

The Work and Impact of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop: An Introduction

The great Zora Neale Hurston, an American author, anthropologist, and filmmaker portrayed racial struggles in the early-1900s American South. The most popular of her four novels is *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published in 1937.

Hurston is quoted as saying, "Research is poking and prying with a purpose." Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's contribution to the canon of research about literature written for children and young adults did just what Hurston spoke of. Sims Bishop's work pokes and pries with a purpose. The purpose is to focus on socially and culturally conscious, multidimensional, and authentic representations in children's books.

While Dr. Sims Bishop has produced considerable scholarship, there are three scholarly works that were ground-breaking and filled a major gap in the field. Those scholarly pieces are *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction*, "Strong Black Girls: A Ten Year Old Responds to Fiction About Afro-Americans," and "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." Each of these works established a ground-breaking framework for analyzing literature that has impacted the field and influenced work with children's literature from elementary schools to research scholars in the field for several decades.

Sims Bishop was the first to introduce the theory to practice concept of books as "mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors," supporting that all children, but especially those who are marginalized, need books to be mirrors so they can see themselves, windows so they can look in and see other worlds and sliding glass doors, allowing readers to enter different worlds. Unfortunately, the attribution of the phrase, "mirror, windows, and sliding glass doors" at times is lost in the scholarship, we must be intentional to make sure Dr. Sims Bishop is given full credit for her thought leadership in the field when the importance of multicultural literature and diversity connected to literary research was not a part of research and scholarship on the topic.



In her most recent book *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature*, Dr. Sims Bishop continues the legacy of reading, researching, and reporting about the history and contributions of diverse literature written for children and young adults with the sole purpose of reinforcing the need for all children, but especially Black children to see themselves in the books they read.

The research and scholarship of this gentle scholar, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop continues to speak volumes. Her work has been nationally and internationally cited, assigned in university courses, at the center of teacher professional development, the subject of infographics and lauded as ground-breaking in its own rite. Most importantly, her work had lifted as she climbed contributing to the work of a long line many like myself who became her students, scholars, colleagues, and friends.

As a canon of work dedicated to the study of children's literature, it has provided inspiration for new research and scholarship while simultaneously doing what the late author Virginia Hamilton would call "plumbing the line" as a foundational part of literary scholarship in the field for all who are interested in and committed to the power of diversity in children's literature in the lives of all children.

There is an old gospel song entitled "May the Work That I've Done Speak for Me." Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's work – a life of impactful research and scholarship – can rest assured that the work- her work that will indeed speak for her.

Dr. Cynthia A. Tyson, Professor
The Ohio State University



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compiled by **Dr. Jonda C. McNair**, Charlotte S. Huck Endowed Professor
The Ohio State University



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