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PRESS RELEASE

Hub City Writers Project Announces Books as Mirrors

An initiative to seed every school in Spartanburg county with culturally relevant and diverse books

Spartanburg, April 19, 2021: The Hub City Writers Project, with a generous grant from Women Giving for Spartanburg, launched **Books as Mirrors: Ensuring Children See Themselves in the Literature They Read** at six Spartanburg County public elementary schools: Cleveland Academy of Learning, Drayton Mills Elementary School, Duncan Elementary School, Roebuck Elementary School, Jesse S. Bobo Elementary School, and Woodland Heights Elementary School. Each school received \$5000 of new, culturally relevant, and diverse books; schools were prioritized based on the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. “Women Giving for Spartanburg is thrilled that Books as Mirrors has been able to move forward and get these wonderful books into the schools,” says Camille Wolfe, Grants Committee Chair for Women Giving for Spartanburg. “This has been a challenging year, especially for school-aged children. We are happy to support this project and provide them with books that will take them to new places, see new faces and spark their imagination.”

For many students, books are not accessible at home, and they rely on libraries, primarily their school’s libraries, to gain access to books that allow exposure to perspectives that they otherwise may never be able to experience. By placing these books directly into the schools’ libraries, Books as Mirrors is able to ensure that diverse topics and conversations are readily available to a wide variety of students. Exposure to literature that models children’s ways of being and living in the world supports the Spartanburg Academic Movement’s stated goal of “recognizing that capacity of all children to learn from cradle to career and throughout life.”

A 2001 article by Bena R. Hefflin and Mary Alice Barksdale-Ladd in the journal [*The Reading Teacher*](#) states that “one primary motivation for reading fiction involves the pleasure that can be taken in relating to characters, their lives, their problems, and their experiences. When readers frequently encounter texts that feature characters with whom they can connect, they will see how others are like them and how reading can play a role in their lives.”¹ A 2008 study published in the *Ohio Journal of English Language Arts* suggests that “when teachers provide children with reading

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material that reflects their lives and experiences, children show academic progress and demonstrate positive attitudes towards reading.”²

“Although ‘Books as Mirrors’ is a timely topic, these books will be in our media center so that students can see themselves represented for years to come,” says Katrina Hankins, Literacy Coach at Roebuck Elementary. “In addition, teachers will be able to use these books in their classrooms to model lessons and entice reluctant readers. Having these resources at our fingertips will encourage conversations and growth in understanding as well as literacy.”

Hub City Writers Project, through Books as Mirrors, aims to supply school libraries and equip teachers with titles that encourage children to seek out literature to better understand their differences and the differences of those around them. This initiative has the potential to reveal new areas for community indicators data collection that could reveal new research avenues to improve our understanding of how identity-based barriers affect Spartanburg County children. Over the next three to five years, Books as Mirrors will provide more than \$200,000 of recently published hardcover books to every Spartanburg County public elementary school library.

As the outreach assistant for Hub City Writers Project, Kyla Burwick says, “If these books can allow a reluctant reader to pick up a book and then another because they feel a connection to its story or its characters, then Books as Mirrors will have been a success.”

"Our mission is to cultivate readers and nurture writers," says Hub City Writers Project executive director Anne Waters. "We believe in the transformative power of the written word to entertain and educate. If all children see themselves reflected in the pages of their books—their race, ethnicity, cultural heritage, family dynamic—it will provide an affirming experience that just might provide that spark that ignites a lifelong passion for reading and learning. If we can cultivate readers at the crucial time when they move from 'learning to read to reading to learn,' we have fulfilled half our mission. Then we can move onto nurturing their writing."

Books as Mirrors is currently seeking funding as it plans to contribute to the libraries of seven more schools in 2021: Mary H. Wright Elementary, Blacksburg Elementary, Blacksburg Primary, Arcadia Elementary, Lone Oak Elementary, Wellford Elementary, and E.P. Todd Elementary. If you are interested in adopting a school or contributing in any way, visit HubCity.org/BooksAsMirrors for more information.

About the **Hub City Writers Project**: The Hub City Writers Project is headquartered in Spartanburg, SC. For twenty-five years, the HCWP has been dedicated to cultivating readers and nurturing writers through its independent press, community bookshop, diverse literary programming, and literacy outreach.

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¹Hefflin, B., & Barksdale-Ladd, M. (2001). African American children's literature that helps students find themselves: Selection guidelines for grades K-3. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(8), 810–819. Retrieved April 15, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20204996>

²Smolen, L. A., Collins, L. J., & Still, K. L. (2008). Enhancing cultural understanding and respect with multicultural text sets in the K–8 classroom. *Ohio Journal of English Language Arts*, 48(2), 18–29.