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## Retail Hell #5: Hell is the Kids' Department

*Seeking books for a girl about six years old that featured generic heroines with dark skin*

By Kat Avila | Web Published 1.15.2006

The children's section at the bookstore where I work is the "black hole" in the universe of my co-workers. It's where old people go to die, judging from the general age of those scheduled to work there, including myself.



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I never liked working the section. Nobody wants to babysit, which is why they finally decided to permanently assign people. I told the manager that I had a credential in ADULT Basic Education, not KinderCare. Kids are evil. They make too much noise, and they like to destroy stuff. An unsupervised toddler can do as much damage in ten minutes as a mini-tornado.

"WHAT HAPPENED HERE?!" I gasped one time after coming back from a break. It was an unusually horrific scene; I half-expected Edward James Olmos to show up to help me clean the mess. "I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! I wasn't gone THAT long!" I suspected it was the work of this one father-and-toddler team trying to sneak off before I could see them.

I've heard people mutter that Mexicans don't watch their kids and let them do whatever they want. Guess what, bad parenting comes in all shapes and sizes and colors. I'd like to say fathers are worse parents than mothers, but they're only the most memorable.

There's the father who regularly abandons his daughter in Kids', while he sits in the cafe and browses magazines he won't be buying; small wonder she clings to any stranger who will pay attention to her. Another father lets his autistic-like teenager wander around alone to frighten customers with sudden outbursts or in-your-face "HUH? WHAT DID YOU SA-A-Y?" when he overhears comments about his strange behavior.

Anyway, what actually prompted me to write this latest Retail Hell installment is a European-American woman who came into the store to ask about several items, including books for a girl about six years old that featured generic heroines with dark skin. Dick & Jane was out. Disney Princess titles feature either generic pale-skinned girls or culturally specific "others," and Lilo & Stitch is indigenous Hawaiian culture. The super-hero Powerpuff Girls all look white. There's Nickelodeon's Dora the Explorer, but she's bilingual, and these books were going to be sent to the Middle East. Other books we looked at were talking critters books.

So, I'm asking LatinoLA readers for your suggestions about books that might be found at a chain bookstore like Borders or Barnes & Noble, books for preschoolers with same-age, generic dark-skinned heroes and heroines that any child regardless of ethnic and cultural background could enjoy. (I might not like working in Kids', but I still try to do my job.)

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