Donkey that Brayed and Prayed”) and legends (such as “The Scattered Jewels” which explores the “making of Guyana” [back cover] and “The Lure of the Mermaid”) are both included. Surprisingly, there is virtually no overlap between these two collections. In *Give Me Some More Sense: A Collection of Caribbean Island Folktales* (1988), St. Lucian educator, Jacintha Lee, “translated the [ten] folk tales from the local French Creole of St. Lucia and [wove] them into fascinating stories for young and old” [back cover].

Individual folktales are primarily found in picture-book format and also represent either ‘Caribbean’ stories such as *The Twins and the Bird of Darkness: A Hero Tale of the Caribbean* retold by Robert San Souci; and *Zebo Nooloo Chinoo: A Caribbean Folktale* written by Lynette Comissiong, or stories from specific countries like Cuba (*The Bossy Gallito/El Gallo de Bodas: A Traditional Cuban Folktale* retold by Lucia Gonzalez); and the Dominican Republic (*The Secret Footprints* retold by Julia Alvarez). Also included are some stories that originate from other parts of the world with a West Indian variant that is retold (as in the case of Virginia Hamilton’s *The Girl Who Spun Gold*) or, in the absence of a West Indian variant, these stories visually use the West Indies as a setting for the tale; as noted in Richardo Keens-Douglas’ retelling of *The Trial of the Stone*, a folktale with variations in both Asia and Africa; and Jenny’s Snow’s retelling of the English tale, *The House that Jack Built* where the text remains the same but the images are set in the Caribbean.

The next most common category, at three titles, was that of literary/original tales. These stories all employed the folk tale structure, format, and thematic conventions but with more highly developed characters and settings. They included Hazel Campbell’s *Ramgoat Dashedlong: Magical Tales of Jamaica* (2002); Andy Campbell’s 2001 publication *Stories from the Cockpit: Three Tall Short Stories (for ages 6 to 106)*; and *Tales from the Isle of Spice* (2004) by Richardo Keens-Douglas. Alternatively, some collections like Dr. Michael Anthony’s *Caribbean Folk Tales & Fantasies* combine retellings of folk tales like “The Tug-of-War” with original fantasy stories that feature folklore characters primarily from the Eastern Caribbean, like the Soucouyant, La Diabliesse, and Papa Bois.

This collection appears to be unique in the inclusion of these characters that feature extensively in the oral lore of Trinidad and Tobago but seldom appear in the written stories

produced for children. [Please see chapter 5 for student responses to this title.] On the other hand, *Pappi Pappi , Please Read me a Story* (c. 2002) by Trinidadian Professor Lance Seunarine is described as a collection “where politics, economics and social change are intermingled” in its focus on transmitting the stories and values of the Rastafarian religion to young children. Again, this is the only such iteration of such stories in the collection. Coincidentally, the title, *Indian Caribbean Folklore Spirits* (2010) by Dr. Kumar Mahabir is also a unique addition to the collection in part because it is the only offering that hints at an Indo-Caribbean folklore tradition and also because it is an informational account (as opposed to narrative storytelling) of the various spirits “believed to roam the Caribbean since the abolition of slavery” [back cover].

Finally, rhymes and songs are featured in Grace Hallworth’s *Rhythm and Rhyme: Songs, Rhymes and Games* (comprised mainly of songs, games, and rhymes the author remembered as a child growing up in Trinidad); the illustrated collection *Skip Across the Ocean: Nursery Rhymes from Around the World* by Floella Benjamin (which features “the best [rhymes and lullabies] from six continents and 23 countries”); and the picture book, *A Caribbean Counting Book* by Faustin Charles (which features traditional rhymes from different Caribbean islands). In keeping with the publication trends observed in Chapter 3, thirteen of the folklore titles were published in the U.K.; eight in the U.S.; eight in the Caribbean (six in Jamaica and two in Trinidad); and four in Canada.

### **Overview of Informational Books**

As noted in chapter three, the non-fiction section comprised 157 titles across 21 broad subject classification areas. Folklore (Dewey 398—discussed in the previous section), poetry and literature (Dewey 808-823), and English usage (Dewey 411-428) constitute 51% of this section, and contain stories and narratives as well as many concept books and a few biographies. The

titles that can be described specifically as informational books, characterized by their factual content, expository writing style and documented sources (Van Orden & Strong, 2007; Vardell, 2008), are the domain of specific categories such as Customs and Festivals (Dewey 394); Ecology (Dewey 577); Food and drink (Dewey 641); Geography (Dewey 917); History (Dewey 972-988); Medicine (Dewey 610); Social Sciences (Dewey 305-362); and Sports (Dewey 796).

Other categories, including folklore, poetry, and English usage, mentioned earlier also appear to contain informational texts to varying degrees, while categories such as music (Dewey 780), education (Dewey 372), animals (Dewey 590), and religion (Dewey 220-294) discuss subjects that are somewhat ‘specialized’ in presentation and content, for example, alphabet books and other concepts books are intended to ‘teach’ the alphabet or concept but can be presented in different formats across genres (poetry, folklore, etc.) or religious books can describe the religion or contain stories related to the practice of the religion.

In this section, I will discuss informational texts across Dewey categories that explore countries within the region (and beyond if so represented) and the people that appear in biographical texts, as this gives an indication of the individuals and places that are thought to be significant in the world of the Caribbean child. A very brief overview of other informational texts will follow this exposition.

### **Countries Surveyed**

As expected, books classified as ‘History’ (20 titles), ‘Geography’ (2 titles), or ‘Customs’ (5 titles) focused on one or more of the countries within the Caribbean region. [See Figure 4.7] The six survey books that focus on the entire Caribbean include: *The Caribbean (Food and Festivals Series* published in 1999 by Raintree Steck-Vaughn in the U.S., which focuses on the food related to major festivals of the region); *The Caribbean (Country File Series* published in

2005 by Franklin Watts in the U.K.); *The Changing Face of the Caribbean* (2002); *Caribbean Island Facts and Figures* (*Discovering the Caribbean Series* published in 2004 by Mason Crest Publishers in U.S.); and two other volumes from the latter series that split the region into the titles *Leeward Islands: Anguilla, St. Martin, St. Barbs, St. Eustatius, Guadeloupe, St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua & Barbuda, and Montserrat* (2004) and *Windward Islands: St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Martinique, and Dominica* (2004). One textbook, *Caribbean Social Studies* (1996), is included among these titles.

Predictably, there is more than one title about Trinidad, though four is not as many as one would expect in a collection based in Trinidad—a publishing setting that tends to focus on textbook and informational book publishing. The subtopics include a book of festivals—*Trinidad (Festivals of the World Series* published in 1999 by Gareth Stevens publishing in the U.S.); one booklet that zeroes in on one aspect of Carnival celebrations which does not appear to be intended for children—*A Glimpse of Carnival in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago: King Calabar Robber Speeches, Manual no. 1* (1978); Trinidad and Tobago (*Discovering the Caribbean Series*) written by Romel Hernandez—a general survey book of the country; and the historical overview *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago* (1996) written by University of the West Indies professor, Dr. Bridget Bereton, and intended for use at the secondary school level.

Cuba was presented in three titles, one general survey *Cuba (Discovering the Caribbean Series)* and two that focused on the more controversial aspects of Cuba's past and present: *The Cuban Missile Crisis: To the Brink of World War III (Turning Points in History Series* published in 2001 by Heinemann Library in the U.K.) which includes “eyewitness accounts and contemporary views on the event”<sup>4</sup>—and *Cuba (Nations in Conflict Series* published in 2003 by

Blackbirch Press in the U.S.), which covers the historical, present, and future of the “political turmoil” that prevails in the country.

Four countries, Haiti, The Dominican Republic, Dominica, and Jamaica, are accounted for in two titles each. In the latter case, there is the general survey title, *Jamaica (Discovering the Caribbean Series)* and the survey/alphabet book *J is for Jamaica* (2006) written by poet Benjamin Zephaniah for the *World Alphabet Series* published by Frances Lincoln Children’s Books in the U.K.. On each page, a color photograph (or photographs) that correspond/s to a letter is accompanied by a description of the feature in verse (which in this case might not be the most effective mode by which to convey this information); for example:

*B is for Blue Mountain; its beauty must be seen.  
The lovely Blue Mountain is really very green.  
In the centre of Jamaica, it rises to the sky,  
And it looks very special when a rainbow passes by.*

This is the only title among those classified as ‘History’ (as opposed to the other Jamaican or Caribbean alphabet books) in picture book format with a rhyming text.

On the other hand, the books about Dominica are reflective of a particular point of view or perspective and not the all-encompassing survey books that are more common. The titles included are *Yet We Survive: The Kalinago People of Dominica – Our Lives in Words and Pictures* (2007) which describes the current state of “the last survivors of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean” [book description] in their own words and pictures; and *Children of Dominica (World Children Series)* published in 1999, in which, according to a reviewer from *School Library Journal*, “individual children are used primarily as hooks upon which to hang bits of information”<sup>5</sup>. These titles seem to substantiate the reviewer’s concluding observation that “Dominica is not well represented in series books about Caribbean island nations” and “even standard reference sources give a short mention”.<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, the countries that share the same island mass, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are each represented in two standard series survey texts; in this case *Haiti (Countries of the World Series)* published in 1999; and *Haiti (Festivals of the World Series)* published in 2002; *The Dominican Republic (Enchantment of the World Series)* published in 1999; and *Dominican Republic (Discovering the Caribbean Series)*. *Guyana (Discovering the Caribbean Series)*, yet another survey book is the only offering about that country, while *Bequia Reflections: An Artist in the Caribbean* (1999) produced by American painter Julia Savage Lea contains a collection of sketches and paintings that document life on the largest of the islands in the Grenadines over a twenty year period, from 1978 to 1998. Apart from the inclusion of a chapter on St. Vincent & the Grenadines in the book *Windward Islands (Discovering the Caribbean Series)*, this is the only representation of this country in the collection.

Finally, under the description of “Other” in the graph, there are three titles that go beyond the region into neighboring and historically connected countries. They include: an index entitled *Early Civilizations in the Americas: Reference Library Cumulative Index* (2005) compiled by Julie Carnagie and published by Thomson Gale in the U.S.; *An Online Visit to South America* (the only volume of the *Internet Field Trips* series included in the collection; published in 2002 by PowerKids Press in the U.S.); and *West Africa* (the second of two volumes from the *Food and Festivals Series* in the collection).

Of the ten series included, only one *Discovering the Caribbean* (2004) is dedicated to the countries of the Caribbean. However, only nine of the eleven-volumes in the series were noted (*Barbados* and *Puerto Rico* were not). The other series focused on countries outside of the region and therefore only the ones that did focus on the Caribbean as a whole or on individual countries were shelved in the WIJ collection, while the other volumes of each series were shelved in the

general collection. Nine of the titles were designated as 'Reference' or non-circulating, though there was no obvious pattern discerned in the determination of such assignments, as six of them were volumes from series (*Trinidad and Tobago*, *Children of Dominica*, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, *the Dominican Republic*, *Caribbean Island Facts and Figures*, and *West Africa*) and three were not (*A Glimpse of Carnival*, *The Changing Face of the Caribbean* and *Early Civilizations in the Americas*).

### **Biographies**

The seventeen biographical titles can be found across four subject-areas: 10 classified as 'Biographies' (900s); two classified as 'English Language usage' (400s); three classified as 'Customs' (300s); and two classified under 'Medicine' (600s). The oldest of the titles was published in 1973, while the most recent publication date was 2005 (4 titles). Formats varied, but trade books were the most common (11 titles), followed by picture books (4 titles); and two illustrated books. In all but one volume, the focus of each title was on a single individual. The exception was a compilation of short biographies of 35 scientists and innovators in the title *Caribbean Icons of Science, Technology and Innovation (Vol 1)* published in 2005 by the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST). The distribution of fields/professions of the individuals featured in 16 titles is summarized in Figure 4.8.

As observed in the chart, political figures, politicians and/or activists, is the most common subject for these biographies. Four titles feature two famous political icons: Jamaican born proponent of Pan-Africanism, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) in *A Man Called Garvey: the Life and Times of the Great Leader Marcus Garvey* (2004) written by Paloma Mohammed and *Marcus Garvey* (2003) written by Sandra Donovan from the series *African American*

*Biographies*; and revolutionary and former Prime Minister and President of Cuba, Fidel Castro (born in 1926), in *Fidel Castro: Leader of Cuba's Revolution* (2000) by Tom Gibb, from the *Famous Lives Series*, and *Fidel Castro* (2003) by Richard Platt, from the series *Twentieth Century History Makers*. Both figures are an intrinsic part of the post-colonial fabric of the region and their presence in the collection is expected.

The other two political figures featured are prominent in Britain and perhaps less well known to a child audience in the Caribbean. The first is the Rt. Hon Patricia Scotland, Baroness of Asthal, who was born in Dominica in 1956 but migrated to the U.K. with her family at the age of two, where she became the first black female Queen's Counsel in 1991. Her life and accomplishments thus far is the subject of the book, *Baroness Scotland of Asthal* (2001), a volume of the *Black Profiles Series* published by Tamarind Ltd. The second British politician is John David Beckett, Baron Taylor of Warwick, who was born in Birmingham to Jamaican parents and is currently a (suspended) member of the House of Lords in the U.K. Parliament who was "charged with expenses fraud and has now been found guilty of making £11,277 in false claim"<sup>7</sup>. His biography, *John Taylor Lord Taylor of Warwick: Barrister* (2000), is also an installment of the *Black Profiles Series*.

Entrepreneurs are the next most common group of professionals featured in juvenile biographies. Two prominent Trinidadian insurance executives, Cyril Duprey (1897-1988) and Russell Tesheira (1951-2004), are the two of the subjects of the *Great Nationals of Trinidad and Tobago* series published by the company with which they were both affiliated, Colonial Life and General Insurance Company (CLICO). This company was the first black-owned and 'locally-grown' insurance company in the region and its founder, Duprey, was a pioneer in the field at home and abroad (having worked for insurance companies in the United States prior to starting

CLICO). Tesheira was a local football hero as a former captain of the national team before ascending to vice-president of sales and agencies administration at CLICO.

British information technology entrepreneur, Jim Braithwaite (born in 1953), who holds the distinction of being the first black CEO of a publicly quoted company in the U.K., is featured in yet another title of the *Black Profiles Series*, the eponymous *Jim Braithwaite: Entrepreneur* (2000). Interestingly, there is conflicting information regarding the island of his birth—the book description says St. Lucia while in the body of the text Barbados is mentioned; the consensus appears to be the former. Though the contributions made by all three men were invaluable, the intrinsic appeal of their stories to children is questionable.

Other subjects in other walks of life featured in the *Black Profiles Series* include an award-winning British author in *Malorie Blackman (Author)* published in 2000, and the first black British female consultant orthopedic surgeon in *Samantha Tross: A Profile* also published in 2000. Tross was born in Guyana in 1968, while Blackman was born in London with no obvious ties to the Caribbean stated (her parents may or may not have migrated from Barbados<sup>8</sup>). Jamaican born, Mary Seacole (1805-1881), who served as a nurse for Britain during the Crimean war, was featured in one of the volumes of the series *Tell Me About Pioneers* (1999) published by Evans Brothers Ltd. in the U.K. Her reputation is said to have rivaled that of Florence Nightingale<sup>9</sup>. In a departure from the standard trade book format, *Under the Royal Palms: A Childhood in Cuba* (1998) is a collection of stories and reminiscences from the early life of author Alma Flor Ada. This is the only title among books of this type that can be considered autobiographical. She is a prolific U.S. based author who publishes extensively in Spanish and English.

The remaining three biographies focus on a prominent musician and arranger of steel pan music in *Great Nationals of Trinidad and Tobago: Jit Samaroo* (2005); a record breaking Trinidadian-born cricketer, *Brian Lara* (1997) from the *Livewire: Real-Live Sport* reading series; and an account of a young boy who was lost at sea with his father and miraculously survived after ten days when his father did not, in *Jason Whyte, Jamaican: A True Story* (1973). Of the three, Brian Lara is possibly the most well-known by contemporary Trinidadian and Caribbean child audiences.

### **Other Informational Topics**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the range of topics covered in the non-fiction section is somewhat limited compared to the wider collection of juvenile literature at the POS children's library, and works that can be considered primarily informational, much less so. 'Sports' (Dewey decimal classification 796) was a key area but still underdeveloped with a total of six (6) titles featuring two sports, cricket and football. Three of the cricket titles are all part of the *Get Caught Reading* series, which "is a series of fiction and non-fiction readers with a cricketing theme"<sup>10</sup>, written by Trinidadian author Nasser Khan and published by Heinemann Educational Publishers in the U.K. One reader, *It's a Funny Game* (2007) is intended for ages 7-8; while *Know the Game* (2007) and *The World Cup* (2007) target the ages 9 to 11 years old.

The fourth title, *Working with the Best of Cricket – Workbook* (c. 2007) is a workbook that is meant "as a guide to teachers and students as they make a study of the *Best of Cricket: World Cup 1975-2003*"<sup>11</sup>. This workbook is a non-circulating title that was written by Grenadian author Eon Mars and printed in Trinidad, but the companion text is not included in the WIJ collection. The football books consisted of *The Official Guide to the 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa* (2010), a handbook, and *World Class: An Illustrated History of Caribbean Football*

(2006) written by James Ferguson and published by Macmillan Education; a survey of the “development of the game from colonial amateur times into today’s increasingly professional sport”<sup>12</sup>.

Apart from sports, other informational titles include a book classified under ‘Ecology’; *Monteverde: Science and Scientists in a Costa Rican Cloud Forest* (1997); two classified under ‘Food and drink’, the picture book *What’s in the Pan, Man?* (2002) and *Wholesome Nutrition for Young Children* (2004); one classified as ‘Music’, *The History of Steel Band* (2006); and three classified under ‘Religion’—*Hinduism for Children* (1994), *Hum Hindu Hain: Level 2* (2006); and *The Lights of Divali* (1988).

In the latter two categories there are titles that also provide examples of music, such as the Belafonte classic *Island in the Sun* (1999) and *Caribbean Carnival: Songs of the West Indies* (1993); as well as religious stories, including six Christian-themed texts—*ABC’s of the Bible* (2005); *And Jesus Smiled: Religious Short Stories for Children* (2008); *Adding Value for Children* (2008); *If Animals Could Speak: Ozzie, the Shunammite’s donkey; Hero, the horse; Cameo, the camel; El Rey, the King’s horse* (2009); *If Animals Could Speak: Roddy, the part-time cobra; Balaam’s donkey; Sheppy, the lamb; Blackie, the raven* (2009); and *My Little Prayer Book* (2009)—as well as one Hindu-themed book entitled *My First Book of Krishna Stories* (2002).

### **Overview of Chapter Books**

The 28 chapter books inspected represented a cross-section of genres, intended audiences, themes, and settings. Most of the selections were fairly current, though overall they spanned five decades with the earliest being 1965 (*The Year in San Fernando*) and the most

recent published in 2008 (*Legend of the Swan Children*). [See Figure 4.9 for a brief overview of the counts in each decade]

Some of the earlier publications were not initially intended for a child audience when they were published, though the author/s would have chosen to write from the perspective of a child protagonist and address the theme of childhood<sup>13</sup>. Most notable examples of this were Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey* (which was originally published in 1970 but the copy in the collection is a 1981 reprint); and *The Year in San Fernando* by Michael Anthony, as these books later became appropriated for use by young adults at the secondary school level. However, other books in the collection, bearing a more recent publication date, by virtue of their literary characteristics (adult protagonists, complex vocabulary and sentence structure, adult themes, etcetera., indicate that they might not be the most useful inclusion in a collection of that age range. As a result, those titles *Children's Feet* (2009) by Michael Als, and *In Praise of Love and Children* (2002) by Beryl Gilmore will not be further discussed in this overview.

This brings the count to 26 selections which essentially contain a child protagonist as its most basic feature. In terms of gender distribution, once again most of those protagonists were predominantly male (16), while half of that count was female (8). Two titles featured both a male and female lead—*Three Finger Jack's Treasure* (1969) and *The Legend of the St. Ann's Flood* (2004). It is worth mentioning that these observations do not imply that there was a deficiency in strong female characters, especially given the fact that 14 titles were written by 13 female authors (two by Julia Alvarez), and the remaining 12 were written by seven male authors (six written by C. Everard Palmer).

## Genres and Themes

Delineating the genres and sub-genres represented in the chapter books was not a straightforward as anticipated. Realism was clearly the most common form but in some instances it was difficult to determine whether or not a title that should be considered contemporary realistic fiction would seem more like historical fiction to the contemporary reader. One reason for this is the ‘nostalgic’ tone of many of the books and no clear indication of the time period or time frame in which these stories took place, outside of the publication date. For purposes of this exposition, however, the distinction between contemporary realism and historical realism is the prescriptive one: the former is set in current times while the latter is set in the past. Fantasy is defined as “imaginative stories about people, animals and objects in settings outside of our daily lives” (Van Orden, 2004; p. 91) and mysteries as stories with suspenseful plots, both of which can be set in the past, present or future. [See Figure 4.10]

Across these genres, there are a number of recurring themes. Among them: **family relationships** with all of the attendant nuances and complications. At least nine novels explore this theme; among them, *How Tia Lola Came to Stay* by Julia Alvarez—a young boy of divorced parents struggles to come to terms with moving away from his father and the eccentric aunt from the Dominican Republic who comes to live with his family; *Jojo’s Treasure Hunt* by Cherrell Sheeley-Robinson—a story, with elements of magical realism, of a sensitive boy in rural Jamaica who is determined to save his family from impending eviction; and the two-parter by C. Everard Palmer, *My Father Sun-Sun Johnson* and *Full Circle: the Rami Johnson Story*, which both deal with very dense issues such as bankruptcy, divorce, and revenge, but at the core is the relationship between a father and son.

Another recurring theme is that of the *bildungsroman* or **coming of age story**, which is often, though not exclusively, the domain of the female protagonist. In these stories, the protagonist undergoes a transformation from childhood to adulthood (or significant spans of time developmentally) while facing several challenges that may incorporate other themes, for example, difficult family relationships, adjusting to a new country, etc. *Letters to my Mother* by Teresa Cardena weaves a sensitive tale of a young girl who is emotionally and physically abused by her relatives in whose care she is entrusted after the death of her mother. The diary format relates episodes that cover five years of her life.

*Crick Crack Monkey* by Merle Hodge (as mentioned in chapter 2) is the semi-autobiographical story of a young girl who is torn between the cultural ethos of two branches of her family (working class and middle class) as she struggles to find her identity and where she belongs. *The Year in San Fernando* by Michael Anthony is the story of twelve-year old Francis who gets the opportunity to work as a servant companion to an old lady, in a town that is very unlike his own and in the absence of his family. Though the story covers one year of his life the mental and physical changes are significant enough for it to be best described as a coming-of-age story.

The theme/element of **migration** often co-exists with the aforementioned themes of coming-of-age and family relationships, but these stories also involve the physical transplantation of the protagonist to another country and cultural ethos. Two examples of this include Floella Benjamin's autobiographical novel *Coming to England*, which details her move from Trinidad to England at age 11 and the "adversity, bleak weather, unfamiliar surroundings, and regular taunts and bullying"<sup>14</sup> with which she was forced to grapple and overcome; and *The Diary of a Young West Indian Immigrant* by Trish Cooke, the fictional account of the character

Gloria Charles who leaves her home in Dominica and travels to England in 1961 at the age of ten to meet her parents; the story spans five years of her new life and is “based on a collection of real-life interviews with people who have had similar experiences”<sup>15</sup>. In the novel, *Surprising Joy* by Valerie Bloom, migration is also a dominant motif, however, Joy’s ‘adjustment’ had less to do with no longer being in the sunny island of Jamaica and more to do with the realization that the woman she had thought of as her mother was not her mother and the discovery of the true identity of the woman.

Whereas the coming of age story combined with migration can be described as a personal quest, there are some novels that deal explicitly with a **physical quest** or journey rife with **fantasy**, such as *Legend of the Swan Children* by Maureen Marks-Mendonca—the tale of young Alex who discovers his special abilities while on a quest to save her mother; *Mella and the N’anga: An African Tale* by Gail Nyoka—the story “set a long time ago in what we now call Zimbabwe” of a princess who must confront the Great N’anga to save her father the king from certain death; and *Three Finger Jack’s Treasure* by Philip Sherlock, a self-explanatory tale of a brother and sister who set off on a quest to find this alleged treasure. *Tarik and the Island of Adventure* by Lee Kessell is similarly themed but involves a journey to escape the virtual world into which Tarik’s computer has engulfed him.

In the midst of some adventures, other themes such as **friendship**, as evident in *Legend of the St. Ann’s Flood* by Debbie Jacob (the protagonists befriend and try to protect a snake that is the product of two folklore characters); *Baba and Mr. Big* by C. Everard Palmer (a young boy’s attempt to protect a wild hawk, who is a notorious chicken thief, from angry villagers with the help of an old man he befriends); and the peculiar and puzzling *Whose Side are You On?* by Alan Gibbons (the story of young equivocator, Mattie, who is confronted with instances of

racism against his Asian friend and school but fails to act, resulting in his transplantation (no pun intended) to Jamaica during the height of slavery. He bonds with the slaves he meets and learns a valuable lesson.)

While the Gibbons novel, to me, was an odd take on slavery as a thematic element, other novels treat the subject of **history** with much more sensitivity and accuracy. Victor Reid provides a much more germane perspective on slavery in his 1971 novel, *Peter of Mount Emphraim*, which chronicles the Samuel Sharpe uprising in the eighteenth century. It is said that Reid's goal in his writing for children and adults was intentionally meant to teach young Jamaicans about their history and to influence their future actions in a positive, nationalistic way. Political and social issues, interwoven with personal ones, are also dealt with in Julia Alvarez's *Before we were Free*; the story of a twelve-year old girl caught in the middle of her family's involvement in the cruel Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic<sup>16</sup>.

Other themes less well-represented include **rivalry** (*Big Doc Bitterroot* by C Everard Palmer); **triumph over adversity** (*The Sun Salutes You* also by C. Everard Palmer); **determination** (as evident in the mystery *The River That Disappeared* by Andrew Salkey); and **comic misadventure** (*Sprat Morrison* by Jean D'Costa). The two overtly transitional chapter books *Carnival* by Grace Hallworth—the story of a young boy who is separated from his father during the annual Carnival street parade in Trinidad—and *Butter-Finger* by John Agard and Bob Cattell—which tells of a young boy's determination to be chosen for the community cricket team—also incorporate themes of friendship, family, and overcoming adversity. The summary of themes is presented in Figure 4.12.

## Writing Style

Quite a few narrative techniques are employed across the 26 selections. Eleven titles are written from the point of view of the protagonist (first person narration) while 15 employ third person limited and omniscient narration. As expected, the former was more commonly used in the coming of age stories, and many that focused on family relationships, while the latter prevailed in the adventure/quest/fantasy, as well as a few that dealt with family life and friendships. Two novels—*Letters to my Mother* and *Diary of a Young West Indian Immigrant*—are written entirely in the diary/journal format, while *Butter-Finger* attempts to blend prose with poetry/song.

All novels are written in Standard English, however, they vary in the use of the Creole of the particular country in which the story is set, for example, the liberal use of Jamaican Creole in *Surprising Joy*, and *Jojo's Treasure Hunt*; and Trinidadian Creole in *Crick Crack, Monkey* and *The Year in San Fernando* versus the limited use of Creole in the books of C. Everard Palmer. Spanish terms, phrases and references can also be found in a few of the texts, namely: *Letters to my Mother*, *How Tia Lola came to Stay*, *Before We Were Free*, and *Legend of the Swan Children*.

## Setting

Among the possible locations (see Figure 4.12), Jamaica served as the setting for most of these stories, namely, Palmer's six titles; Reid's *Peter of Mount Ephraim*; D'Costa's *Sprat Morrison*; Salkey's *The River that Disappeared*, Shelley-Robinson's *Jojo's Treasure Hunt*, and the first half of Bloom's *Surprising Joy*. Trinidad was the next most common setting: Hodge's *Crick, Crack Monkey*; Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*, Jacob's *Legend of the St. Ann's Flood*, Hallworth's *Carnival*, and the first half of Benjamin's *Coming to England*. Three novels

are set in vague, indeterminate locations (“a West Indian island” in *Butter-Finger*; “somewhere in the tropics” (most likely South America) in *Legend of the Swan Children*; and “an island in the Caribbean” (possibly St. Lucia or Montserrat because of the presence of a volcano).

A more nuanced look at setting reveals the complex interplay between the rural/pastoral and the urban or ambiguous location. For example, virtually all of C. Everard Palmer’s books are “set in the rural part of Jamaica where Palmer grew up and depict a slower, more rooted way of life that has long since vanished<sup>17</sup>”. The urban setting is often represented through the immigrant experience as the child moves from their quaint, little island to the hustle and bustle of the big city of London or New York. Stories such as *Carnival* and *Legend of the St. Ann’s Flood*, both set in Trinidad do a good job of situating the stories within a clearly defined physical context or event without negating the possibility that there could be other facets of the society unexplored by the text (as opposed to giving the impression that the entire society is so defined).

### **Cultural Markers**

The cultural markers evident in these chapter books were very similar to the textual, and visual, ones found in the picture books; namely flora, fauna, place names, festivals, rituals, music, and language. Ethnic representation is less homogeneous, though many of the books contain African-Caribbean protagonists and characters with some novels based on Hispanic characters from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Some works conveyed very little about the Caribbean at all as they were either set outside of the region (as is the case with *Mella and the N’anga*) or those without any overt ‘connections’ to a Caribbean aesthetic or traditions and could have been set anywhere or on any island (as evidenced by *Tarik and the Island of Adventure* and *Legend of the Swan Children*).

## Discussion

Given the relative infancy of Caribbean children's literature, it is no surprise that there is such variance in quality, quantity, thematic exploration, and more diverse representation. As indicated, picture storybooks perhaps paint the most lucid 'picture' of Caribbean-ness, but it is often plagued by limited representation, idealized, nostalgic references, and a misunderstanding of the most effective use of the format (often in the form of redundant images and excruciating textual details that can be conveyed by or are conveyed by the images).

Another aspect of concern is the level of inequity with respect to gender representation (whether human or animal) where males outnumbered female protagonists (30 to 17 in the sample examined). Given the fact that statistically the ratio of male to female children in the Caribbean is roughly 1.03: 1 respectively, being mindful of levels of representation in the literature will go a long way to reflect reality and ensure that both groups feel equally empowered through the images they see. Consequently, the format is an ideal medium for the Caribbean child to see himself or herself and his or her immediate environment in the books they read. At its best, it is capable of capturing subtle and profound relationships between family members and friends with the nuances and attention to detail that expertly conveys what is unique about the region.

The folktales that served as the first site of publishing for children remain a significant genre within the collection. While Anancy still dominates, there is an encouraging trend of collecting, documenting, and sharing the less popular stories of various types from specific countries within the Caribbean. The idea of a Caribbean folklore is clearly less well-defined as previously imagined, as evidenced by little or no overlap among the stories presented in these collections. In fact, in the case of Trinidad and speaking from personal experience, the characters

with which many of us are familiar through the oral tradition and intergenerational storytelling are barely represented in the books found in the collection. It is also difficult to tell, due to minimal source notes at best, the more precise origin of stories labeled as Caribbean. Is it enough for a story that did not originate in the Caribbean but retold with a Caribbean backdrop to be considered part of ‘our’ folklore while the actual lore remains elusive?

Similarly, there is much room for informational books to capture more of the Caribbean landscape and people. With the inclusion of only one dedicated series on the islands of the Caribbean and several volumes in other more general or generic series, young Caribbean readers are missing out on the opportunity to learn more about their immediate environment, hobbies, and other interesting phenomena through books. Additionally, the fact that so many of these books are published outside of the region seems to clearly indicate that the implied reader is not the Caribbean child living in a Caribbean country but rather the child who may or may not have Caribbean ‘roots’ living in one of the metropolitan areas of London, New York or Toronto. For example, there are very few high interest, low level informational books on regional footballers, musicians/performers, or even more recognizable politicians/activists who reside in the Caribbean.

Lastly, single narrative chapter books are a major area of deficiency, with what seems like no clear focus/direction in publishing and a similar lack of focus among librarians responsible for collection development. This could be indicative of a general lack of understanding of the audience for these books (children living in the Caribbean) and the stories they do read and want to read. With the overall decrease in migration to the ‘developed’ world, how familiar is that scenario for the average child who has limited opportunity to travel outside of the region.

In the event that they do have parents or other family members abroad and they do eventually visit or migrate to these cities, the level of familiarity would be much greater now in the age of mass media which would mitigate the levels of alienation and displacement discussed in the older novels. Where fantasy is proffered—known to be a popular genre among school-aged children—it is sometimes done in such a way that there is nothing particularly unique about it being set in the Caribbean (though there were some good examples of effective use of magical realism in the texts discussed). Overall, this snapshot provides much food for thought and a more compelling view of where we need to be.

### Figures and Tables

Figure 4.1: Protagonists by ethnicity/race in picture books

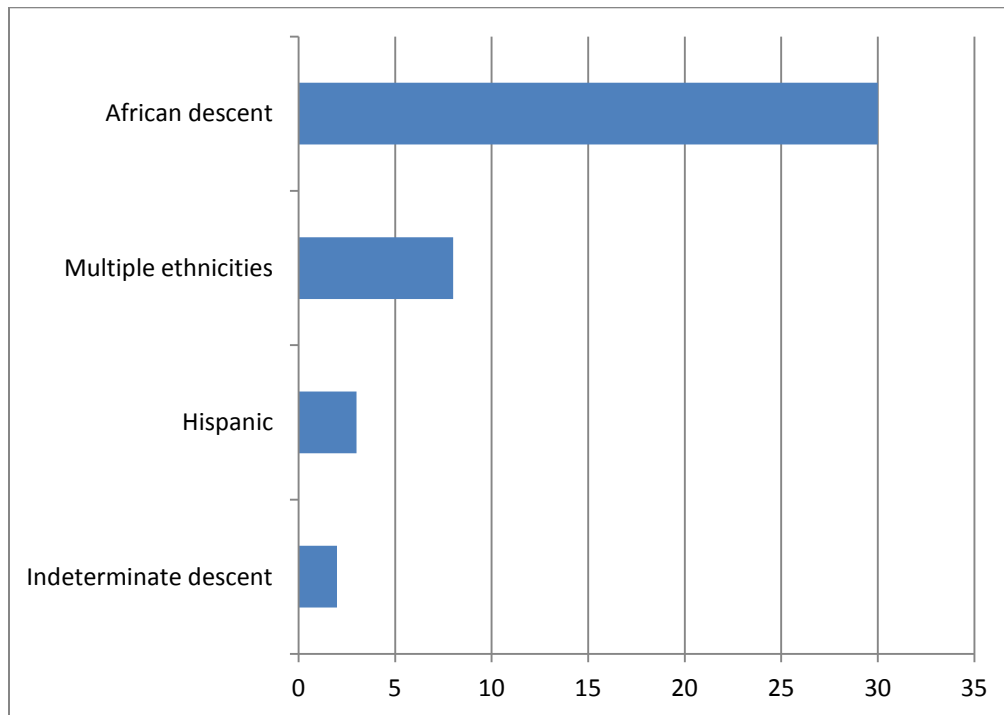


Figure 4.2: Significant thematic labels in picture books

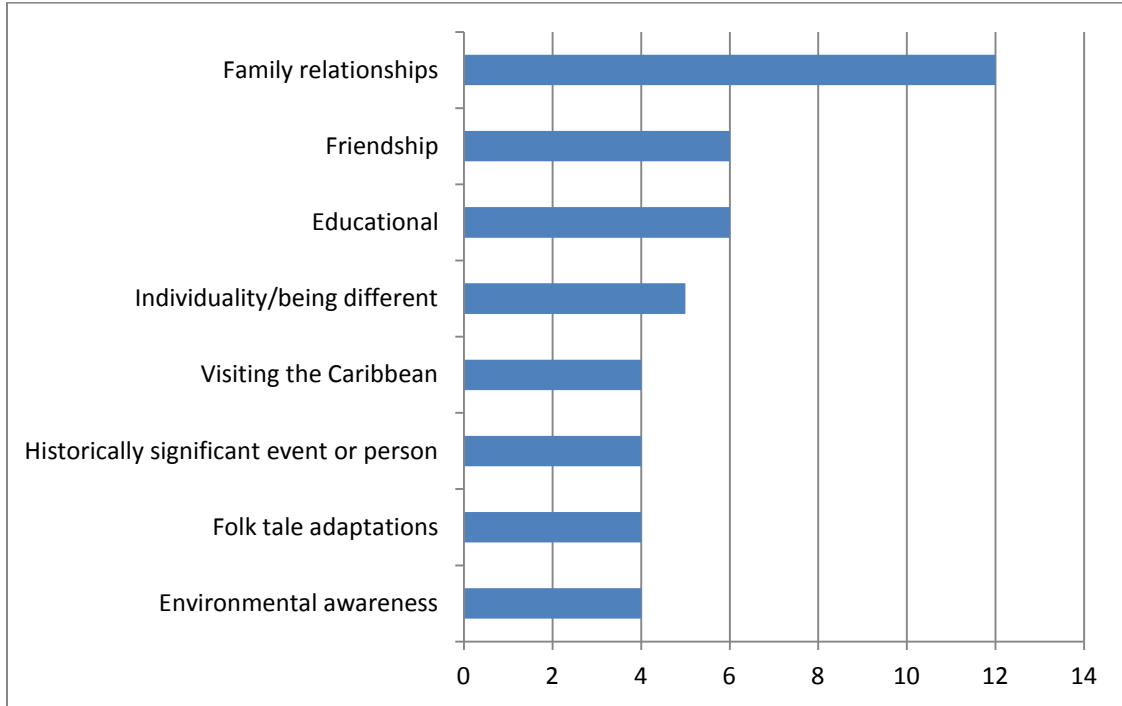


Figure 4.3: Setting in picture books according to visual and/or textual cues

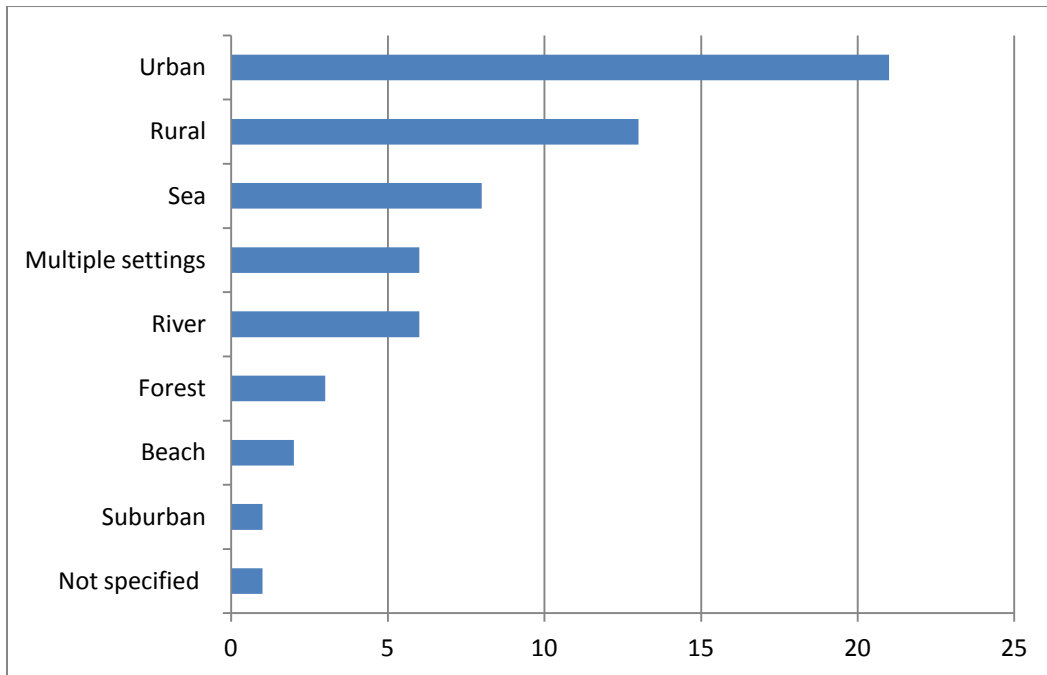


Figure 4.4: Artistic styles represented in picture books

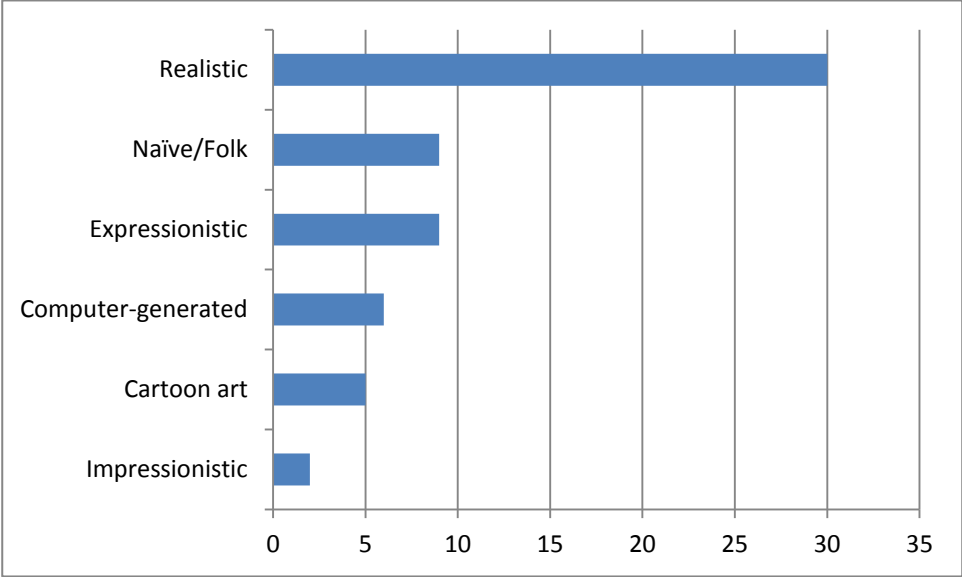


Figure 4.5: Traditional tales by publishing format

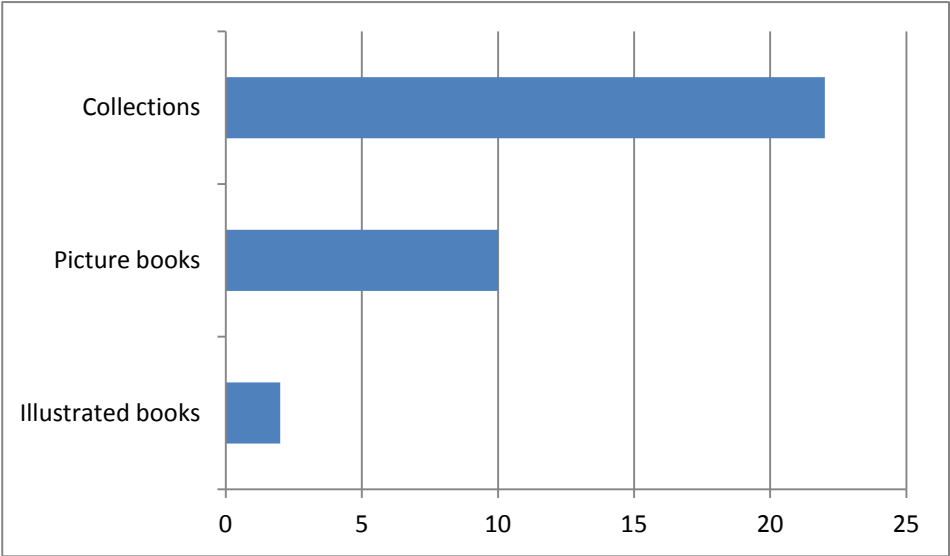


Figure 4.6: Traditional literature by sub-type or genre within the Dewey category 398.2

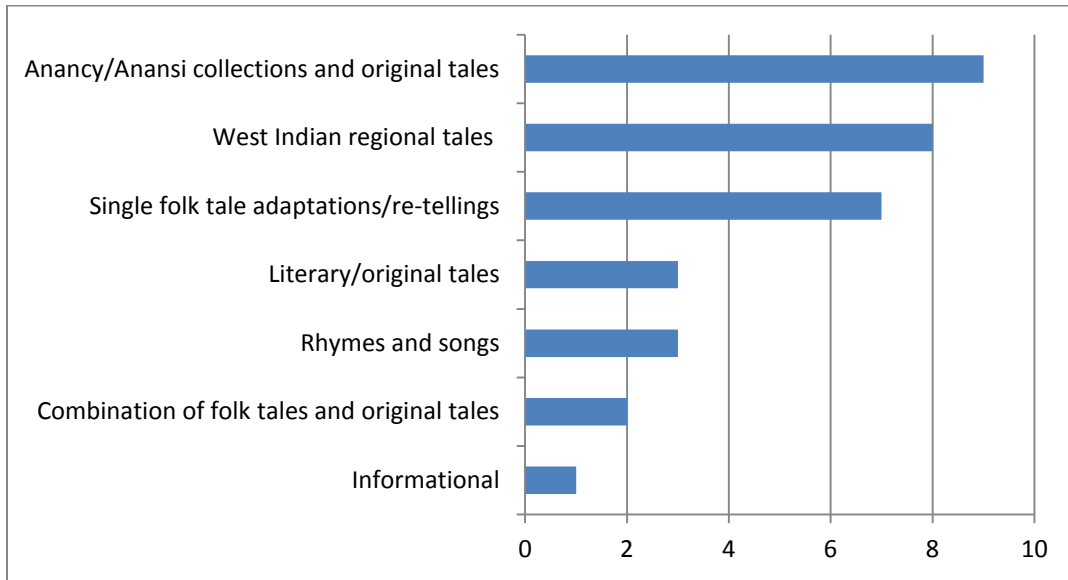


Figure 4.7: Countries presented in informational books

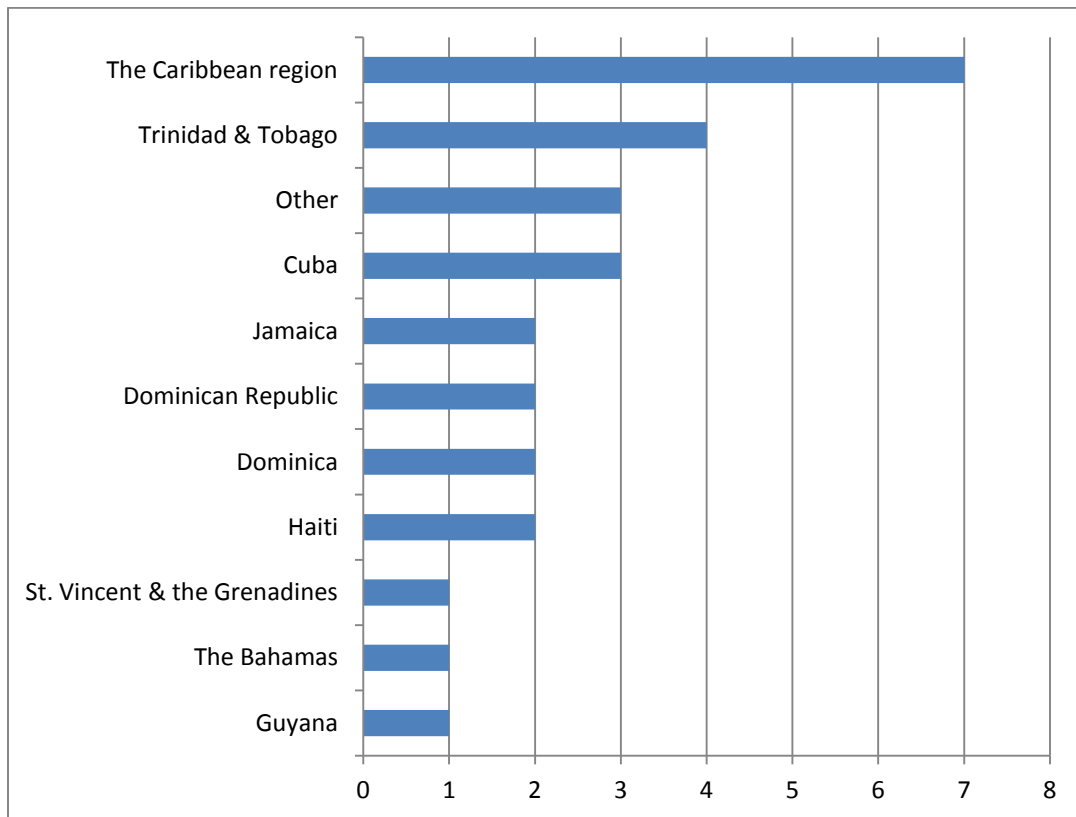


Figure 4.8: Professions represented in biographies

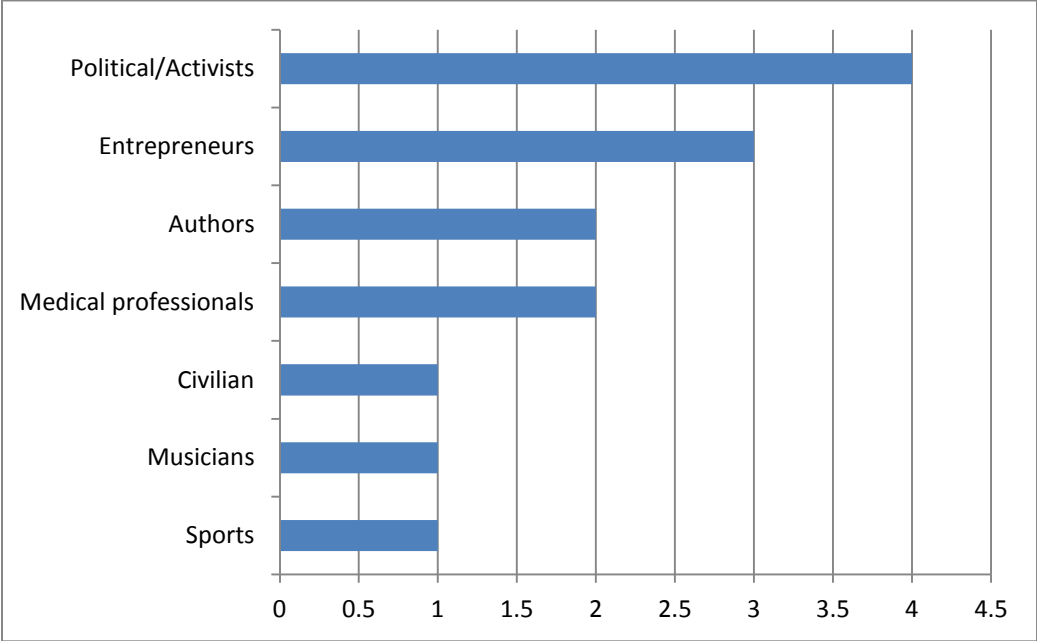


Figure 4.9: Chapter books according to publication date

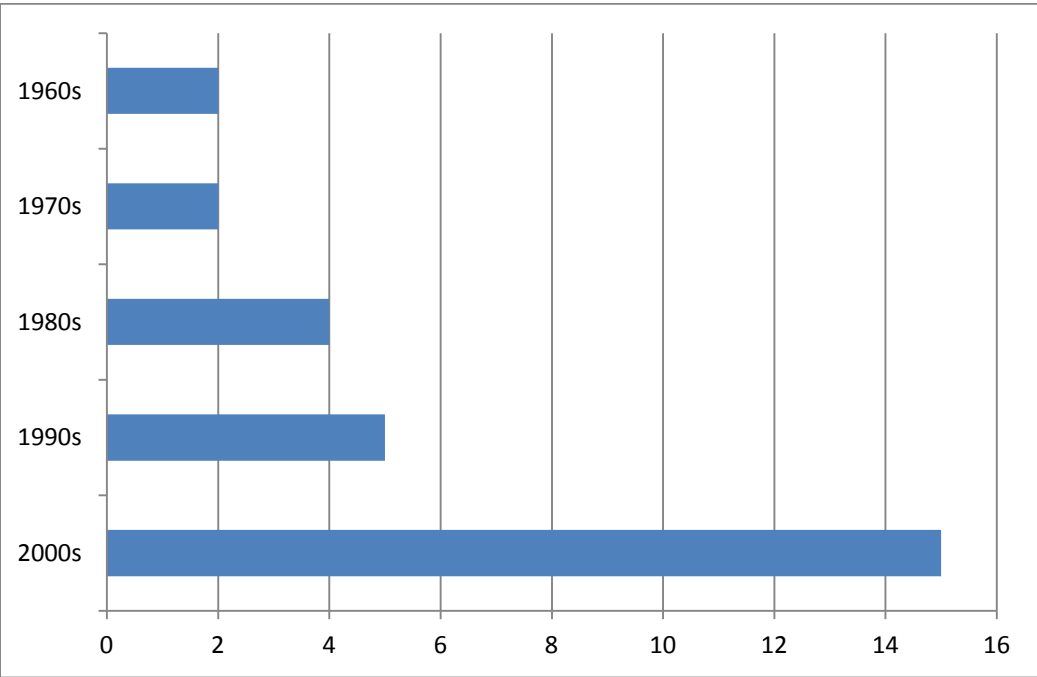


Figure 4.10: Chapter books according to genre

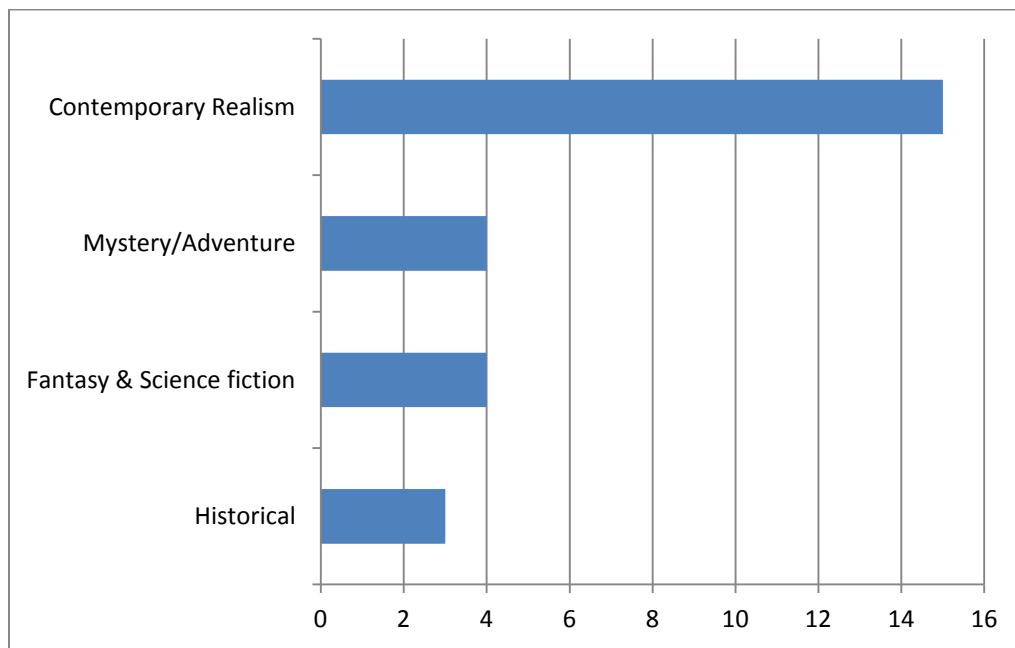


Figure 4.11: Chapter books according to theme

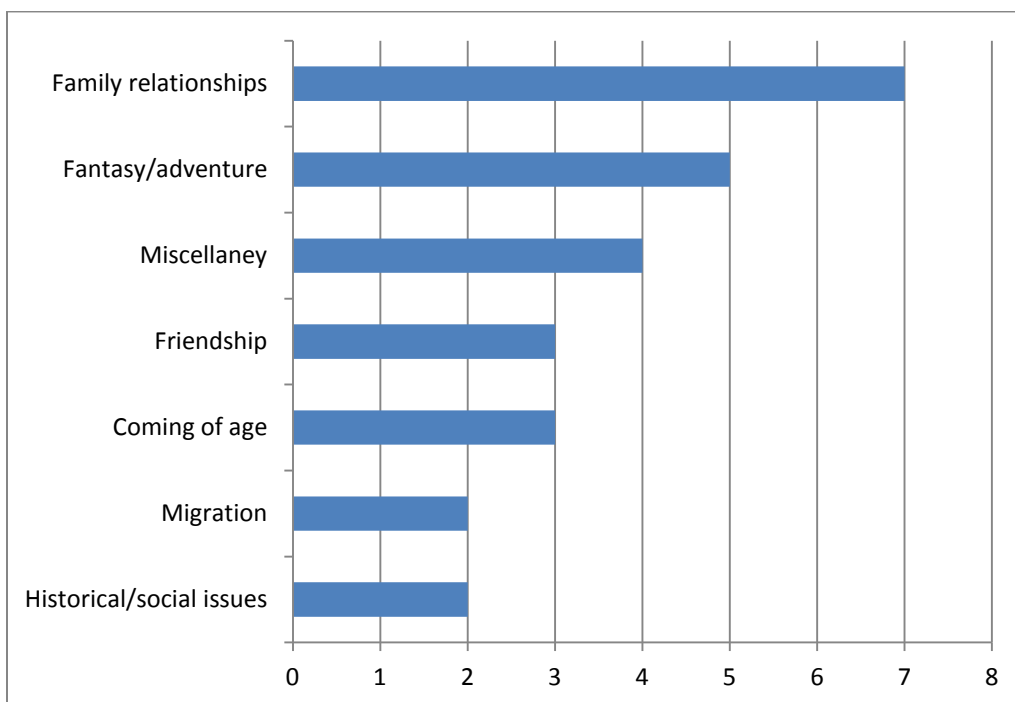


Figure 4.12: Chapter books according to setting

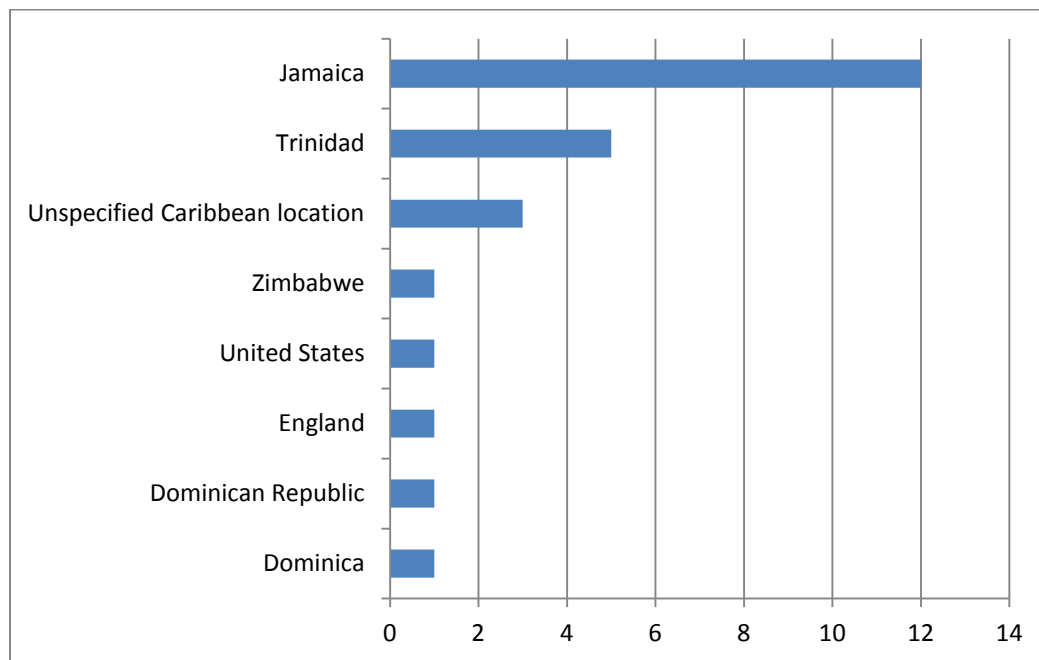


Table 4.1: Protagonists by gender in picture books

| <b>Protagonist</b> | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> | <b>Both</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| <b>Human</b>       | 24          | 10            | 6           | <b>40</b>    |
| <b>Animal</b>      | 6           | 7             | -           | <b>13</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>30</b>   | <b>17</b>     | <b>6</b>    | <b>53</b>    |

1 Definition sourced from the Oxford Dictionaries online:  
<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/expressionism>

2 Radcliffe Quay is a shopping area in St. John's, Antigua. According to Frommer's online, it is located on the "waterfront on the southern edge of town, where nearly three-dozen boutiques are housed in former warehouses set around tree-shaded, landscaped courtyards". Source:  
<http://www.frommers.com/destinations/antigua/0175010031.html#ixzz1woDzM5CH>

3 A quotation featured on the website for Annick Press, taken from a review of the book published in Teacher Magazine. Source: <http://site.annickpress.com/catalog/catalog.aspx?Title=Anancy+and+The+Haunted+House>

4 Quoted from the summary of the book:  
[http://books.google.com/books/about/The\\_Cuban\\_Missile\\_Crisis.html?id=LUvuAAAACAAJ](http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Cuban_Missile_Crisis.html?id=LUvuAAAACAAJ)

5 Review written by Pam Gosner in 1999 for the School Library Journal. Accessed through Amazon.com:  
<http://www.amazon.com/Children-Dominica-Worlds-Frank-Staub/dp/1575052172>

6 Ibid

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7 Source: BBC News Online in an article entitled: “Profile: Lord Taylor of Warwick” published on 25 January 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12175980>

8 My research on the author is corroborated by Jamaican author Diane Browne in her blog post entitled: “Can we claim Malorie Blackman, author of ‘Naughts and Crosses’?; posted on Monday, July 9, 2012: <http://dianebrowneblog.blogspot.com/2012/07/can-we-claim-malorie-blackman-author-of.html>

9 Profile of Mary Seacole from the BBC: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/seacole\\_mary.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/seacole_mary.shtml)

10 Series description on back cover of book.

11 Description on title page.

12 Book description on back cover of book.

13 Roy Narinesingh in the Introduction to *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) by Merle Hodge specifically refers to this novel and others “as belonging to a group of West Indian novels which deal with the theme of childhood.” (p. vii).

14 Quoted from the blurb on the back cover of the 1995 Walker Books edition

15 Quoted from the description of the story on p. 4 of the 2001 Franklin Watts edition.

16 <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~eliswong/trujillo/eraintro.html>

17 An apt description in a short biography and overview of Palmer’s works on Answers.com: <http://www.answers.com/topic/c-everard-palmer#ixzz22nKJFwR0>

## CHAPTER 5

### THE READERS

The reader response portion of the study took place prior to the collection evaluation over a period of five non-consecutive days from June 17<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011.<sup>1</sup> I chose books based on my conception of ‘Caribbean’ literature: written by authors based in the Caribbean (as opposed to expatriates); focusing on topics relevant to or reflective of the life, stories, or curriculum of the average Caribbean—or more specifically—Trinidadian child. Another criterion was one that was simply based on logistics; having enough copies of the books chosen for everyone in the group. Being mindful of the age-group (11-12 year olds), I also tried to select titles that would be appropriate for their reading level/interests (a particularly tricky prospect when looking at picture books).

As described in Chapters 3 and 4, the literature varied widely both in quality, perspective, and content. I was also eager to have the input of the participants in the process of book selection, which would be a means of increasing “ownership” of their roles as co-researchers. Thus, the first, introductory session was devoted to selecting the literature for subsequent sessions and completing the children’s assent forms, plus a brief discussion about their perspectives of reading, including recreational reading and West Indian children’s literature such as that found in the POS collection. The introductory meeting, and each subsequent session, was 90 minutes long. I began this process by asking each student to peruse the collection in its entirety and to select at least two books that immediately ‘spoke’ to them. For some, it was the first time that they had done so, which had the effect of either confirming their preconceptions or challenging them in some small way.

Each student was given roughly 30 minutes to browse and make their selections while the process of obtaining the assent of each participant was carried out in another part of the library. In the end, there was quite a great deal of overlap between the titles I considered and the ones chosen by the students. To further narrow the selections, we briefly discussed each of the 17 books chosen (examining the pictures, reading the synopses, etc.) and decided by consensus which ones would form the basis of our later discussions. Where the choices were skewed to one genre or type over others (the children primarily chose fiction), I made an executive decision but did discuss with them the reason for the inclusions of other genres such as folktales and informational books. In the end, we chose 3 picture books, 2 folktale collections, 5 information books, and 3 fiction/chapter books.

This chapter will focus on the perceptions and assumptions made by students about the genre/title prior to reading and examination; the process involved in the reading and examination of the books (read-alouds, perusal, in-depth personal reading, etc.); and their personal reactions (likes and/or dislikes) and literary interpretations (opinions about the theme, characterization, plot, structure etc.) as they respond to the literature. For each of the four focus-group discussions across genres and types of literature (sessions two to five), a brief summary of the composition and format of the session is provided, along with full bibliographic citations and short description of each title the children examined, read, and discussed; an account of the activities/general levels of engagement and interaction between and among participants; an overview of their literary and personal/cultural responses to each book; and lastly, my reflective summary of the session.

Though questions asked during each discussion varied according to the book/s being discussed, the general framework of questioning sought to ascertain each student's:

- initial reaction/s to the book (more specifically what they liked and/or disliked about it);
- opinions about the ways in which the book conveyed or did not convey elements of the Caribbean (ranging from recognizable elements within their own society of Trinidad and Tobago or other less familiar elements that suggest a Caribbean ‘feel’ or ‘aesthetic’, e.g. through language, dress, landscape, etc.); and
- some concluding sense of their overarching opinion at the end of the discussion and whether or not their initial impressions were solidified or altered in some way (often they would rate the book “thumbs up”, “thumbs down” or “in-between” or in one instance, out of five stars).

At the end of each session, I asked each student to complete a short written evaluation where they reflected on the process of the discussion. Three basic questions were asked:

1. Did we meet our goal today?            Yes            or            No
2. What did you not do that would have been helpful?
3. How could we do better next time?

Results of these are summarized in Appendix J

### **Session 1: Perceptions of Reading and the West Indian Juvenile Collection**

As noted in chapter one, the criteria for participant selection included being an articulate, avid reader in possession of a library card between the ages of 11 and 13 years-old, willing to share his or her thoughts with others and be available to participate over five non-consecutive days. In the first focus group discussion—which took place following the process of acquiring assent— students were asked specific open-ended questions to determine their literary tastes, reading patterns, and perceptions of the literature contained within the West Indian juvenile collection. [See Appendix K for questions asked]. Those who were unable to participate in this

session but who indicated a willingness to participate in the study were interviewed at their schools. Overall, responses were gleaned from ten students; six males and four females and can be summarized as follows:

- Half of the students (5 of 10) stated that they read because of the obvious educational benefits—for example, an increased understanding of curricula subjects or vocabulary development or enhancement, while the other half described reading as enjoyable and exciting. These reasons were not mutually exclusive as everyone acknowledged the validity of both as incentives.
- Three students visited the public library regularly (at least once per week) to check out books to read. The other seven indicated that they read books to which they had access at home, or obtained through exchanges with friends.
- When asked about the types of the books they preferred to read, responses were either overt or deduced from the specific titles given, and included the genres: action/adventure; mystery; fantasy; horror/scary stories; fables/moral/biblical tales; realistic fiction—especially humorous fare; and informational books that explore animals, science, and ancient history. No one indicated an interest in poetry or folktales.
- The students were asked directly about their familiarity with/interest in the West Indian juvenile collection and all students expressed unfamiliarity with the collection (though one was able to recall its previous location) and/or general disinterest in its composition and in Caribbean stories in general.
- Four children seemed to either equate WIJ literature with ‘local folktales’ or ‘Anancy stories’ or to the information about the Caribbean found in their textbooks. Nevertheless, they all agreed that having stories and books that represented the indigenous culture was

an important thing because if “you only [buy] books from people outside of the country you would start to lose focus [on] your country”.<sup>2</sup> They conjectured that the books in the West Indian collection would thematically cover ‘local stuff’ that would not coincide with their general interests, but they would be willing to explore these titles with open minds.

## **Session 2: Responses to Picture Books**

### **Description of Groups**

Nine students (5 boys and 4 girls) participated in the first book discussion on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2011. Three of the students (all boys) who participated in the first session opted to attend the second session; seven did not return largely because of conflicting activities.

However, session 2 was joined by 6 new participants (2 boys, 4 girls). On the one hand, I was glad to see that other students were interested (the two boys had agreed to participate but could not attend the first session, while the teacher failed to inform the girls about the first session).

Unfortunately, this meant that six of the nine students did not have the opportunity to engage in the selection process. In addition to that unanticipated scenario, the session was off to a late start awaiting the arrival of four students whose teachers forgot to factor in the time it would take to get the students to the library; hence the time allotted was reduced by approximately 30 minutes. As a consequence of the time constraint and because this was the first discussion meeting, I read all three picture books aloud and elicited their responses after each reading. The three picture books discussed included two locally produced/published titles and one that was chosen based on a topic of interest to the selectors.

## **Account of Activities**

Because this was the first of the literature discussions and because the books explored were picture books, the level of engagement among the students and with the books fluctuated and was somewhat limited. When asked for their opinions about these books, predictably, they felt that picture books were for “babies” and focused on topics like “trucks”. As a result, the discussion generated was not as spontaneous as expected, but rather assumed a question and answer format (initiated and sustained by me) with very little cross-talk among participants and answers ranging from the monosyllabic utterances to simple sentences. Gradually, levels of comfort increased and some students felt more comfortable expressing stronger opinions about the books. Overall, the boys were more talkative than the girls (118 responses versus 46), though some boys had more to say than others (I believe that this could be attributed to different personality types of each individual much more so than level of engagement or interest.)

## **Evaluation of Books**

### **Book description: *Kofi Wanted to be a Bad Bwoy*.**

*Kofi Wanted to be a Bad Bwoy* written by Mushriah Wilson, illustrated by Garth Jacobs.

Published in 2005 by BIS Publications in the United Kingdom. The paperback format inspected was roughly 7.9 x 7.6 inches and contained 24 pages. This title was shelved in the non-fiction section and classified as **WI J 428.6 Wi** - English Language Usage.

This is the first of two titles featuring the protagonist Kofi (the other is *Kofi to the Rescue: Bullies Beware*.) In this book, elementary-aged Kofi is impressed with the lives and attitudes of ‘bad bwoys’ he sees on the streets of his urban neighborhood, so much so that he actively tries to mimic their facial expressions to appear more intimidating. His consciously-crafted ‘bad bwoy’ face is so scary, his food, parents, bus driver, teacher and even natural

elements like the sun cower in its wake. However, when his parents are called to school to meet with his teacher, Miss Happyface, they are told that if Kofi's behavior does not change, he would have to be moved to another school. Under the threat of leaving his friends, favorite toys, and other favorites behind, Kofi realizes that being a good boy is much more rewarding and the balance is restored.

The intention of the author, as clearly stated in the afterword and back matter, is to provide a means of encouraging/assisting parents, teachers and other caregivers to explain "to the child that although the Bad Bwoy or street image may seem attractive, it is not a positive way of communicating or trying to get a message across."<sup>3</sup>The language is simple and in-keeping with its 'Key Stages 1' reading level designation (the United Kingdom curriculum that serves five to seven year-olds in the first and second years of elementary school). The vivid, exaggerated realistic images provide a broad sketch/impression of the stereotypical contemporary representations of urban life without situating it or grounding it too firmly in any one community; though the style of school uniform worn by Kofi and the other children clearly indicate that they are in a temperate climate and not in the Caribbean.

**Literary responses.** Of the seven children who were present for the discussion of this title, four did not like it (expressed as "thumbs down") and three thought that it was okay; ("in-between thumbs up and down"). The latter group felt that it was a funny story at best, and the former group thought it to be a boring one. They all agreed that it was best suited for a younger child ("6 to 9" was the estimated age-range). The main character's misguided motivation for wanting to be a bad boy was cited as one of the strengths of the book, especially as a cautionary tale for others; as evident by the following two excerpts:

“The fact that he wants to be a bad boy and, like, he didn’t really mean to be a bad boy, he wants to be a good boy, and that sometimes being a bad boy is not really a good thing because it could, like make other things happen.”

“They will learn that it’s not to try to be something that you don’t really want to be that will make anybody happy...”

Alternatively, others felt that the characterization of Kofi was not “real”—i.e. an inaccurate representation of a ‘bad bwoy’—which in turn affected their enjoyment of the story:

“Cause that wasn’t his true self; he wanted to be a good boy but he seemed like a bad boy. He wasn’t true to himself and to...he wasn’t true to himself and to other people.”

Another reason for the children’s dislike of the story stemmed from its lack of action and it not being “my type of book”.

**Personal and cultural associations.** The ‘richer’ responses to the story were based on the social concepts and attitudes elicited by the story. These concepts and attitudes were centered on issues of race, language, and societal roles/constructs. For example, students identified the book as West Indian primarily because the illustrations represented people who were black or of African descent and because of the use of the phrase “bad bwoy” (the Jamaican spelling, pronunciation and connotations of the word—the criminal ‘bad man’ element.). They demonstrated a strong awareness of the social influences involved in the construction of the “bad bwoy” which seemed to govern their unwillingness to suspend belief and accept the cause/effect cited in the book. To them, one becomes a “bad bwoy” by following “bad company” or—less commonly—if something happens to you at home and you are forced to take it out on others at school. One student frames this belief in the following way:

“Because, well black people...when you want to be a bad bwoy, yuh doesn’t...yuh look at them, they does lime<sup>4</sup> with them, um...you make friends with them and then they does have to do the same thing, they does follow them and end up being a bad boy.”

From the nature of the comment, it appears that they possessed more than passing or rudimentary knowledge of the creation and actions of a ‘bad bwoy’ and did not believe that the book represented their experiential reality of these individuals in a recognizable way. When asked what elements they would have chosen to include, the responses were:

Child 1: “Bad company”

Child 2: “Or something like something happens home by... at yuh home and yuh go come and take out on odder children in school”

Child 3: “No is only if dey hanging out with bad boys they will learn to be a bad boy”

**Book description: *The Treasure Hunt: Trinidad’s Magnificent Seven.***

*The Treasure Hunt: Trinidad’s Magnificent Seven* written by Karyn Anjali Mathura-Glubis, illustrated by Sona and Jacob. Published in 2006 by Caribbean Print Art in Trinidad; a company self-described as “ a fresh, young, forward-thinking publishing house with a unique corporate culture” that is “committed to making an impact on Caribbean society, on our industry, and on the lives of individual readers by publishing books with high-quality content and uncommon value”. The hardcover copy was roughly 7 x 7 inches and contained 28 pages. This title was classified as **WI J Glu** in the Fiction section.

This story is a purposive attempt to educate its readers about the historical colonial buildings known as the Magnificent Seven; all of which are located in the heart of Port of Spain and were constructed during the Spanish and British occupation of the island.<sup>5</sup> The plot follows

four friends, Ranjiv, Victor, Jussie, and Brandon—who are on vacation from school and bored out of their minds---as they stumble upon and follow a series of riddles/clues (the first of which appears on a napkin acquired after a food purchase from a street vendor) that lead them to the identification and subsequent exploration of each of the seven buildings. On their quest they receive factual information from various adults connected to the mansions in some way, which in turn elicits expressions of previous knowledge on their part or spates of abject wonder. At the end, their reward is their new awareness gleaned from their “adventure”, which in turn is inadvertently passed on to a new group of ‘bored’ children they encounter (they suggest the children pay a visit to the street-food vendor).

The children in the story (three girls and one boy) appear to range in age from 3-4 to 10 years old which makes their unsupervised/unaccompanied exploration of these buildings more than a little disconcerting. The text, presented in a small font size, appears to be quite dense and the riddles/clues they receive at each location, which lead them to the next site, seem forced and somewhat obvious [“You’ve solved the first clue/Now can you figure the rest/Built on Hayes to honour Hayes/Anstey alone chose YMCA’s]. Visually, the computer-generated images, one per page confined to a 4”x4” square frame, impose a generic/non-specific tone to the book that is firmly entrenched in a specific context and deliberate in its intentions.

**Literary response.** All of the students had mixed feelings about this story; no one disliked it outright, but no one thought that it was particularly good either. For most, the positive literary aspects included a “kinda interesting” and “adventurous” plot that enabled the reader to “[learn] new things”. Two students, on the other hand, specifically voiced that the riddles were “not interesting” and called the veracity or accuracy of some of the information presented into

question when asked if there was anything “challenging” about the story that they agreed was “very Trinidadian”. One male student stated:

“Well some parts of it was made up because they said how the school made his sister...how they say that the school made they sister bright and smart but a school can’t make you smart; is the teachers and how you does think.”

Those students also felt that the purpose of a treasure hunt, and hence the plot, was undermined by the fact that characters did not acquire some physical prize at the end:

“Well, in a treasure hunt, you suppose to get something at the end when you finish.”

There was both agreement and disagreement to this premise, as a few felt that the information gleaned by the characters was enough of a reward/treasure—though they did acknowledge that this was moot for the characters who had previous knowledge of the buildings through school or some other means.

Yet another bone of contention was the characters’ seeming disregard for personal safety on their quest as they happily spoke with strangers, entered the buildings when offered, and accepted food and drink:

“Them taking people home...them taking things from people they don’t even know.”

Visually, they all felt that the absence of random bystanders or “even a little dog” in the background of the pictures presented was a misrepresentation of the reality of the setting, due largely to the absence of any other people in what is known to be a ‘busy’ area, especially during the presumed time of day. When prompted, they also agreed that the font size (“too small”) and length of the text (“too long”) could be improved.

**Personal and cultural associations.** Given the purposive nature of the book, there was immediate identification with the setting/context (they were all aware of the Magnificent Seven)

and many of the activities referenced (the many facets of eating “doubles”—a sandwich made of two pieces of flat fried bread or ‘bara’ and curried chick peas commonly sold as street food—was a recurring theme during the discussion). Because of the strong sense of prior knowledge and experience, it appeared that they were more confident ‘critiquing’ the aspects of the text that they found lacking. The issue of safety that is currently so prevalent in Trinidadian society was a significant one as previously mentioned, with some going so far as to say they no longer frequent or visit the Savannah for fear of being accosted by a “piper” (drug addict). Additionally, the names of the characters also elicited an unexpected reaction that was seemingly born out of larger societal or communal constructs/notions, as evidenced by the following exchange:

Child 1: “Jussie? I don’t know no Jussie.”

Child 2: “It sounding like a Jamaican name.”

Child 1: “Ranjiv is not a Trinidadian name, that is a Indian name”

These comments were surprising given the multicultural and multiethnic composition of the society and pervasive awareness of this, but perhaps their comments were indicative of a certain degree of racial insularity or unfamiliarity that may occur within their schools or communities.

**Book description: *Butler: Story of a Hero*.**

*Butler: Story of a Hero* written by Naison Trebor, with photography by Lisle Waldron and design/layout by Marsha Pearce. Published in 2005 by The Faculty of Humanities and Education, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad. The book is in paperback format and measures approximately 8 x 11 inches. It was classified as **WI J Tre** in the Fiction section (as opposed to biographies in non-fiction).

This story is of the life of labor leader Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler (1897-1977) who was born in Grenada but moved to Trinidad in 1921 as an adult where he was immediately attracted

to the burgeoning oil industry. After being permanently injured in an industrial accident in 1929, he became a tireless advocate and political activist for the working class. He was tried and convicted of sedition and imprisoned on two separate occasions for organizing and leading strike action, the first of which started off peacefully but led to riots in which 14 people were killed and 59 were injured.<sup>6</sup> For being the pioneer of the labor movement, in 1970, he received the Trinity Cross, the nation's highest award (prior to 2006), and is immortalized in a statue in the town of Fyzabad in south Trinidad.

This somewhat 'stylized' version of Butler's life is told from the perspective of a young boy, Roland, listening to the conversation between two adults in a well-known public square in the heart of the capital city of Port of Spain. The discussion, which can be more aptly described as a debate, offers details of Butler's life and why he should or should not be considered a hero of Trinidad and Tobago (mainly because he immigrated from Grenada). The conversation between the adults, referred to simply as "Brown pants" and "Khaki pants" as this is the only way the child can distinguish them, is fast-paced as they each convey facts about Butler's life to support their 'ideological' position in the debate. This is punctuated by the internal deliberations of the child as he attempts to make sense of the exchange and the infrequent interjections of his mother who is concerned about his safety while she busily sells street food. Images are a combination of color photographs of various scenes (Butler's statue, the trousers of the debaters, buildings that surround the square, etc.) juxtaposed with computer-generated manipulations that are somewhat abstract in style and sometimes unclear in intention.

**Literary response.** This was by far the most 'spirited' discussion of the session. While two students enjoyed the text of the story, the remaining members of the group had mixed feelings about it (the consensus on the text was 'in-between' (7 votes) with two 'thumbs up').

The responses to the illustrations were much more negative and pervasive with a unanimous vote of ‘thumbs down’ (though one female student did concede that she “kinda liked the fact that they [brought] in cartoon animation into the actual picture”). On the former issue, some of the students thought that the humor was a positive element of the text (this was reinforced by laughter during the read-aloud) but others, one male student in particular, felt that the humorous tone was somewhat disrespectful to the subject of the book. He repeatedly commented about this throughout the discussion (at least six times) with the most strongly articulated being:

“Yeah, cause it important...they name the highway after him. I don’t understand that. They turn it funny and it was something important. This is a book with some...this is history. That is for other children in the future to learn about history in the past.”

Another participant felt that the title was misleading and did not give a full account of Butler’s life:

“But they saying...on the cover they saying ‘Butler-Story of a Hero’ but in the book they saying...they talking about the boy, and how he was watching them and what they saying; they wasn’t talking about...like how he grow up in childhood or something so. I thought the story was about that.”

Some of the interpretational responses to the content choices made also seemed to stem from ambiguity, calling into question the use of the nicknames Brown pants and Khaki pants, for example, which one student felt was not “real nicknames that people would call each other”. After receiving an explanation for the use of the nicknames, he responded that “they shoulda say that somewhere” indicating that not all narrative devices used were intuitive enough for the target audience.

The illustrations were panned by almost everyone in the group. Criticisms ranged from the use of photographs of statues and other abstract means of representation—as opposed to including “copies” of actual photographs taken of Butler—to the absence of any visual presence of the male protagonist, Roland, as he listens to the conversation between the two men. The following comments were typical of these responses:

“They showing the man looking like a moko jumbie<sup>7</sup> thing and when children see that they would think of him different”

“First of all, I don’t know why they put statues...[and] how they have the thing white, white, white with no colors on it” ...“They should have put real pictures of him. They should just take a picture of what, like how they used to have long time cameras, they should have take that picture and put it in the book...”

“They ent show the boy at all. Even how they talking about Butler, lemme see, how the boy watching them them; they shoulda show the boy watching the people and thing, because, like they only showing Butler in the story, you only seeing pictures of [him]”.

“They want to scare little children.”

The students clearly felt that because Butler was a ‘real’ person, there should have been a stronger visual presence of him throughout the book, instead of the range of ‘related’ images and scenes around three shots of his statue from different angles, and a photograph of his tombstone at the end. (I am uncertain as to where the above description of “white, white with no color” came from as the statue was present in its actual dark stoned color, unless he meant the recurring image, towards the end, of the fence that surrounds the square in stark white computer-manipulated form.)

**Personal and cultural responses.** The overall reactions to the book seemed informed by their prior knowledge of Butler that the students would have gleaned through school, media, and members of their families and communities. They all accepted the fact, and stated quite clearly before listening to and perusing the book, that he was an important figure in Trinidadian history at the heart of a national holiday—Labour Day—and had a highway named after him. However, exploring the book appeared to have given them a different perspective, perhaps a more intimate perspective, of his life to which they were not privy. As a result, they seemed torn between the presentation of the information offered and the realization of how little they actually ‘knew’ about Butler’s life.

When asked directly about the key ‘debate’ presented in the book— can Butler be considered a national hero of Trinidad and Tobago if he was born in Grenada—which, up to that point, was not spontaneously mentioned or questioned by anyone, the reactions were mixed and mirrored the stances adopted by the characters in the story, as evidenced by the following exchange:

Child 1: “I not sure because they was saying that first he had a riot, then he was in jail”

Child 2: “...and gone back to jail”

Child 3: “...and he from Grenada”

Child 4: “He’s a hero but not a Trinidadian hero”

Child 3: “I don’t know why they put him as a Trinidadian hero and he was from Grenada”

Child 5: “Well, most of his life was in Trinidad”

It is unclear how much of the arguments they have internalized beyond what was stated above and whether or not the issues raised would become part of their ever-expanding cultural

vocabulary. Two students did indicate that they were “a little bit” interested in learning more about his life, while one admitted that he intends to read more about the riots.

In response to a question about the likelihood of them actually overhearing such a debate taking place in Woodford Square (the setting of the discussion in the book and a prominent and significant site of recreational, commercial, and political activity in the heart of the capital city), the students’ responses reflected the change in/awareness of common social attitudes/practices within their immediate environment and possibly the wider society:

Child 1: “All you would hear is people cussing each other.”

Child 2: “Haul your mother...and all kinds of thing”

This topic was quickly abandoned in favor of additional criticism about the images, which they could not easily dismiss. As they ‘commiserated’, however, their interactions were much more relaxed and their comments were reflective of the cultural predisposition to make light of serious issues in a humorous manner...much like the narrative structure of the book.

### **Researcher Reflections**

This was the first session for most of the students and so the degree of engagement and quality of responses was minimal at first but seemed to increase as the discussion progressed and greater familiarity with the process and one another was established. The first tentative monosyllabic responses of the first book were quickly replaced by overt indignation expressed over the presentation of Butler’s life in the third book. There was nevertheless laughter and good humor throughout and at appropriate times. The fact that two of the male students were very opinionated may have had the effect of either prompting other male students to respond in kind or inhibiting female students from being more vocal. At the end of the session, they all seemed to have started the bonding process, complete with good-natured ribbing about the differences in

speech patterns between boys and girls, and seemed to happily anticipate the subsequent sessions. In fact, seven students opted to eat on the premises (as opposed to taking their lunches back to school) which extended the interaction.

My involvement in the discussion was much more significant than originally anticipated because of the initial reticence and unfamiliarity with the process of talking about literature. Apart from prompting and asking specific questions, I found myself repeating statements made to either clarify what was said (for myself as well as others) or to ensure that everyone in the group heard what was said. I was mindful to not ‘talk down’ to the students and employed vocabulary that was accessible but consistent with ‘scholarly’ investigation, emphasizing their roles as co-researchers. Again, this is not necessarily a style to which they are familiar or a role they often occupy, but I did want them to develop a sense of ownership over the process. While I did not use Trinidadian Creole as the students did, I tried to match their tone and utilized syntactic elements (in the framing of questions, the use of common morphological structures, etc.) to convey acceptance of their use of the language. Overall, a learning experience on both sides.

### **Session 3: Responses to Folklore**

#### **Description of Groups**

All of the students (five boys and four girls) who participated in the second session returned for the third session which took place on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2011. Their arrival was once again staggered but there was less time lost as only one person was significantly late and everyone from the previous session returned (which confirmed the level of interest conveyed at the end of the previous session). Because of the length of the books, it was important to provide the students with an opportunity to peruse them prior to the discussion. To achieve this aim, the

students were divided into two mixed-gender groups, where each group was assigned one of the two selected titles. After approximately 30 minutes of individual reading, the whole group discussion ensued.

To establish prior knowledge or familiarity with the genre, I asked general questions about their perceptions/opinions of folklore (for example: “What do you know about it?” “How much of it have you read?” “How much of it have you heard?” “What do you think about it?”) which then evolved into specific questions based on the titles read. The final selections for the discussion were chosen by me and out of the pool of options chosen by the children. The decision was based primarily on the country on which the collection was based or from which it originated and also in order to capture the nature of stories classified as folklore [WIJ 398.2] in the WIJ collection—folktales and original tales. Other students were encouraged to ask any questions that they might have had about the books or folklore in general or to contribute opinions that were relevant to the discussion. After the discussion of the assigned titles, students were asked to briefly look at some other examples of books that can be found within the folklore section of the WIJ collection.

### **Account of Activities**

The young participants seemed more comfortable with each other and the process during the second session. Although there were changes in the format of the discussion and yet another genre to look at and consider, they were flexible and cooperative throughout. During the initial examination of the books at the start of the session, there was no cross-talk or direct communication among the members of the smaller groups, indicating a level of seriousness that was not necessarily required and a dedication to the task that was heartening. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for them to read all of the stories in each book.

During the whole-group discussion, everyone participated and there was greater balance in the responses produced by each gender (79 male; 50 female statements), unlike the first session. This may have been due in part to the ‘required’ reporting by each person in the smaller group assigned to a specific title; the discussion moved back and forth between the two titles. However, responses had to be elicited in many cases and, once again, the more loquacious members of the group required little prompting to offer opinions, both literary and personal. Nevertheless, the level of engagement was fairly consistent throughout.

As with the previous genre, participants were asked about their level of familiarity before the discussion of the titles ensued. In the case of folktales, all of the students expressed an awareness of the existence of folklore but did not necessarily include the reading of folktales as part of their literary repertoire. They claimed that exposure to these stories came through teachers and librarians but they were no longer included in their required text books for reading.<sup>8</sup> They were nevertheless able to name several characters and in some cases, readily offered anecdotes of personal folklore ‘encounters’ told to them by older family members which either supported or diminished their belief in the lore.

### **Evaluation of Books**

#### **Book description: *Caribbean Folk Tales & Fantasies*.**

*Caribbean Folk Tales & Fantasies* by Dr. Michael Anthony, one of Trinidad and Tobago’s most illustrious authors and historians. Published in 2004 by Macmillan Caribbean in the United Kingdom, this title’s 100 pages contain nine stories. Realistic black and white illustrations accompany each story.

This collection situates and presents folklore and fantasy in a variety of ways: the tale, the lore, and the individual’s relationship to both. Two traditional tales and fables featuring animal

protagonists, namely “The Tug-of-War” and “How Mrs. Feathery Solved her Problem”, are included as well the contemporary animal fantasy “The Dog who came to the City” (whose inclusion seems incongruous with the rest of the collection). The lore is incorporated into ‘cautionary’ stories (or “duppy stories”, as one reviewer describes them<sup>9</sup>) set in ‘modern times’ featuring a skeptical human protagonist and an assortment of folktale characters of the Eastern Caribbean.

These characters include: the soucouyant—an old woman who is able to transform herself into a ball of fire at night (“One Pitch-Black Night”); the douen—the spirit of a child who dies before being christened who returns in child-like form with feet that are turned backwards (“In the Bushes Near the School”); Papa Bois—the “father of the woods” who is short, strong, and hairy with cloven feet and the ability to metamorphosize (“The Night of Papa Bois”), and the la diablesse, a woman whose grotesque features are obscured by her wide-brimmed hat while her elaborate and appealing garb and gait (used to lure men along with the promise of sexual favors) conceals the fact that she has one human foot and one cow’s hoof (“The Dancing Lady”).

The penultimate story, “The Spell of the Shango” explores the root of our cultural expression and relationship to the lore and to the spirits as a newly-married couple on opposite sides of the belief spectrum witness a Shango ceremony (also known as Orisha, one of the few forms of African religious expression that survived in the middle passage and remained relatively intact, often characterized by animal sacrifice, the use of drums, dancing, and “public possession of the spirit”<sup>10</sup>). The final story, “The Silk Cotton Trees of Sangre Grande”, references most of the previously introduced creatures but focuses on a character being ‘tricked’ into believing that they exist. This collection is Anthony’s first attempt at writing specifically for a juvenile audience and as a result, many of the choices made seem forced, constrained and

somewhat indecisive. Standard English is used throughout with some inclusion of the Creole in dialogue.

**Literary responses.** Of the four students who scanned this title, all of them rated it positively, though they expressed some reservations about some aspects of the collection. There was a clear preference for the stories that included the oral folklore characters with which they were familiar (“The Dancing Lady” was a favorite) and less tolerance for the stories that could be considered fantasy (namely, “The Dog Who Came to the City” and the animal tale “The Tug-o-War”). More specifically, two students agreed that the selections offered “a good mix”, while the remaining two emphasized that the author should have included only folktales because they are “more exciting”. In support of the former stance, one student explained:

“It wasn’t a bad idea because folklore and fantasy mightn’t mix but you still getting to read more; you still getting to read more things, so it wasn’t a bad idea.”

The counterargument to this opinion resided in the perception of who creates and consumes folklore and fantasy:

“I find he should have stick to one story because the folklore more like for people who black, how them does make up, and the fantasy more for white people... It come like, if a black person making up a book, he wouldn’t talk about a dog coming to the city, he go more talk about like Papa Bois.”

When asked about the effect of the inclusion of Trinidad Creole on their appreciation/enjoyment of the stories, the unanimous response was that it made little to no difference. Conversely, they elaborated that the use of language that was similar to “the way how we does talk now” would inhibit readers outside of our context from understanding these stories; as noted in the following exchange:

Child 1: “If it was a English [person] reading the book, he woulda feel...”

Child 2: “...he woulda be like ‘what is that?’”

Child 1: “Because you know English people does talk real... good”

Child 3: “Proper”

Child 1: “Proper, yeah”

Child 4: “He might not understand what they saying”

With regards to changes that they would make to the collection or would like to see made to such collections in the future, one of the more enthusiastic contributors expanded further on the language choices, and by extension, characterization, by suggesting that some of the words used in the book were dated and no longer a part of common usage. An example from the story “One Pitch Black Night” was offered in support:

“Well, even though how we does speak like that, some of the words you doesn’t get it because some people doesn’t speak it no more... Change up some of the words or some of how the character was acting because how when the boy say ‘superstition’, the woman say ‘superskission’ and the grandmother was acting like a soucouyant... because you didn’t know if the grandmother was a soucouyant or if it was another soucouyant.”

Interestingly, this view was neither actively supported nor discredited by the other participants, who instead recommended that the addition of “more excitement” or “a twist” in the stories, in conjunction with the removal of the fantasies and an increase in the folktale offerings would enhance the work.

**Personal and cultural associations.** It was clear from the outset that the students equated the folktale with stories that revolved around familiar characters from the folk lore of Trinidad and Tobago, hence the reason why the folktale adaptations included in the collection

were largely ignored or redefined as “just a very good story”. It was also evident that they felt that these tales that revolved around the lore belonged to and can comfortably be expressed by “black people” and that fantasy was the domain of “white people”. This ‘belief’ can most likely be attributed to dissemination of the folklore through the oral tradition which achieves some level of ‘validation’ through text, but this is not a required or necessarily desired element, as the primary purpose of folklore is “to scare children”.

Since everyone who read *Caribbean Folk Tales and Fantasies* confirmed that they would recommend it to others, the natural follow-up question was, “Why?” Two responses supported the use of folklore as ‘cautionary tales’ (which is consistent with the traditional use of folklore with children, to warn them of the dangers of the known and unknown evils):

“Because you could be warned about some of the superstitious things it have in this world. It could be true or it could not be true; it’s good to take caution.”

“You could learn about the things your ancestors used to learn about and it could teach you of the many dangers...how to be careful.”

One cited the suspenseful nature of the stories, (though it was unclear which ones he found to bear these characteristics apart from “One Pitch Black Night” and “The Dancing Lady” previously mentioned):

“It’s exciting”

The third emphasized the importance of embracing this aspect of your cultural traditions:

“They trying to show you how you don't have to keep on like, you see how white people and Egyptians (?), you don't have to keep focusing on them kind of folklore because your country have folklore too.”

The responses given were fairly consistent with prevailing notions of the “instructive” nature of folklore in the Caribbean from its earliest manifestations and use with children; the entertainment value of folklore through intergenerational storytelling, and the fact that folklore is often perceived as an indigenous form of communal/cultural expression.

**Book description. *Ramgoat Dashalong: Magical Tales from Jamaica***

*Ramgoat Dashalong: Magical Tales from Jamaica* by Hazel D. Campbell, who was the winner of the 1997 Vic Reid Award for Children’s Literature. Published in 2000 by LMH Publishing Limited in Jamaica. The collection’s 73 pages contain five stories. Minimal black and white illustrations are embedded within each chapter heading only.

The five original stories in this collection appear to all intentionally serve as cautionary tales or life lessons for the child reader (except for the title story perhaps). The protagonists, with the help of some magical experience, each address and overcome some character flaw or weakness. Winona in “Winona’s Bounceabout” learns the value of being content with what one has when her wish to own a bounceabout causes every aspect of her life to go awry. George in “Froggie George” learns empathy for defenseless creatures when he is inadvertently transformed into one of the frogs he routinely torments. Shani in “Shanna’s Book Report” learns about the joy of reading when she is transported into a story she was reluctant to read, while Ginseng in “Good Morning Corner” learns the value of good manners, respect for traditional beliefs (especially those with no logical explanation), and acquires a sense of belonging after a harrowing experience.

Errol and his grandmother ‘Ganje’ in “Ramgoat Dashalong” have to deal with the effects of a disappearing potion—which they used to evade gunmen in urban Kingston on their way to and from the market and school— gone wrong for the lack of one ingredient, the ramgoat

dashalong herb, which they manage to overcome at the end but without any ‘lesson’ being taught (other than always have all of the ingredients of a magic potion on hand before you drink it). Unlike folklore, these stories contain elaborately described settings, somewhat detailed characterization, and an unpredictable plot structure. Any ‘traditional’ elements used are well integrated within the ‘fabric’ of each story. Liberal use of Jamaican Creole in the dialogue of some characters and a cross-section of representations of Jamaican life situate and ground the work. However, this collection could just have easily be filed as folklore rather than a collection of fantasy short stories.

**Literary response.** This title did not receive much positive feedback from the students who examined it. Three of the readers simply did not like it and one had mixed feelings. The overwhelming response was: “It was boring” with the one concession that the story of “Ramgoat Dashalong” was “kinda interesting”. Specific criticisms centered on the absence of folklore; the non-specificity of the setting—“The story with the bounceabout it coulda be from any country so it really did not make sense”; and the realistic situations and portrayals in the story—“It is a little bit too realistic; things could be realistic but not extra realistic”. The one respondent who asserted that he would recommend the book to others would do so “because almost every story in the book have a message in it.”

**Personal and cultural response.** Given the general lack of appeal of *Ramgoat Dashalong* among the assigned readers, no significant personal associations were made. The most noteworthy cultural connection for them was the use of Jamaican Creole in the stories read. They all felt that this linguistic marker provided the strongest sense of the setting presented. As prolific as the use of the national language was throughout the text, however, one student maintained that the language use was not sufficient, among other observations:

“If you wanted to learn about things from Jamaica, I would not recommend it because most of the characters not speaking Jamaican and they wouldn't really find fairy tales or something they want to know.”

This opinion of course was colored by the fact that they did not read all of the stories in their entirety.

**Additional responses.** At the end of the discussion, I asked the students to select and discuss other folklore titles from those provided. The titles selected were *Indian Caribbean Folklore and Spirits* by Kumar Mahabir, *Anancy Mek It* by Peter-Paul Zahl, *Zeeboo Nooloo Chinoo* by Lynette Comissiong, and *Anancy and the Haunted House* by Richardo Keens-Douglas. Because these titles were briefly skimmed by the participants (due to the limited time), a detailed summary would not be provided here [More is said about these titles in chapter 4]. The student responses are nevertheless worth noting. For one thing, they were adamantly against what they saw as an excess of Anancy stories, especially in a single volume<sup>11</sup>; especially the predictability of the “endings”. They were also generally underwhelmed by the predominance of animal protagonists in most of the stories read; not that they were against the inclusion of animals in folklore, but they expressed an interest in there being a greater balance between human and animal characters. As expected for their age group, collections with little to no illustrations were preferable to folktale picture books.

### **Researcher Reflections**

The change in the way the books were presented in this session (individual perusal as opposed to a read aloud) did result in a period of adjustment for the students as this differed from the structure of the previous session, and the level of engagement fluctuated throughout (the word “boring” cropped up more than a few times.) By the end of the session, however, they were

thoughtfully expressing their preferences about this type of literature which was a far cry from the earlier perceptions of folklore. Personally, I was unsure as to how much contextual information I should have provided or whether I should have actively addressed possible misconceptions. I erred on the side of allowing them to simply explore their personal beliefs and reactions while discussing the literature, but did feel compelled to respond to issues of one language being ‘better’ or more ‘proper’ than another and the importance of respect for the religious beliefs of another regardless of how much it differs from our personal beliefs. They all left the session eager to return for more.

#### **Session 4: Responses to Informational Books**

##### **Description of Groups**

Session 4 held on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2011 (because of the public holiday on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June) focused on informational books. Eight students (four girls and four boys) from the previous session participated in this session which sought to incorporate some of the previous discussion strategies—read-alouds and individual reading—as well as introduce new ones, namely small group peer-led discussion. Most of the students arrived on time so this was the first full 90 minute session conducted up to that point. The first phase of the session began with a read-aloud and subsequent discussion of one of two biographies of Marcus Garvey. This activity was followed by the individual perusal and discussion of the second biography for comparative purposes. The second phase consisted of splitting the students into two mixed-gender groups once again with the assignment to read one title that was specific to each group and one title that was common to both groups. One volunteer was sought from each group to serve as the discussion leader. Upon completion of the group sessions, we all came together for a general recap of what was discussed and overall impressions of the genre.

The process of selecting titles for this session was more difficult simply because of the breadth of the non-fiction section of the WIJ collection. One thing that was apparent though was the proliferation of biographies even across Dewey categories [See Chapter 4]. The decision therefore was to use this ‘strength’ and choose someone who played a significant role in defining a critical aspect of being from the Caribbean. One such person is Marcus Garvey (an admittedly personal bias). The other two selections were much more specific to Trinidad and could potentially be used to supplement primary school curricula. The fifth selection was a bit of an exception as it was selected on the basis of being the only book about science in the WIJ collection with a cover that implied a child audience.

### **Account of Activities**

There was an increase in the level of comfort and engagement once again, as on day four, we witness the emergence of a fairly cohesive and collaborative unit, with much personal chatter and easy banter among the group prior to and following the ‘work’ of the session. The format was once again altered slightly and the group was up to the task of executing the instructions given. The first segment involving a read-aloud followed by a comparative analysis of a similar text, elicited several spontaneous comments, requiring less prompting or direct questioning. The smaller group discussions required them to engage with one another as they discussed two additional titles. They were asked to consider the areas we have looked at for each book so far and invariably quite effectively mirrored the style of questioning employed in the whole group discussions.

The gender balance of contributions to the discussion was once again skewed in favor of the male participants (166 male; 74 female statements), much like the first session, especially during the small group discussions which were both led by male students—although one

discussion leader was more effective at soliciting individual responses from all members of the group than the other. Two female participants in particular were less likely to act on the impulse to share and exhibited more reticence overall. In spite of this, they did offer their opinions when asked and were open to communicating with all members of the group.

Once again, at the start of the session, participants were asked about their level of familiarity with the genre under discussion. Everyone demonstrated an awareness of the differences between fiction and non-fiction (as expected) and the basic characteristics that go into creating a reliable product of non-fiction. Examples of informational texts seemed to default to biographies or “life story”— which fed well into the biographical texts that were examined—and brief mention was made of “books about science”. As with the other sessions, they offered strong opinions based on likes and dislikes, though in this instance, there was a greater manifestation of negative comments about his appearance in the photographs that sometimes extended beyond the boundaries of literary analysis (examples will follow in the evaluation section).

### **Evaluation of books**

**Book description.** *A Man Called Garvey: The Life and Times of the Great Leader Marcus Garvey*

*A Man Called Garvey: The Life and Times of the Great Leader Marcus Garvey*, written by Paloma Mohamed, Guyanese prize-winning author and playwright; illustrated by Barrington Braithwaite. Published in 2004 by the Majority Press, Dover, MA. The paperback format found in the collection measures approximately 8x10 inches and contains 32 pages. This title was shelved in the WIJ non-fiction section with the call number **WIJ 923 Mo.**

According to the back matter, this title is an adaptation of the college textbook, *Marcus Garvey: Hero* by Dr. Tony Martin, professor and scholar of Pan-African history, and as a result “distills a vast amount of historical content into a fast paced and entertaining sojourn for young readers”.<sup>12</sup> It opens with a discussion of the conditions under which slaves lived to establish the impetus for Marcus Garvey’s commitment to improving the lives of black people throughout the African Diaspora. The fairly comprehensive overview of his life is written in a conversational tone with supporting black and white illustrations on every page. There are no chapter divisions which makes it less useful as a reference text. A list of “Further Reading from The Majority Press Inc.” is provided at the end, with references divided into two sections: “The New Marcus Garvey Library” and “The Black World”.

**Literary response.** The title read aloud, *A Man Called Garvey*, received the most overwhelmingly positive response from the entire group up to this point in the research sessions. Their knowledge of Marcus Garvey prior to the reading was limited at best—one student confirmed that he “hear[d] the name before”—but they were all genuinely impressed with his life and story. Their initial reactions were more directly related to the subject of the biography rather than the presentation of the information, as apparent in the following comments:

“I find that Marcus Garvey is someone people should know and I think it is a good book for people to read.”

“I think that the book is very historical...and it telling you that Marcus Garvey never backed down and he always fight for what’s right for black people.”

“I like this book because Marcus Garvey was a man of courage [although] they do all kinda thing [to him], he still stood up for what was right.”

This consensus extended to other elements such as the appropriateness of the quality and quantity of the information; the relevance and suitability of the illustrations; and the familiar tone employed by the author.

A few questions were raised about the veracity of some scenarios presented as fact, namely the claim that Marcus Garvey “was the youngest foreman printer ever in Jamaica” (Mohammed, 2004, p. 17) and that he was “chased by a shark while bathing in the sea” (Mohammed, 2004, p. 11). On the former claim, one student opined:

“Jamaica big and it have more than one [printing house] and she not sure because she didn’t check out all to see if he was the youngest.”

On the latter issue, another student reasoned:

“...that was kinda suspicious...He had to be far out because sharks don’t come up in the beach line, they does stay far, far out.”

Though there were easy, plausible explanations for each scenario, the close attention paid to the text and the willingness to question even ‘factual’ information was an encouraging development.

**Book description. *Marcus Garvey (African American Biographies)***

*Marcus Garvey (African American Biographies)* written by Sandra Donovan. Published in 2003 by Raintree Publishers, Chicago, IL. The hardcover version examined measures approximately 7.5x6.5 inches and contains 64 pages. It was found in the WIJ non-fiction section and assigned the call number **WI J 305.896 073 0092 Do.**

This title is one of a series of biographies that focus on the lives of African American musicians, actors, educators, sports heroes, and leaders “whose determination and talent continue to set examples today”.<sup>13</sup> In this volume, it chronicles the life of Marcus Garvey over seven chapters: “Growing Up in Jamaica”; “Traveling the World”; “Improving Lives”; “Success”;

“Back to Africa”; “Hard Times”; and the “Final Years”. Each chapter is roughly five to seven pages long with sub-headings for increased accessibility and points of entry. The expository style is clear and concise and black and white photographs of the subject and other significant artifacts abound. Supplementary materials include sidebars, an index, a glossary, a timeline, and suggestions for further reading.

**Literary response.** The chatter that ensued while the students examined the second biography again differed from previous group meetings. Apart from their increasing personal levels of comfort, they were provided with a basis for comparison which triggered a spark in their understanding and interpretation of the material. Overall, this title was also positively received. All participants felt that it “worked well” with the other title that would serve as a good source of additional information for research purposes. One of the key distinctions noted was the style of illustration:

“The pictures was more realistic”

“They actually give you a photograph of the Black Star Line.”

They also noted a difference in the ‘amount’ of information provided:

“They using more words in this one.”

“Yeah, so maybe we getting more information.”

Lastly, they believed that there was some subtle variance in the intended audience/s of the book:

“That’s [*A Man Called Garvey*] for more people who are global [international] and they not understanding the book, so they could read that instead of this [*Marcus Garvey AAB*]

“This is for older children and this [*A Man Called Garvey*] is for younger children.”

Nevertheless, the consensus was that both titles were equally thorough, either as a source of general information or to be consulted for the completion of a school assignment.

**Personal and cultural associations.** The associations made were much less overt than other instances and seemed to be much more profound and ‘internal’. When asked to recap what they liked best about the title (A Man Called Garvey in particular), they each repeated the underlying themes that appeared to resonate deeply, expressed in phrases like: “he never back[ed] down”; “he was very courageous and stood up for what was right”; and “he helped black people all over the world”. Essentially, they seemed surprised that someone like Marcus Garvey existed and accomplished the things that he did. By extension, their reactions could also be considered a clear recognition of cultural pride.

In spite of this, when comparing the second text to the first, and seeing the photographs as opposed to the ‘idealized’ drawings, a series of unflattering comments were made about Garvey’s appearance (namely about his weight and facial features). Fortunately, this chatter quickly dissipated into questions about some of the tangential people and topics raised in the second biography, *Marcus Garvey*, such as Frederick Douglass and the Ku Klux Klan.

**Book description.** *The History of the Steel Band*. [Small group discussion 1]

*The History of the Steel Band*, written by Verna Wilkins and Michael La Rose, with illustrations by Lynne Willey. Published in 2006 by Tamarind Ltd., United Kingdom. Hardcover format with dimensions approximately 7.5x7.5 inches. Contains color illustrations throughout; drawings and photographs and 41 pages.

This title traces the development of the steel pan, believed to be the only widely-known musical instrument invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from its origin in Trinidad and Tobago to its omnipresence on the world stage. Along with a brief introduction, this historical overview is accomplished over eleven chapters: 1. “Treasure islands”; 2. “More arrivals”; 3. Musical culture”; 4. “The origin of Carnival”; 5. “Tamboo Bamboo”; 6. “Beating pan”; 7. “All-steel

bands”; 8. “Banned!”; 9. “Pounding the pan”; 10. “Development of steel bands and Panorama”; and 11. “From Trinidad to the World”. Each chapter is no longer than 3 pages long making this an engaging quick read or useful as a quick reference. An additional section (not counted as a chapter) profiles “Sterling Betancourt and Sterling’s Angels steel band”, who were instrumental in the formation and expansion of Notting Hill Carnival, which takes place annually and “Europe’s biggest street carnival.” (Wilkins and La Rose, 2006, p.38). A list of photo credits and a CD of the Sterling Angels live (not included with the circulating copy) round out the presentation.

**Literary and personal responses.** In the brief discussion that ensued on this title (the children did not seem to have much to say or discuss in their groups) it was clear that all of the students enjoyed it and appreciated the fact that the authors found a way to “make the steel pan real interesting”. They agreed that the illustrations suited and supported the text effectively; rationalizing the benefits of using a combination of photographs and drawings in the following way:

“...Well, they could mix it because like they don’t have any pictures to show the things so they just draw it out... cause who could get a picture of somebody making pan?  
Nobody [could] get that!”

Perceptively, the one caveat they noted was the absence of a bibliography or list of notes.

Personal and cultural associations were manifested in descriptive comments that seemed to reflect their pride in the acknowledgement of the origin and importance of this musical instrument:

“I find it was interesting to know that Trinidad and Tobago created an instrument that is now used all over the world...”

“What I find interesting is that they have so many people nowadays from when they was making pan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century...”

**Book description.** *Great Nationals of Trinidad and Tobago-Cyril Duprey.* [Small group discussion 2]

*Great Nationals of Trinidad and Tobago-Cyril Duprey (Russell Tesheira Memorial Series) – Volume 1*, written by Joy Clarke and illustrated by Colin Clarke. Published in 2005 by Colonial Life Insurance Company, Trinidad, W.I. Paperback format that measures approximately 8x10 inches. Contains color illustrations and 32 pages. Call number: **WI J 923.68972983 Cl.**

This title is the first of a three-volume series (as of the time of this research) “aimed at teaching school students about local icons and role models”<sup>14</sup>. This installment presents the life and accomplishments of businessman Cyril Duprey (1897-1988) who founded the first locally-owned insurance company in Trinidad and Tobago in 1936. The images are an intriguing mix of the realistic and abstract, with representational symbols and reproduced documents (the Union Jack, a stop-watch, the first business certificate, and many more). The writing is simple and direct, reporting on significant events with little or no embellishment, though at times it is a bit repetitious. There are no chapter/section divisions, index, bibliography, or photo captions.

**Literary and personal responses.** This title was much less-favorably received by the four students in this group. While one student was enthusiastic about the quantity of information and “fun facts” included, the phrase “interestingly boring” seemed to sum up the consensus. When the discussion leader asked each person what they liked about the book, the exchange proceeded in the following manner:

Child 1: “The pictures”

Child 2: “This was not interesting; it was kinda boring.”

When asked what they liked about the book, the responses looked quite similar:

Child 2: “Everything”

Child 3: “I like the pictures”

When asked what they thought about the pictures, they responded:

Child 1: “Normal”

Child 2: “Dull”

Child 3: “Creative”

Invariably, this lack of engagement/interest in the text did not elicit additional personal or cultural associations, and may have been attributed to some degree of ‘discussion fatigue’ or the nature of the subject and story told.

**Book description:** *Caribbean Icons in Science, Technology & Innovation*. [Discussed by both groups]

*Caribbean Icons in Science, Technology & Innovation* written by Celeste Chariandy, Patricia Ganase, and Stacey-Ann Sarjusingh. Published in 2005 by the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, Trinidad, U.K. Paperback format that measures approximately 8x14 inches. Contains 61 pages with color photographs. Call number **WI J 925.09729 Ca.**

This title serves as the first, and only volume available in the WIJ collection (perhaps the others had been checked out), in a series of ‘commemorative’ texts featuring Caribbean scientists who achieved excellence in their field and made an impact on their societies and possibly the world at large. Thirty-five such ‘icons’ are featured across eight fields of distinction: “Innovation”; “Medicine”; “Science”; “Science and Education”; “Breaking New Ground”;

“Discoveries”; “Leaving a Legacy”; and “Trailblazers”. The sections are further subdivided by the name of the scientist and each profile supplies a short biography, a photograph or photographs, a small map of the Caribbean country of origin, and definitions of “Key Words” with which the reader might not be familiar.

**Literary response.** This book did not come close to having the desirable effects, of “mak[ing] your science class fun and help[ing] you to understand science better”<sup>15</sup>, on any of the students in the research group, as they expected to learn more about science and not the scientists. Although the members of group one in particular expressed a general interest in science and technology prior to their perusal of the book, they were barely able to sustain any interest in exploring the text in more depth, based solely on what they believed to be the deceptive presentation of “boring” material. In the whole group discussion where we recapped their overall impressions with each title, they explained:

“When you watch the cover you could see/think is a children’s book but when you look inside...”

“When you look inside it looking kinda child friendly, but when you read it, it real boring.”

“They trying to fool you with a child in the front.”

“That is more for like adults to read, although I like technology, it still boring.”

The second group was even less tolerant and agreed unanimously that the book was not worth their time with the statement:

“Alright, let we make this short, it boring!”

When prompted further, one student suggested how it might be improved:

“Well, they could have just put a little joke in, it was just plain...or put something about the human body...or do something, I don’t really want to see people faces”

In the whole group discussion again, they were adamant that they would not even consider using this title for research purposes.

**Personal and cultural associations.** The strongest connections to emerge from the exploration of *Caribbean Icons in Science, Technology and Innovation* were the related chatter about each individual’s personal interest in science. They were less impressed about what was being said about these Caribbean icons and more engaged in discussing activities related to science—“All yuh went to Sci-Technicus?”—and their hopes for the future—“I want to be a scientist” or “I want to be a person in technology”. On the dearth of local books about science and technology in the WIJ collection, the students emphatically stated that authors/publishers “have to do better than that” because “is we culture we talking about” and “we good at science”. Clearly they were not averse to learning more about local scientific exploration and technological innovation, just not in the form of a biographical text.

### **Researcher Reflections**

This session was dynamic and revealing in many unexpected ways. The overall response to the biographies of Marcus Garvey was one of not only intellectual curiosity, but personal or cultural pride. They all sat up a bit straighter, were a little more forthcoming with responses, and seemed genuinely ‘proud’ that someone with such tenacity and courage was a product of the Caribbean. The mix of verbal and non-verbal cues continued throughout the meeting and was most apparent in the small group discussions, where one group mirrored the structure of the whole-group discussion while the other seemed decidedly less enthused (fatigue may have crept in at that time too). Nonetheless, by the end of the session they were all happily engaged and

excitedly chatting about what made the books boring, and before leaving, other likes and dislikes.

## **Session 5: Responses to Chapter Books**

### **Description of Groups**

The final session was held on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2011 with a group of seven participants (4 girls, 3 boys) all on time. Because one student left the previous session before the assignments were made, the six remaining participants were asked to read one of the three titles selected (two students per title). The titles selected were chosen almost entirely by the students during session one and they coincided with the emphasis on recognizable themes or settings. Surprisingly—or maybe not—they all contained an element of fantasy as opposed to realistic fiction offerings. At least one student in each pair read the selected title in its entirety. (more specifically, three students completed the reading task; one completed approximately 80% of the book chosen; one managed 10%; while the other did not have the opportunity to read his selection at all.)

The whole group discussion therefore consisted of each pair of readers recounting the details of their book and fielding questions from me and the rest of the group. Within the exploration of each title, a chapter deemed significant by the readers was read aloud to the group so that each person had a clearer sense of the writing style of the author. Once all three titles were discussed, participants were asked to recount their previous impressions of the WIJ collection, and their familiarity with the material, and to express the ways in which that opinion was sustained or altered after the sessions.

### **Account of Activities**

The discussion generated in this session was the most ‘spirited’ of the four sessions. The format was much less prescribed and allowed the students assigned to specific titles to

communicate the strength of that title to the wider group. The students who were genuinely enthused about the title read launched into a discussion prior to the official start of the session and sustained the level of engagement throughout the session. Summative details dominated the type of response provided by the two ‘presenters’ of each book, but much of this commentary served as answers to the many questions that other participants posed about the books.

This format also allowed for a greater balance in ‘talk time’ between the genders. In fact, since the four girls completed (or nearly completed in the case of one) their selected books, they had much more to say about the contents of the books than the boys did. Instead, the boys essentially assumed the ‘questioning’ role throughout the discussion, and cross-talk was abundant. As they recounted the plots of the stories, the students settled unconsciously into the technique of tandem telling. Additionally, they spontaneously made ‘extra-textual’ connections/references to other books explored in previous sessions, as well as books that form part of their personal reading repertoire.

At the end of the literature discussion, the young participants eagerly responded to questions about changes in their perceptions of, interest in, and appreciation for Caribbean juvenile literature, stating almost unanimously that the five-day process has encouraged them to see the literature in a new light. When asked about the process employed to talk about the literature, they relayed anecdotes about the general disinterest in reading common among their peers and being teased about their interest in reading with comments like:

“Everybody does harass me because I like to read, they always say, ‘you boring, eh, you always in a book.’”

They nevertheless agreed to remain committed to being avid readers in spite of this. The camaraderie among the group was so well-established at that point, they all seemed reluctant to say good-bye.

### **Evaluation of Books**

#### **Book description: *Legend of the St Ann's Flood.***

*Legend of the St Ann's Flood*, written by Debbie Jacob, journalist and head of the English Department at a secondary school in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Published in 2004 by Macmillan Caribbean, Oxford, U.K. Paperback format inspected contains 110 pages and black and white pencil illustrations. Call number: **WI J Ja**

This fast-paced tale attempts to provide a mystical explanation for one of the deadliest floods ever experienced in Trinidad and Tobago. This disaster took place on October 5 1993 when the St. Ann's river overflowed its banks and engulfed the area, taking five lives and destroying several homes. The story begins in the forest of St. Ann's where a meeting of the most 'famous' characters in Trinidadian folklore is in progress. A decision needs to be made regarding the presence of a human boy in their midst. The conclusion, this boy, Jabari, would be allowed to return to his home to tell everyone of the reason behind the St. Ann's flood and the courage of two children in preventing subsequent attacks.

Over the subsequent 16 chapters, the story vacillates between the world of folklore and day-to-day life in the village of St. Ann's in 1993, at the core of which is the friendship between Simon the snake, son of Papa Bois and Mama Dlo, and Joseph, an 11-year old easily-distracted student who is obsessed with snakes. Simon, who ran away from home, is captured and put in the zoo. Joseph, while on a routine field trip to the zoo, notices a small anaconda, which is let out of its cage upon request by the honorary zookeeper for the day, Roy. Joseph, being the snake-

loving boy that he is, feels a strong affinity for Simon and takes it home in his lunchbox. Mama Dlo on the other hand, profoundly distressed by her son's absence, sheds tears of woe that flood the entire village.

This story was a fairly successful attempt to seamlessly blend the fantastical elements of Trinidadian folklore, an actual historical event, and realistic scenario that focuses heavily on themes of individuality/difference, friendship, and belief. The narrative structure moves effortlessly between the different settings and characterizations, allowing the reader to successfully suspend belief and accept that the tale being woven is as plausible as the scientifically-accepted explanation.

**Literary responses.** The two students who read this book were very pleased with the story. They appreciated the humorous and exciting elements of the story; the theme of friendship between the protagonists; and the infusion of folklore with which they were familiar. As they recounted the details of the story, the other students raised questions about the plausibility of the plot; even within its clearly defined parameters. Some issues involved the lack of clarity around Joseph's obsession with snakes and his motivation for risking his life to protect Simon when he (Simon) "could just go back into the forest". They also expressed confusion over the parentage of Simon the snake, (Papa Bois and Mama Dlo), which is understandable given the fact that their relationship is one of the lesser known aspects of the established lore on which the story is based<sup>16</sup>:

Child 1: "Simon was more like its father, Papa Bois."

Child 2: "Oh my goodness"

Child 3: "Papa Bois is the snake father?"

Child 4: "Ay...this is weird."

Child 1: “It kind like its father”

Child 5: “Papa Bois married? Who carry out the service, the douens or something like that?”

This skepticism however, did not affect the overall positive response from those who have not read the book and their expressed desire to do so.

**Personal and cultural associations.** The liberal inclusion of identifiable aspects of Trinidadian life, such as places, food, forms of transportation, etcetera, thoroughly engaged the students. One typical cultural association was made between the ‘madness’ of the plot and the fact that the story was set in St. Ann’s—the location of the main mental health hospital in Trinidad:

“I think I know why they name it St. Ann’s flood, you know...because everybody crazy.”

This allusion could only be made by a Trinidadian and was almost expected within the context of the discussion.

On the other hand, during a description of the bravery of the female protagonist, Jaya, a brief but ‘heated’ exchange on the topic of gender differences cropped up quite unexpectedly:

Child 1 (female): “She [Jaya] would stand up in front a big snake and try to reason.”

Child 2 (male): “Most girls will run and scream and...”

Child 3 (female): “Most boys will do that too.”

Child 2 (male): “Well, yes, but not like that...They will run and scream and get on mad”

Child 3 (female): “Eh, eh, not all of them.”

While this reaction is not specific to the context of Trinidad and Tobago, it is reinforced at the societal level in many ways and is also a common characteristic of the perceptions of children of their age as they become more aware of gender roles to which they might want to adhere or from

which they wish to depart. The example of the strong female protagonist and the ‘emotional’ male protagonist in the book veers more toward the latter state.

**Book description:** *Jojo’s Treasure Hunt*.

*Jojo’s Treasure Hunt* written by Dr. Cherrell Shelley Robinson, former Senior Lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Studies, The University of the West Indies. Published in 2003 by Carlong Publishers, Jamaica, W.I. Paperback format inspected contains 145 pages with black and white illustrations. Call number: **WI J She**.

The strength of this tale lies in its ability to be firmly entrenched in a somewhat harsh reality while exploring a ‘magical’ or ‘supernatural’ solution to the problems faced. The story centers on 12-year-old Jojo and his day-to-day interactions with his close-knit but somewhat dysfunctional family, his ‘mean-spirited’ headmaster, and his close friends, Bigger and Maas Paolo. Apart from these relationships, Jojo is preoccupied with the search for a Spanish jar full of treasure which he believes will save his family from the impending eviction they face, but must confront his fear of ghosts who guard this elusive treasure. The text is straightforward, with the liberal use of Jamaican Creole. The plot moves quickly, but the inherent conflict/s can seem a bit forced over the 19 chapters.

**Literary responses.** The assigned readers of this title succinctly described this title as “a book about doing good”. They both rated it highly (four out of five stars), citing the believable and relatable characters, in particular the bravery of the protagonists, as the main reason why. In fact, they compared Jojo’s struggle and determination to that of a young Marcus Garvey—“**He come just like the man, Marcus Garvey**”. One student further elaborated that although the story is interesting she found some parts to be “**kinda scary**”; namely the parts that reference the spirits of the slaves luring individuals to the silk-cotton tree. When asked about the use of Jamaican

Creole throughout the text and whether or not that hindered their understanding of or appreciation for the story in any way, the responses reinforced their acceptance of linguistic variation as a regular feature of Caribbean juvenile literature:

“Because it is a local book so they would have some Jamaican in it...because we grow up here and people talk like this down here”

“This would give you a better understanding.”

**Personal and cultural associations.** The aforementioned assertions would also count as an example of cultural associations made between the text and reality. As that train of thought progressed, however, they all acknowledged that not all local books should employ the use of the regional Creole dialects:

Child 1: “Like in textbooks, you wouldn’t want that kinda language in textbooks.”

Child 2: “No, they wouldn’t put that; they would use proper language.”

By describing the standard language as “proper language”, it seems that they have internalized the pervasive societal notion that the Creole is somehow a lesser, substandard or ‘bastardized’ form of the English language; an unfortunate paradox in light of the fact that they communicated almost exclusively in Trinidadian Creole, in and out of school.

**Book description. *Legend of the Swan Children***

*Legend of the Swan Children* written by Maureen Marks-Mendonca, a former diplomat, teacher, and economist. Published in 2008 by Macmillan Education, Oxford, U.K. The paperback format inspected totals 192 pages.

This rather complex fantasy tale, follows the adventures of the protagonist, Alejandro ‘Alex’ Springfeather, as he attempts to find his mother, Tia Lucia, who suddenly and mysteriously disappears without a trace as they are both trying to escape some very determined

pursuers referred to as the Agouti people. Along the way and through many ill-defined settings, he encounters a motley crew of would-be friends and enemies. In the end he has to choose between saving his mother's life and fulfilling the Legend of the Swan Children.

This book seems to have everything and the kitchen sink thrown into it. New characters are introduced at every turn (up to the very last chapter) is it difficult to keep track of them and difficult to care about the ones who persist throughout (including the protagonist). The action is fast-paced but scattered. Several nationalities, names, languages, locales, and settings are included but underdeveloped. Could hold appeal for advanced readers who appreciate the genre.

**Literary responses.** Because of the intricate plot and the vast cast of characters that make up this novel, the students who read this title spent the entire discussion period trying to explain what the book was about in a way that made sense to their peers. One of the readers admitted that “it started off kinda weird” but that she would give it a rating of four and a half out of five. Unfortunately, the listeners did not agree and suggested that they would give this one a miss. Language use was an issue once again, as the other reader explained:

“The book kinda hard to understand because it have a whole set of Spanish and whole set of [other] kinda words.”

Other aspects of the book that served as insurmountable sources of confusion included the exact location/setting of the story, the sheer volume of the secondary characters, and, more generally, the fact that it “don't seem like a West Indian book...even though they talking about Caribbean and thing in the back”. No apparent personal or cultural associations were made beyond that.

### **Researcher Reflections**

The level of engagement was at an all time high throughout this session possibly due in part to the nature of the genre (fantastical and adventurous fiction to which they all claimed an affinity) and because I served less as an instigator/facilitator and more of an equal participant. I

deliberately steered clear of too many leading questions and allowed them to simply talk about the literature before them. At the end of the discussion of books, when asked to examine how their previous perceptions of the literature changed over their week-long involvement in the research, they all admitted to an increased interest in the literature and the collection.

Surprisingly, the book *Caribbean Folk Tales and Fantasies* was identified as the most interesting of the works explored, in spite of the enthusiastic responses to the fiction, which perhaps indicates that folklore resonates on a much deeper personal level and a sense of cultural ‘ownership’.

### **Discussion**

What started off as a reluctant journey into the unfamiliar evolved into a receptive exploration of literature meant to speak to and about the lives of Caribbean children. No one work was overwhelmingly good or overwhelmingly bad as they worked their way through the nuances of various literary forms and developed their level of comfort talking about their perceptions, reactions and opinions. I believe that it is this single factor, the opportunity for talk that perhaps made the biggest difference in their openness to the research experience and to the books themselves. It is entirely possible that without this opportunity, they would not have willingly engaged with the literature to the extent that they eventually did. Fortunately, they would be exposed to more Caribbean literature from the adult canon once they enter secondary school, but that exposure would require more of them than the sheer joy of discovery.

### **Response as Process**

In accordance with the reader response theories examined in chapter one, the characteristics of the discussions reflected/coincided with various models. Many of their reactions fit into the psychoanalytic categories model presented by Squire (1964) and Purves

(1968), as they constantly made **literary judgments** about the quality of the work before them; there were many examples of **interpretational responses** and **narrational reactions**, especially in their reaction to *Butler: The Story of a Hero*; while **associational responses** were most often made during stories that mirrored their lives or knowledge base in some way (for example, their opinions about what constitutes a folktale). **Self involvement** was evident in the chorus of “boring” or comments such as “that is not my thing”, and finally, their version of **prescriptive judgments** took the form of the language use they thought was most appropriate or in their disagreement/admonishment expressed when they perceived that the representation provided did not adequately do justice to the reality. Though aspects of other models were also evident in their talk, this model was the most relevant.

### **Collaborative Elements**

The opportunity to explore and discuss the literature using different techniques (read-alouds, small group discussion, whole group discussion-leading) allowed for each child to find his or her voice during the research process. Since, by their own admission, this was not a practice in which they routinely engaged, each person had to undergo a period of adjustment. For some, that period was quite short and I could tell that they relished the opportunity to have a captive audience. For others, it required more time, but yielded—more often than not—more “thoughtful” responses. Needless to say, many of these differences occurred along gender lines, with the more gregarious males and the less gregarious females. In small groups, the girls were happy to allow the boys to lead the discussion and the boys willingly accepted. These characteristics, while reflective of the larger society, were inadvertently being challenged in the post-discussion talk which was not included in this analysis. In the end, they formed a dynamic

that forced each of them to consider different points of view in a non-threatening environment and to raise their level of ‘talk’.

### **Culturally-situated Theory of Reader Response**

Many of the responses given by the children were similar to those elicited in culturally-situated reader response studies, including Egan-Robertson’s (1993) observations of “the presence of parental voice” (in the discussion about religion and folklore); Smith’s (1995) findings that student’s gravitated towards text that mirrored their cultural reality and specific cultural practices (as exemplified in their responses to *Caribbean Folk Tales & Fantasies* and the biographies of Marcus Garvey); and Brooks and Browne’s (2012) theoretical model of the cultural position of ‘Homeplace’ as the most dominant stance of the reader (evidence of which is provided throughout the analysis and labeled ‘personal and cultural response’).

As much as the findings of this study corroborate the results of others, it also suggests a different conception of the issue where the inherent stance is to reject what is culturally familiar in favor of what satisfies the reading taste of the child, regardless of cultural affinity or representation. In other words, the students who participated in the study did not appear to be clamoring for representations of themselves in the literature and seemed to miss most cultural cues until they were explicitly asked about them. The only instance of them having a visceral ‘cultural’ reaction to what they read was in their interpretation of what is “we” folklore as opposed to the stories that belong to other ethnic groups. To a lesser extent, the insistence (primarily by one student) that the treatment of Butler was “disrespectful” seemed to imply a strong recognition of what is uniquely Trinidadian and who is worthy of reverence. I posit that this reaction sustains the colonial residue of a literary tradition where children became

desensitized to absent or inadequate forms of representation, and a postcolonial failure to pay closer attention to the literature that was produced for and used with children.

### The ‘Implied’ versus the ‘Actual’ Reader

Since most of the books chosen were deliberately meant to target the Caribbean child—as opposed to the child of Caribbean heritage living somewhere in the Diaspora—these books invariably contained cues that ‘betray’ the author’s conception of such a child and the ways in which this child should be addressed through the literature. In the picture books examined, the perceptions of children and childhood included: “**children are susceptible and must be steered away from temptation**” (*Kofi Wanted to be a Bad Bwoy*); “**children should be educated at every opportunity**” (*The Magnificent Seven*); and “**children appreciate challenging discourse**” (*Butler*). The folktale selections implied that “**children need to be exposed to their cultural heritage while receiving valuable moral instruction**”. The informational books all seemed to have a strong socio-political agenda, especially the books about Garvey, which the children willingly embraced. The fiction selected seem to convey that children of a particular age like to be entertained and removed from the hum-drum of ordinary life. *Jojo’s Treasure Hunt* was the only one to tackle a harsher reality.

Rarely did the books ‘talk down’ to the reader, which the children seemed to appreciate, and they were not afraid to challenge the author’s perceived stance, or for the very least, the presentation of that stance when the need arose. They effectively exercised their right to accept or reject the assumptions and intentions of the author in favor of deriving a comfortable level of engagement with and acceptance of the text. The potential for critical thought was rife with this group.

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<sup>1</sup> The actual dates were Friday 17<sup>th</sup>; Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup>; Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup>; Friday 24<sup>th</sup>; Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Direct quotation from one of the male students interviewed at his school.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted from the “Parents and Teachers Notes” on page 24. She goes on to explain specific issues surrounding body language and how these issues can be addressed through dialogue and by reiterating the focus of the book.

<sup>4</sup> Trinidadian Creole term that means an informal gathering between/among friends, family or casual acquaintances.

<sup>5</sup> These mansions are located on the corner of Queen's Park Savannah on Maraval Road. They are named as follows: Killarney (Stollmeyer's Castle); White Hall (Rosenweg); Archbishop's Palace; Ambard's House (Roomor); Mille Fleurs; Hayes Court; and Queen's Royal College. Source: <http://www.traveldudes.org/travel-tips/magnificent-seven-trinidad-and-tobago/12832>

<sup>6</sup> Source: NALIS website:

<http://www2.nalis.gov.tt/Research/SubjectGuide/Biographies/tabid/100/Default.aspx?PageContentID=259> .

Biography of Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler compiled from Anthony, Michael. *Heroes of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. St. James and Anthony, Michael. *Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago*. London: The Scarecrow Press, 1977. 81-84.

<sup>7</sup> A popular character at many festivals in Trinidad and Tobago portrayed by men or women walking or dancing on stilts. The word ‘moko’ is thought to be a West African deity, while ‘jumbie’ is a Creole term for a spirit or demon. Additional information can be found here: <http://mokoinfo.blogspot.com/2010/01/history-of-moko-jumbie-in-trinidad.html>

<sup>8</sup> Folktales were usually included in textbooks used to support reading acquisition. The current inclusions in these texts would have to be further investigated.

<sup>9</sup> Cited from the review of Anthony's book entitled “Culturally relevant, short on magic” by Tanya Batson-Savage, published in the Jamaica Gleaner, July 31, 2005, and accessed here: <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20050731/arts/arts3.html>

<sup>10</sup> A more detailed account of the Shango-Orisha ritual is outlined in *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An introduction to their historical, cultural, and sacred traditions* by Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, published in 2010 by Temple University Press.

<sup>11</sup> The text examined was *Anancy Mek It* by Peter-Paul Zahl

<sup>12</sup> Taken from the back matter of the text most likely written by the editor/publisher

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from back matter

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from an article in the Newsday newspaper ...[add details]

<sup>15</sup> As expressed by the president of NIHERST in her introductory message (n.p.) of the text

<sup>16</sup> The web-article, *Our folklore is predominantly of African Origin*, states that Mama DLo is sometimes thought to be the lover of Papa Bois. Source: <http://www.triniview.com/TnT/Folklore.htm>

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I will review and summarize the impetus, methodology, and results of my exploration of Caribbean children's literature and discuss the limitations and major implications of the study, as well as the potential for future research. At its heart, this research attempted to elucidate the current state of Caribbean children's literature, an area of previously limited scholarly investigation. More specifically, this research focused on the genres and formats within one collection of Caribbean literature; its literary characteristics and content; and the perceptions and opinions of selected works on a sample group of elementary-aged students.

Educators and scholars see indigenous children's literature as a valuable vehicle through which an indigenous child interacts with and internalizes the culture of a society (Hateley, 2009; Hunt, 2005; Meek, 2001). I designed my study to gain a clearer sense of the ways in which that mandate is achieved and/or falls short. From May 2004 to July 2006, I worked as a librarian attached to the Port of Spain Children's Library of the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago. During that time, I observed the varied quality of the material contained within the collection housed there bearing the label "West Indian Juvenile literature." I also observed the general apathy of the intended audience toward these books. While it was heartening to note the existence of such a collection, I found the overall situation to be disheartening and felt compelled to learn more.

As a point of entry, I focused solely on this collection housed at what is considered to be a flagship children's library that serves a catchment population of roughly 50,000 in the capital city of Port of Spain and is often an attraction to patrons from various communities throughout the island. To investigate the characteristics and contents of the West Indian Juvenile

collection—a collection of approximately 302 items—I opted for a qualitative approach supported by additional mixed methods techniques. The research process itself was comprised of three phases: (a) a comprehensive analysis of the collection including physical inspection, review of documents and other artifacts, interviews with practitioners, and unobtrusive observation of the collection’s use; (b) an ethnographic content analysis of selected materials within the collection involving a close reading of texts; and (c) a reader response component employing guided group discussions with interested children (ages 11-13) selected from neighboring elementary schools.

This methodological approach facilitated a fuller investigation of the questions posed and revealed the many layers of complexity in the definition and delineation of what constitutes the ‘Caribbean-ness’ of the collection. Some of the major findings during the collection analysis process included: a range of inconsistencies in the classification and shelving of West Indian juvenile material; confirmation that over 60% of materials in the collection were produced and published in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada—a ratio that far exceeded the output of materials produced in the Caribbean; and the dominance of the picture book format and preponderance of folktales—a clear indication of the priorities of the publishing agenda. Interviews with practitioners revealed the breadth of challenges faced in the delineation, quality, acquisition, and promotion of the collection, while unobtrusive observation confirmed the perceived indifference of the target audience.

The ethnographic content/textual analysis of the four main genres/formats in the collection—picture books, informational books, folklore, and chapter books—revealed many of the characteristics and features that are distinctly Caribbean, such as the use of the dialect; pervasive themes of migration and travel; and the predominance of tropical flora and fauna. The

reader response portion of the study provided a snapshot of the ways in which Trinidadian children interact with locally and regionally produced texts. The participants' patterns of discourse were largely consistent with the findings of prevailing reader response process theories but also demonstrated aspects that were less predictable, especially when compared to common culturally-situated theories; such as those by Benton (1999), Bracy (2001) and Brooks & Browne (2012).

### **Discussion of Results**

Though this investigation of the West Indian Juvenile (WIJ) collection was not an exhaustive one as it does not contain every title of Caribbean children's literature ever published, it did serve as an effective point of entry for such an investigation of the literature because of the representative breadth and depth of its composition. For one thing, this examination revealed that the very notion of what constitutes the Caribbean or, more precisely, Caribbeana, is both evident and elusive. Whereas in the adult world, the idea of Caribbean Diaspora more or less implies a preoccupation with the concerns of the region and a product that can be easily 'consumed' within a postcolonial framework, regardless of where it is published, these elements did not work in quite the same way in the literature published for younger audiences. Generally speaking, it seemed that the mere inclusion of the word "Caribbean" somewhere in the title more or less guaranteed inclusion in the collection without thought or consideration of its actual content, ideological stance, or agenda. This invariably paved the way for books with stereotypical and/or unrealistic representations of Caribbean life to make their way into the collection.

Without a clearer delineation of what makes a children's book a Caribbean children's book, the acquisition, classification and categorization of the items posed—and will continue to pose—particular challenges to practitioners and readers. Given the collection development

policy mandate at the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago to acquire all works published in Trinidad (and many of the works of the wider Caribbean), it seems counterintuitive not to implement and formalize a system of checks and balances to ensure that the books produced, especially for children, are relevant, age-appropriate, engaging, and of the standard contemporary printing quality. At the very least, close inspection and recommendations by the responsible library practitioners should be an integral part of this collection's development.

One possible way to approach this would be to take stock of what makes Caribbean children's literature unique, and identify the basic components that such books should contain to be considered part of this body of literature. For example, they should be set in an identifiable Caribbean territory; use language that is reflective of that territory, be written by someone with intimate knowledge of the society; and include themes that are recognizable and relevant to the Caribbean child. Without the development and implementation of these standards, valuable financial and intellectual resources will not be utilized to their fullest potential and books will continue to be purchased but never read by the children for whom the West Indian Juvenile Collection is intended. Additionally, the original contributions of Caribbean librarianship can make to the wider world of cataloguing and classification will go unnoticed.

In the library itself, there appeared to be little consideration of issues of physical or intellectual access; and that lack of proactivity can be implicated in the indifference noted during the observational phase of the study, by both the patrons and the staff. Though it is often beneficial to have a separate collection of like materials for those who are purposely seeking these items, as is the case with the WIJ collection, this method of organization appeared to have the opposite effect. Instead, it functions as the designation of materials to be avoided by children browsing the larger collection of the library. The WIJ collection's current location and

inadequate signage and promotion separates it completely from the general collection while the uneven quality and limited array of subjects of interest, along with shelving inconsistencies, further serve to alienate the user and undermine the collection's consideration and use. Interfiling items in the WIJ collection with the general collection could inspire tangible change. If nothing else, it would increase the opportunities for serendipitous discovery and reduce the dichotomy in perception of value between Caribbean books and those from the rest of the world.

Measurable publishing trends confirm that a significant portion of the WIJ collection was produced outside of the region; an awareness of this reality should again provoke some desire to monitor and assess the collection's content in more depth in order to discover where imbalances might lie. These decisions boil down to a question of audience. For whom are these books being written and how are they being consumed? As Sands-O'Connor (2008) confirmed the imbalances in representations that occur in picture books for a British child audience:

There is a clear divide between the settings of British-based and West Indian-based picture books, that of urban and rural. West Indians are of the country and British West Indians are of the city, and never the twain shall meet. (p. 125).

Regrettably, West Indian-born writers have often been blamed for these limited and stagnant images of Caribbean society. Their intention, however, was to provide some cultural contexts for their children in a place where they were not immediately accepted but a place that nevertheless marked an increase in fortunes; a process that can only be described as the colonization of the former colonizer. These nostalgic overtones would have little bearing on the contemporary reality of the Caribbean child, or the author, who have always lived in the Caribbean and thus have not experienced the degree of displacement experienced by those of the West Indian Diaspora.

The publishing trends also seemed to indicate that the genres and formats of books that authors and publishers invest most heavily in producing—picture books and informational texts about history and travel—are reflective of their perceptions and attitudes towards their audience (young and in need of education). When pictures are included, they were often brightly colored images in a realistic style of art featuring a plethora of flora and fauna and fun in the sea. Other times, there was uncertainty as to why the picture book format was employed at all as it did not correspond with the quantity and complexity of the text. While it is good to think of the Caribbean as a shiny, happy place indeed, when this ‘brightness’ is tinged with stereotypical depictions and disparities in the ratio of gender portrayals (as noted in chapter 4) and irrelevant content for the target group, it undermines the usefulness of the genre/format.

Folk elements were present across genres and types and seemed to draw upon much more than one folk tradition (though Anancy still reigned supreme; much to the irritation of the student participants). Creole language use in these books was either deliberate or constrained depending on the ideological stance of the author in some cases or their resistance to any particular stance in other cases. This inconsistent use had the effect of making the literature either more or less identifiably Caribbean, as gleaned from comments made about language use during the discussions, in which the participants spoke almost entirely in Creole. As the work of Creole linguists and educators confirm, language is intimately linked to culture and thought and a child’s home language must be acknowledged and ‘seen’ in the legitimate expressions of formal literacy.

The limited inclusion of chapter books in the collection suggests the question: is this all there is in the wider world of publishing for Caribbean children or is this simply what we have managed to collect? There is a sense that the writers who would take the time to write fiction for

a younger audience either do so because of his or her commitment to literacy and the educational agenda (hence the preponderance of leveled readers) or because they have been asked or encouraged to write a particular type of ‘aesthetic’ literature that mirrors the preferences exhibited by children—in which case, more of a marketing maneuver, (a case in point is the Island Fiction series that spawned *Legend of the Swan Children*). This dearth is most profoundly felt because of the gaps that it would invariably leave for a child with an affinity for Caribbean picture books and leveled readers, who must wait until secondary school to encounter any form of fiction that matches his or her chronological age.

Once again, these observations seem to reflect the gap between a fuller understanding of the target audience, the wider world of children’s publishing, and the range of choices available in the contemporary library setting. Librarians would do well to serve as advocates for greater awareness and action and become more involved in the direction of children’s publishing in the Caribbean as they have in other societal and professional contexts. Without the presence of pertinent representations of the geographic, social, gender, and the linguistic and aesthetic reality of the young Caribbean reader, the opportunities to influence his or her development and understanding of cultural identity will be limited in scope, and negate the creation and use of indigenous literature.

As can be gleaned from the responses of students who participated in the discussions of the selected titles, creating and facilitating spaces and times for discourse can be instrumental in changing the perception and attitudes towards the body of available Caribbean literature while simultaneously obtaining feedback from the intended audience. That authoritative feedback can inform many aspects of the creation, promotion, access, and usage of the collection. The fact that children’s levels of engagement clearly increased as the sessions progressed, in spite of the fact

that they did not always deem the work under discussion to be engaging can also have clear implications for both library and educational practitioners: let the children speak and listen to what they have to say. Arranging times and programs where cultural awareness is linked to the literature, and where students are free to share their experiences and opinions of the literature that bears this cultural capital, is a simple and viable endeavor. If librarians actively engage more critically and employ more creative strategies in serving the children who *need* this collection, the perceptions and appreciation of the children's own stories and literature would increase.

Additionally, the findings of this research could help to sensitize authors—especially the self-published ones—to some of the features they should incorporate as well as pitfalls they should avoid in an effort to address the deficits of the current literature. Steering clear of stereotypical representations, incorporating newer formats (such as the graphic novel), and expanding the thematic pool to include contemporary issues faced by the contemporary child living in the Caribbean will help take the body of available literature into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Establishing more dedicated publishers or imprints for local authors would have a significant impact on the quality and consistency of material produced. Hopefully, as the purpose of the literature becomes clearer to the author and the child, review journals can be established to mediate the intersection between the two and guide the development of new and more relevant literature.

This study also adds a before unexamined, undocumented variable to the contextual breadth of reader response research. While the findings here are not completely divorced from those of previous studies, they do suggest elements of departure in the format, setting, process, and nature of responses received that are specific to the Trinidadian context. This information can be used in the educational setting in Trinidad and Tobago to encourage teachers to utilize

student talk in more effective ways and to ensure that child readers encounter and appreciate the importance of the local and regional juvenile literature—if only to critically interrogate the works about which they have strong opinions. Giving children some input in their educational journey opens up chances for creativity and learning otherwise untapped in the average elementary school classroom in the region. Collaboration as a tool has been and continues to be a successful technique.

### **Implications for Further Research**

The absence of a more definitive theoretical lens in the analysis of the research data was unavoidable. While a definitive theoretical lens is certainly useful to have, in the absence of any previous research it was necessary to systematically discover what currently exists before narrowing the theoretical gaze. Future research focused more extensively on time with the children will allow opportunities to explore other forms of discussion and response, as well as an experience with a wider variety of texts. Moreover, the structure of this study is defined by a mixed-methods approach, and data collection was restricted primarily to multiple qualitative methods; hence the incorporation of additional forms of quantitative data collection techniques may in future yield yet another dimension of discovery.

Implications for further research are rife and include: a comparative analysis of collections housed in school libraries (as opposed to what was discovered in the public library in Trinidad), as well as public libraries in other Caribbean countries. One question to be answered by this stream of research would be: “Are collections of Caribbean children’s literature the same throughout the region?” The reader response portion of the study can also be extended to include groups of children from other parts of Trinidad and Tobago, from different schools, and from different ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds. Eventually this research can be

extended to other Caribbean countries to determine the impact of different cultures and sense of identity on the responses of children to the same texts. For example, would Jamaican children respond to these texts the same way Trinidadian children did? Lastly, the scope of the investigation can be deliberately expanded to include the Francophone, Hispanic, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, in order to determine the extent of their publishing output and their thematic preoccupations.

The past and present of our stories as a region and as individual territories within the Caribbean is worthy of acknowledgement, recognition, and documentation. These stories help us to fill empty cultural spaces, and inspire, create, and exhibit some control over our future. By paying attention to the aspects of our lives and culture that we convey to our children, we invariably guide the way they perceive themselves and the spaces they occupy in their societies. I look forward to observing the progression of Caribbean children's literature on all levels and to charting its contributions to each constituent society. Perhaps Caribbean Children's literature will be able to establish its place on the world stage as its adult counterpart has managed to do. Through a more thoughtful process, this body of work will contribute to altering the preconceptions and misconceptions of who we are as Caribbean people within the region and throughout the Diaspora; especially in the eyes of our children.

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APPENDIX A

MAP OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO



## APPENDIX B

### LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a Trinidadian graduate student, and former librarian at the Port-of Spain Children's library, currently engaging in research for my dissertation thesis. I am interested in books in the West Indian Juvenile collection and Trinidadian children's response to these books. This study would serve as a pilot study for a deeper investigation of the state and relevance of West Indian Juvenile literature. The study is supervised by Dr. Christine Jenkins, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

The significance of the research lies in its attempt to gauge the impact of an indigenous body of literature that is meant to serve as a repository for cultural collective consciousness and national identity in a post-colonial society. As Brown (2008) asserts of such societies: the "rapid cultural change [that it undergoes] militates against the preservation of cultural identity and may lead both parents and therefore children to see their own language and stories as unnecessary relics of a way of life at odds with global criteria for success" (p. 35). This study, in its attempt to look closely at the stories that are told to children through literature and in turn to garner their responses, serves as a step towards reassessing the importance, the approach, and the presentation and preservation of the cultural capital that defined generations past and to determine the extent to which it will define this and subsequent generations.

I am writing today to ask for your assistance (in consultation with the relevant classroom teachers) in the recruitment of two students from your school who meet the following criteria:

- o Avid readers in possession of library cards who frequently visit the library
- o Between the ages of 11 and 13 and awaiting results of the SEA examination
- o Comfortable sharing their thoughts about the books they read with unfamiliar peers.
- o Available to participate for five (non)-consecutive days.

If you are willing to provide a recommendation, I will forward a letter of consent to be signed by the parent or guardian in order to secure their agreement and involvement. I ask too that you encourage them to contact me personally if they have any questions or concerns not addressed in the letter.

Over the course of the five days, students whose parents provide consent—and who are willing to give their assent at the start of the project—will engage in a series of discussions around selected works of literature that are representative of specific themes, topics, formats, and images related to West Indian children and childhood across the various genres and literary types present in the collection. All five sessions will take place at the Port of Spain Children's Library. The expected start date for the first session is **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2011**. The remaining four sessions

will run from **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2011 to Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2011** (with allowances for the two public holidays).

There are no foreseeable risks to students who are selected and willing to participate in this study beyond those that exist in everyday, ordinary life. On the other hand, students are expected to benefit greatly from acquiring new skills to discuss literature by learning to cultivate and express an opinion about the stories meant for them (and related issues). This in turn will help them to develop a clearer sense of the transmission of culture and its relationship to personal identity.

Your involvement and time commitment to this project is solely at your convenience and should be no more extensive than the time necessary to solicit a recommendation from the relevant classroom teacher, who in turn would not be expected to devote more time that is convenient to do so.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me at the above-stated telephone numbers and/or e-mail address. You may also contact Dr. Christine Jenkins at [REDACTED] or [cajenkin@illinois.edu](mailto:cajenkin@illinois.edu).

For further information about the rights of human subjects in UIUC-approved research, feel free to contact the IRB Office ([REDACTED]; [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu)).

Thank you for your kind consideration and cooperation.

Sincerely,

---

Sujin Huggins

## APPENDIX C

### LETTERS OF CONSENT TO PARENTS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Sujin Huggins and I served as the Children's librarian at the Port of Spain Children's Library from May 2002 to July 2004. I will be returning to Trinidad in May-June, 2011 to conduct research for my dissertation thesis. I am interested in the books that make up the West Indian Juvenile collection at the Port of Spain Children's Library and Trinidadian children's opinions of these books.

You are receiving this letter because your son or daughter has been recommended by the principal to participate in this research study. Your son or daughter was chosen because he or she is an avid reader; a member of this library; and has indicated to his or her teacher a willingness to participate with your approval.

If you agree to allow your son or daughter to take part in this study, he or she will be asked to attend five sessions at the Port of Spain Children's library during school hours, **from Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June to Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2011**. At each session, he or she will read selected books and talk about what was read with a group of other students who are the same age from neighboring schools.

Your child's participation in this project is entirely voluntary and he or she may refuse to participate or may discontinue participation at any time during the process. Each session will be audio recorded so you and your child must also agree to that condition in order to participate. No personal information will be requested or recorded and your child's name will not be linked to his or her responses.

I assure you that every effort will be made to keep this letter and all recordings and notes private and secure. Before agreeing to participate, each child will be asked to agree to respect the privacy of the group discussions and not relate what was said by whom outside of the sessions. While I hope that they will do so, I am not able to guarantee that everyone will.

I believe that the research will present no more risks than those found in everyday life and should prove to be a beneficial and rewarding educational experience for your child. It is hoped that the results of this study will have a positive effect on the future of West Indian literature for children. In addition to my thesis defense, the results may be distributed in journals and conference presentations.

If you have any questions or concerns about this letter or the research, please contact me at the [REDACTED] or [sbhuggin@illinois.edu](mailto:sbhuggin@illinois.edu). You may also contact Dr. Jenkins at [REDACTED] or [cajenkin@illinois.edu](mailto:cajenkin@illinois.edu).

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] (collect calls will be accepted if you indicate that your child is a research participant) or via email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu).

For further information about the rights of human subjects in UIUC-approved research, feel free to contact the IRB Office ([REDACTED]; [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu)).

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Sincerely,

---

Sujin Huggins

A copy of this letter will be given to you for your records.

I have read and understood this letter of consent. I certify that I am the parent or legal guardian of [CHILD'S NAME] and I voluntarily agree to have [him or her] participate in this study. I also agree to allow my child to be audio-taped during each session.

---

Signature of parent

---

Date

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (NALIS)

1. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed; can you tell me a little about your history with NALIS and your current role?
2. You have done one of the few annotated bibliographies of Caribbean Children's literature; what was your approach to that process and why did you think it necessary to do so?
3. Have you done any research surrounding the development of the literature? If yes, what were some of your findings?
4. Thematically, do you think that the literature with which you are familiar is reflective of the range of experiences of the West Indian/Caribbean child?
5. I have noticed so far in my collection analysis that much of the publishing of WIJL comes from Macmillan (Education, Caribbean, Books) in the UK and LMH Publishing in Jamaica. What, if any, are the differences in approach or intended audience from your experience?
6. There also seems to be quite a trend in self-publishing in Trinidad, are there specific reasons, with which you are aware, for this dearth in local publishing houses producing children's literature?
7. When you were a practicing librarian, did you actively promote the WIJL collection? If yes, in what ways and if no, why not?
8. From my observation and interviews so far, it appears that most primary school children are either apathetic or averse to West Indian juvenile literature yet they will be exposed to West Indian literature more generally when they move on to secondary school; do you think that primary schools should adopt a more systematic approach to using the literature at this level?
9. What do you see as some of the other cultural forces in the life of the Caribbean child that provide a similar benefit or play a more active role than WIJL?
10. What is the collection development policy regarding West Indian Juvenile literature? (Tell me a bit about the acquisition process in this area)
11. In terms of access, is the collection fairly standard across the libraries? In what ways or why not?
12. What were some of the specific considerations when acquiring/developing the POS collection?

## QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN – POS CHILDREN'S LIBRARY

1. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Can you tell me a little about your history with NALIS and your current role?
2. What is your philosophical and/or practical approach to Children's librarianship?
3. Considering the collection in its entirety, what are some of the general trends that you have noticed with regards to circulation and reader's advisory?
4. What are some of the trends in circulation and reader's advisory that you have noticed with regards to the WIJL specifically? [Often requested titles? Parents wanting their children to read the literature? Request from teachers?...]
5. How do you approach the maintenance and development of the WIJL collection?
6. Do you actively market the collection? If yes, in what ways? [How does this differ from your marketing of the general collection?
7. In your opinion, what do you see as the most significant or compelling argument/s for (or against) the maintenance and development of a WIJL collection?

N.B. Any other documents that are relevant and can be shared

## QUESTIONS FOR HEAD OF TECHNICAL SERVICES [OR APPOINTEE]

1. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Can you tell me a little about your history with NALIS and your current role?
2. What is the policy with regards to the acquisition of West Indian Juvenile Literature for the POS Children's Library and the other branches (if different)? [What priority is it given? What is the criteria for selection? Is there an established budget?]
3. What are the main sources from which you acquire WIJL? [Is there a (comprehensive) list of publishers or authors of WIJL whom you frequently consult?]
4. What is your approach to the cataloguing of WIJL? How does it differ from other areas, if at all?
5. Being an ISBN agency, how often would you say—if you can tell—would you receive a request for WIJL? N.B. Any other documents that are relevant and can be shared

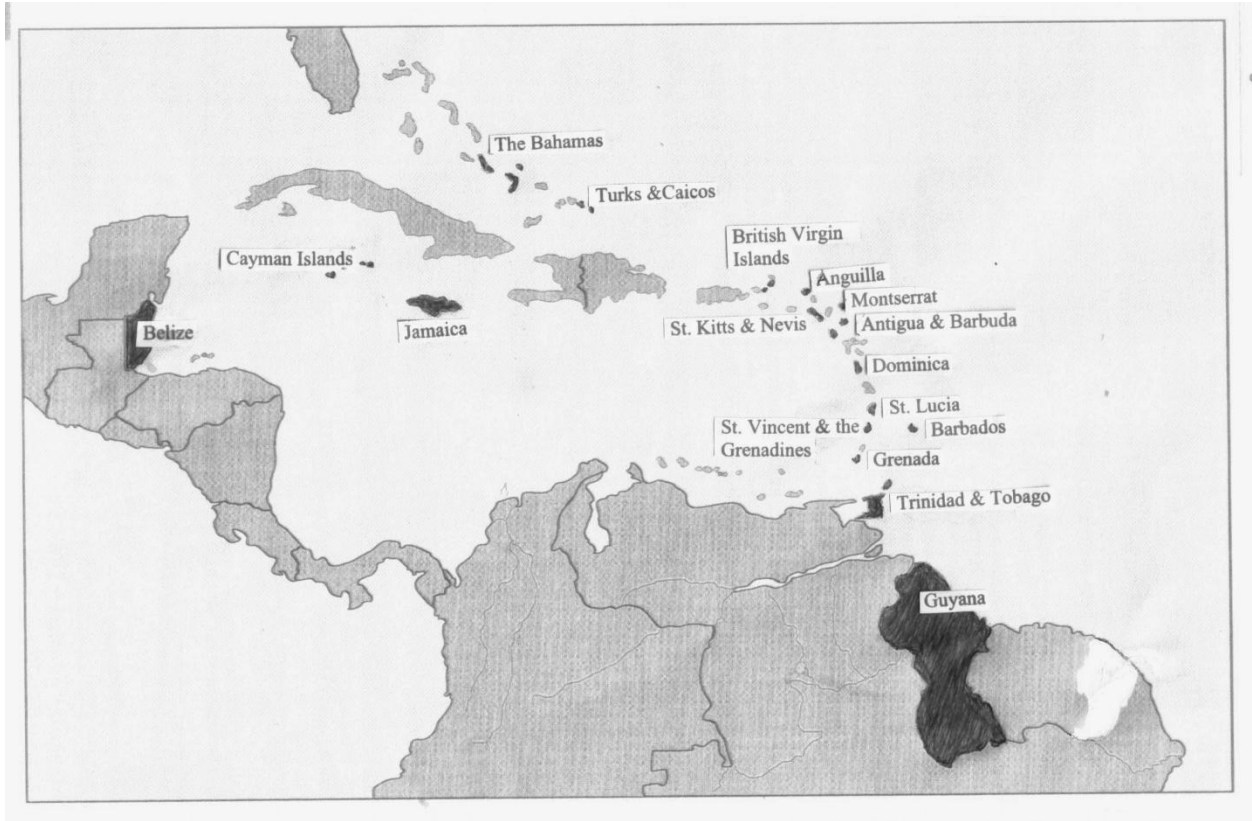
## QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARY CONTENT SYSTEMS MANAGER

1. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Can you tell me a little about your history with NALIS and your current role?
2. What, if any, are some of the ways in which information or statistics specific to a collection or classification can be retrieved/generated?
3. Do you ever receive any requests for specific information about the WIJL collection? If yes, what are examples of those requests?
4. What, if anything, are you able to share with me about the size, scope, circulation, and/or access points to the WIJL collection?

N.B. Any other documents that are relevant and can be shared

APPENDIX E

MAP OF THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN



## APPENDIX F

### SELECTED CHILDREN'S TITLES IN THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN

(1950 TO 1989)

The following list is a selection of 'Caribbean' books for, and used with, children. The list draws primarily from two existing bibliographies—one compiled by Annette Wallace and the other compiled by Anson Gonzalez—and to a lesser extent, individual author bibliographies and various library catalogues. It is arranged according to the earliest time period/decade identified to convey the range and availability of such material from its inception (as far as can be gleaned) and the subsequent four decades. This bibliography is not exhaustive by any means and was intended to supplement a research paper on the history and development of Caribbean children's literature.

#### *1950s*

Sherlock, Phillip M. *Anansi the Spiderman: Jamaican Folktales*. Springfield, Ohio: Crowell, 1954.

----- . *Iguana's Tail: Crick Crack Stories from the Caribbean*. New York: Crowell, 1954.

#### *1960s*

Alladin, M.P. *Folk Stories and Legends of Trinidad*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1969.

Ashtine, Eauline. *Crick Crack! Trinidad and Tobago Folk Tales*. Port-of-Spain: --University of the West Indies Extra-Mural Studies Unit, 1966.

----- . *Nine Folk Tales*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1968.

Augustus, Earl. *Gambage*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: U.W.I., [1966?]

Giuseppi, Undine. *Sir Frank Worrell*. London: Nelson, 1969.

Mills, Therese. *Peggy in Santa Cruz*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1968.

----- . *Ramesh in El Socorro*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1968.

Salkey, Andrew. *Hurricane*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

----- . *Earthquake*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

----- . *Drought*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

----- . *Riot* London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

----- . *Jonah Simpson* London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Sherlock, Phillip M. *West Indian Folktales*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1966.

----- . *Three Finger Jack's Treasure*. Kingston, Jamaica: Jamaica Publishing House, 1969.

### **1970s**

Alladin, M.P. *A Village in Trinidad*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1971.

Allen, Cynthia. *Tanya in Canada*. Port-of-Spain: Inprint, 1978.

Anthony, Michael. *Cricket in the Road*. London: Heinemann, 1973.

----- . *Folk Tales and Fantasies*. Port-of-Spain: National Cultural Council/Columbus, 1976.

----- . *King of the Masquerade*. London: Nelson, 1974.

----- . *Sandra Street and other Stories*. London: Heinemann, 1973.

Ashtine, Eauline. *Monkey Liver Soup and other tales from Trinidad*. Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex: Nelson Caribbean, 1973.

Bacon, Peter R. *Caldong*. London: Macmillan, 1978.

Calpu, M. *The best of sweetbread: a Christmas collection*. [Trinidad]: [M. Calpu], 1977.

Capildeo, Dev. *Maracas Bay and other poems*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1972.

----- . *More Poems for Children*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1976.

----- . *Poems for Children*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1973.

Craig, Karl. *Emanuel goes to market*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

D'Costa, Jean. *Voice in the wind*. Trinidad: Longman Caribbean, 1978.

De Lima, Arthur. *The Community*. Port-of-Spain: Inprint, 1979.

Dyer, Patrick. *Mannie the Manicou*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

----- . *Mannie the Manicou Goes Travelling*. London: Macmillan, 1975.

Giuseppi, Neville and Undine. *Backfire*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

----- . *Out for Stars 1*. London: Macmillan, 1975.

----- . *Out for Stars 2*. London: Macmillan, 1976.

----- . *Sugar and Spice 1*. London: Macmillan, 1977.

Giuseppi, Undine. *A Look at Learie Constantine*. London: Nelson, 1974.

Gomez, Ivy M. *Roses in the Rain*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1974.

- Gonzalez, Anson. *Daaga, the Warrior*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1975.
- . *Kheesas, Local Indian Folk Tales, collected by Ken Parmasad*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1976.
- . *On the Land*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1979.
- . *Photography, An Introducton to a Hobby*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1977.
- . *School Paper Stories*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1978.
- . *Towards Lagos*. Diego Martin: New Voices, 1978.
- Gonzalez, Kit. *Nicole and the Mermaid*. Self-published. San Fernando, 1974.
- Gonzalez, Maria. *Feelings*. Diego Martin: New Voices, 1977.
- . *Step by Step*. Diego Martin: New Voices, 1974.
- Gonzalez, Sylvia. *Steelband Saga*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1978.
- Guy, Rosa. *Edith Jackson*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1979.
- . *The Friends*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1973.
- Hallworth, Grace. *Listen to this Story*. London: Methuen, 1977.
- Hilton, Anne. *Leroy: the story of a streak lizard*. Port of Spain : Publishing Associates, 1977.
- Hoadley, H. M. *The Green Parakeets: A Trinidad Legend*. Port-of-Spain: Columbus, Publishers, 1972.
- Hodge, Merle. *Crick Crack Monkey*. London: Andre Deutsh, 1970.
- Jolly, Dorothy. *Ben the Greatest*. Self-published. San Fernando, 1977.
- . *In Nature's Way*. Self-published. Gasparillo, 197-.
- . *The Kind Firefly*. London: Evans, 1977.
- . *The Rat and the Dog*. London: Evans, 1977.
- Knight, Hollis. *Cecil and the Time Machine*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1977.
- . *Steel Nocturne*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1979.
- . *Sugar*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1979.
- Mac Marie, Joe. *Farm Songs and Rhymes*. Self-published. Moruga, 1971.
- Maynard, Olga Comma. *Carib Echoes: Poems and Stories for Juniors*. Port-of-Spain: Columbus, 1972.

- Mills, Therese. *A kite for Christmas*. [P.O.S. Trinidad]: [The Author], [1974].
- . *A Christmas Tree from Lopinot*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1975.
- . *Caribbean Christmas*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1972.
- . *Shell Book of Trinidad Stories*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1973.
- . *Standard 3 Christmas Concert*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1975.
- . *The Boy Who Ran Away and Other Stories*. Port-of-Spain: College Press, 1976.
- . *The Canefield Fire*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1977.
- Narine, Harricharan. *Days Gone By*. Self-published. Mayaro, 1975.
- Palmer, C. Everard. *The Wooing of Beppo*. Tate Surrey: Nelson Caribbean, c 1972.
- Pinder, Yvonne. *Some People Will Never Learn*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1973.
- Rampaul, Fareeda. *Verses, Rhymes and Jingles for Infants*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1974.
- Ramsawack, Al. *Anansi and the Magic Bowl*. Self-published. San Fernando, 1973.
- . *Flamme Belle*. Self-published. San Fernando, 1978.
- . *I love colours*. Trinidad: Lyretic, 1973.
- . *The Greedy Goat*. Port-of-Spain: Columbus Publishers, 1970.
- . *The Tricky Spider*. Self-published. San Fernando, 1970.
- Sealey, John. *The Joy of Nature*. Self-published. St. Augustine, 1976.
- Salkey, Andrew. *Anancy's Score* (1973)
- Woodward, Marion. *Trinidad Tales, Book 1*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1970.
- . *Trinidad Tales, Book 2*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain. 1972.

### **1980s**

- Anansem: a collection of Caribbean Folktales, legends and poems for juniors*. Edited by Velma Pollard. Kingston, Jamaica: Longman, 1985
- Benjamin, Floella. *Why the agouti has no tail and other stories*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education, 1988.
- Bennette, Olivia. *Festival! Carinival! Festival! Divali!* Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Education, 1986.

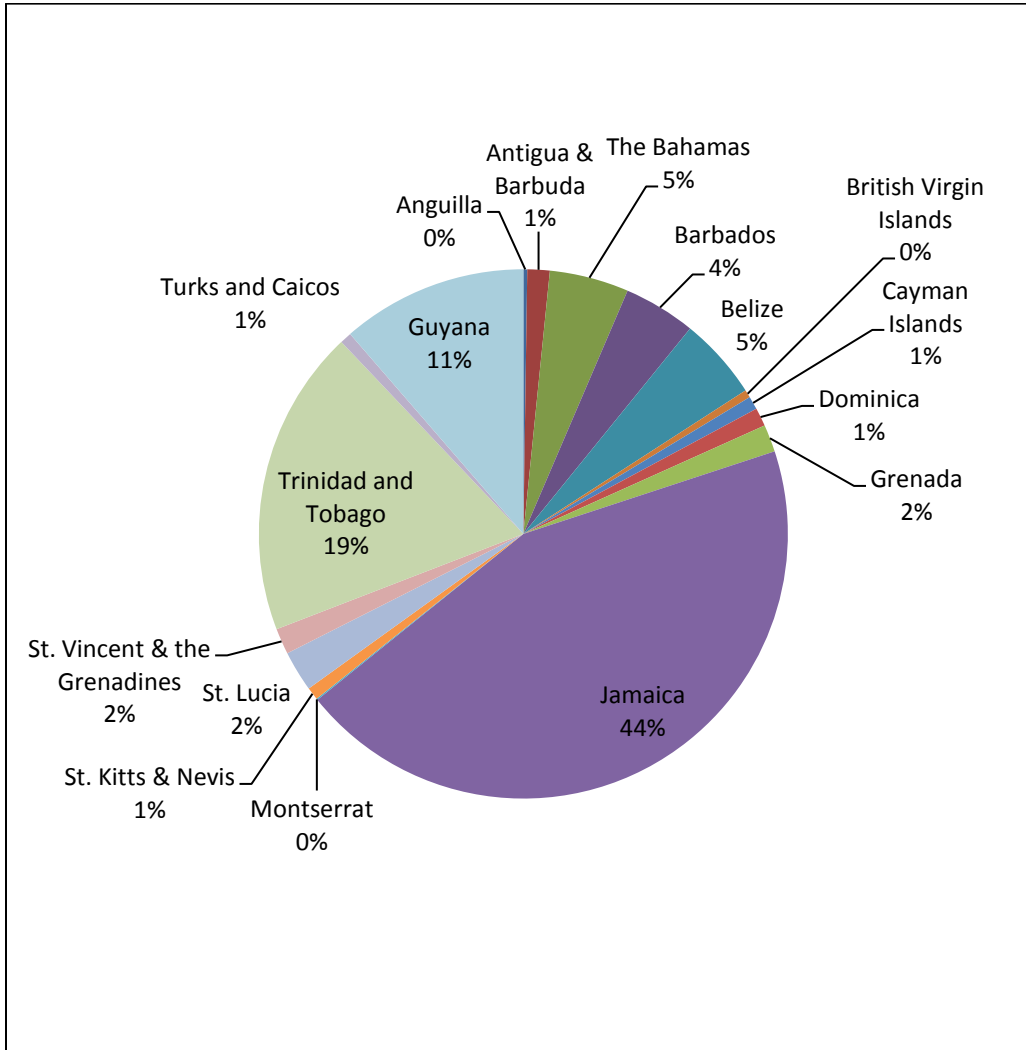
- Besson, Gerrard. *Folklore and Legends of Trinidad and Tobago*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Paria Publishing Co., 1989.
- Berry, James. *Anancy Spiderman: 20 Caribbean Folktales*. London: Walker Books, 1989.
- . *A thief in the Village and other stories*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.
- Bruce, Teddy. *Caribbean bunch and read and colour*. Barataria, Trinidad: Caribbean Cartoon Characters: Macprint Promotions, c 1989.
- D'Costa, Jean. *Escape to last man peak*. Trinidad and Jamaica : Longman Caribbean 1985
- Gonzalez, Anson. *Conservation: The Pointe-a-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1986.
- . *Traditional Action Rhymes and Finger Plays*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1986.
- . *Uncle Boysie's Anti Drug Abuse Book*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1985.
- Guy, Rosa. *Paris, Pee Wee and Big Dog*. London : Macmillan, 1988.
- . *The Ups and Downs of Carl Davis, III*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1989.
- Hallworth, Grace. *Mouth open story jump out*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- Hill, Sonne. *Phantom on the cemetery wall and other short stories*. [Port of Spain]: Sonne Hill, 1984.
- Ibrahim Ali, L. *The Lights of Divali*. Port-of-Spain: Julie Morton, 1988.
- Jones, Evans. *Tales of the Caribbean: witches and duppies*. Aylesbury, Bucks: Ginn, c 1984.
- Jones, Jennifer. *Benji and Carlos*. London: Arawaidi, 1984.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *Annie John*. New York: New American Library, 1985.
- Lessac, Frane. *Caribbean alphabet*. Additional text by Mark Greenwood: London: Macmillan Caribbean, c 1989.
- Maudy, Sybil. *All Around Us: Verses for infants and juniors*. London: Karia, 1987.
- May, Chris. *Bob Marley*. London : Hamish Hamilton, 1985.
- Mc Cartney, Norma. *Tales of the Immortelles: a collection of Caribbean folk-tales*. London : Macmillan Caribbean, 1989.
- Mills, Therese. *Pappy and Other Stories*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1985.
- . *The Bele Queen and Jab Malassie*. Self-published. Port-of-Spain, 1982.
- Modeste, Pat. *Fun With Poems*. Self-published. Tunapuna, 1980.

- Nanton, Ronald. *Special Stories About Exceptional Children*. Port-of-Spain: Ministry of Education, 1980.
- Parmasad, Kenneth Vidia. *Salt and roti: Indian folk tales of the Caribbean a first collection*. Chaguanas, Trinidad: Sankh Productions, c 1984.
- . *The Broken Flute*. Charlieville: Sankh Productions, 1983.
- . *See the Sunlight*. Charlieville: Sanch, 1988.
- Porter, Frank M. *Adventures Up the Caribbean*. Port-of-Spain: Caribbean Children's Press, 1983.
- Ramsawack, Al. *Sermon of the Drunkard and Other Selections*. Self-published. San Fernando, 1983.
- Rollock, Catherine. *Children Stories*. Self-published. Diego Martin. 1982.
- Saunders, Dave. *The West Indians in Britain*. London: Batsford, 1984.
- Sealey, John. *Music in the Caribbean*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982.
- Springer, Eintou Pearl. *God child stories and poems for children*. London: Karia Press, 1988.

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APPENDIX G

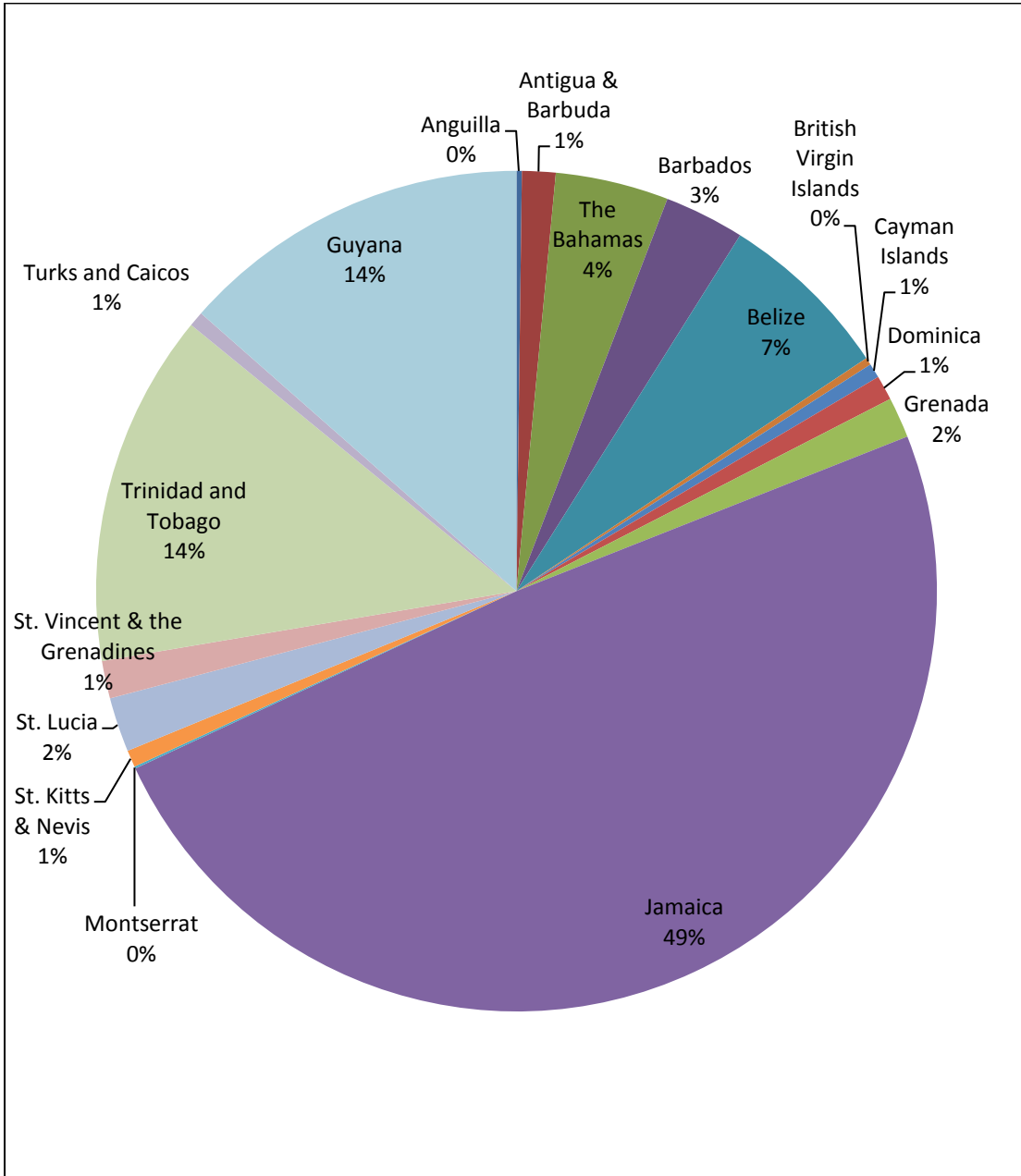
TOTAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION OF THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN



APPENDIX H

TOTAL POPULATION DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN ACROSS THE ANGLOPHONE

CARIBBEAN



## APPENDIX I

### AUTHORS BY PLACE OF PUBLICATION

A list of all the items in the West Indian Juvenile collection that have been examined in this thesis, sorted according to the place of publication and author's name, may be found in the file named **authorlocation.pdf**.

## APPENDIX J

### SUMMARY OF EVALUATION RESPONSES

All nine participants completed the evaluation forms. Of the nine responses received, eight agreed that we met the session goal to discuss the images and stories in selected picture books and one disagreed. [One participant re-expressed the goal as “to talk about things we like and dislike”.]

Qualitatively, responses to the question: What did you not do that would have been helpful?, included:

- “Better pictures in the books”
- “The thing that I did not do is to express my feelings about the books more”
- “I did not answer a lot of questions.”
- “I should have answer (sic) more questions.”
- “I think that we did everything that was helpful”
- “Nothing needed improving.”
- “I did not have an opinion”

[Two participants did not respond to the question.]

In response to the question: How could we do better next time?, the range of responses included:

- “We could speak a bit more about the books.”
- “We could do better next time by talking to each other more.”
- “Read books that are more better than the books we read today.”
- “It should have more books so everyone can see the pictures.”
- “I think we could do better next time by getting better books.”
- “Nothing needed to be better, this session was great.”
- “We can do better next time if we get books that are knowledgeable and more funny at the same time.”

[Two participants did not respond to the question.]

## APPENDIX K

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. You were all chosen because you enjoy reading. What are some of the reasons why you enjoy reading so much?
2. How often do you come to the library to borrow books?
3. Can you show me from the books on display the type of book/s that you borrow most often?
4. What is your favourite book in the last year?
5. Have you ever read literature from the West Indian Juvenile collection at the POS Children's Library?
6. If yes, what titles have you chosen?
7. If no, why don't you?
8. [Follow-up questions will be based on responses]

Thank you for talking to me today. Remember that the books I have chosen for you to look at are not books that are only at your reading level or that you would normally choose. I would like you to help me to examine these books so that we might suggest who would read or like these books; how they might be used; and how successful the writers were at telling their stories.

I look forward to seeing you tomorrow where we will talk about the picture books you have selected.