Abstract

Purpose
History-based trade books have an important and expanding role in various curricula. Contemporary education initiatives urge English and language arts educators to spend half their time on non-fiction and history and social studies teachers to include diverse sources starting in the early grades. Diverse professional organizations annually make financial commitments to promote new trade books. Research indicates misrepresentations abound in history-based trade books, yet few empirical studies have been completed. The purpose of this paper is to research examine the historical representation of Abraham Lincoln, arguably the most consequential nineteenth-century American.

Design/methodology/approach
Data samples included trade books intended for early grades and middle grades students. These grade ranges were selected because these students have the least prior knowledge and are perhaps most dependent on the text. Qualitative content analysis research methods were employed.

Findings
Misrepresentations emerged regarding Lincoln's poverty, actions, motivations for actions, and implications of his actions as seemingly necessary historical content was minimized, vaguely included, or omitted. Findings are juxtaposed across and between selected grade ranges.

Practical implications
Discussion focused on the significance of findings for teachers and researchers. Teachers are guided to supplement trade books with primary sources to position students to distinguish historical misrepresentations.

Originality/value
This research builds on previous scholarship on Lincoln-based trade books by expanding grade range, data samples and research questions.

Keywords
Historical representation, Informational texts, Primary sources, Young adult literature, Abraham Lincoln, Children's trade books

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