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Who is Represented? A Content Analysis of Characters in Award-Winning and Acclaimed Literature for Elementary and Middle School Students

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Who is Represented? A Content Analysis of Characters in Award-Winning and Acclaimed Literature for Elementary and Middle School Students

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Abstract

Equity and inclusion in education are global priorities, and teachers play a vital role in promoting these values through diverse children's literature. Many U.S. classrooms feature extensive collections of inclusive books that foster cultural awareness and provide tools to address discrimination. This study supports global audiences in understanding how U.S. children's literature reflects educational values by analyzing character representation in award-winning and acclaimed titles for PreK–8 students. A database of 4,244 titles from 23 awards and recommended lists was compiled, with 86 titles selected for descriptive content analysis. The study examined main characters' representation across race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, and sexual orientation. Findings reveal a lack of representation that reflects contemporary U.S. children. While gender representation is balanced, non-binary characters are absent. White characters dominate, and other groups—particularly in terms of religion and disability—remain underrepresented. These patterns echo previous research and highlight the need for more inclusive literature. The paper argues that educators must intentionally select diverse books to promote equity, inclusion, and empathy, ensuring all children see themselves in the stories they read. It also emphasizes the global significance of U.S. children's literature in reflecting cultural values and advancing representation.

Introduction

In education, there is a strong emphasis on achieving equity and inclusion for all students across the world (UNESCO, 2017). To foster inclusion and equity in education, it is essential to be aware of differences. Teachers play a major role in interrupting children's building of prejudice and bias by adopting children's literature that celebrates and authentically portrays diversity (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2023). As access to children's literature fosters reading motivation (Chou et al., 2016) and significantly influences children's sense of self (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013), many elementary and middle school classrooms in the United States (U.S.) contain extensive library collections that include diverse books (McNair, 2016). By engaging with diverse books, children can enhance their cultural awareness and gain tools to address issues of equity and discrimination (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016).

However, merely having books is not sufficient. It is essential to evaluate the content, quality, and diversity of

books, along with the role of teachers in choosing curricular materials. The terms 'diversity' and 'diverse' broadly cover the range of social groups and characteristics to which people belong. Today's U.S. society and students reflect a wide array of populations, including race/ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexuality, and ability, among others. Books in curricula and classroom libraries in the U.S. should represent these populations (Koss & Paciga, 2020, 2022). In this context, the current study aims to examine the characters in award-winning and acclaimed literature published in the U.S. to answer the following questions: 1) What types of characters are featured in U.S.-based award-winning and acclaimed children's books? and 2) Do they reflect contemporary U.S. children?

Literature Review

U.S. Children's Demographics

According to the Pew Research Center's 2024 report on student demographics in U.S. public schools (Schaeffer, 2024), just under half (46%) of all public-school students were non-Hispanic White in 2020. Another 28% were Hispanic, 15% were Black, and 5% were Asian. Additionally, 4% were multiracial, and about 1% or fewer were American Indian, Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander. The increasing diversity of student populations underscores the importance of awareness of their representation in children's and young adult literature. The number of disabled students receiving special education or related services has also risen over the last decade, according to the Pew Research Center's 2023 report (Leppert & Schaeffer, 2023). U.S. student demographics suggest that the current generation includes a wider variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a higher prevalence of disabilities compared to previous generations. This reflects broader societal changes, such as increased immigration and better identification and support for disabilities. It highlights the importance of ensuring that children's and young adult literature and educational materials are inclusive and representative of this diversity.

Exploring the Self and the World Through Children's Literature

Children's literature can promote self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Studies have explored the integration of social-emotional learning competencies in children's literature and its impact on students' social and emotional development (Clark et al., 2021; Gunn et al., 2022). By adopting diverse literature, educators can enhance children's understanding of diverse individual and cultural identities, families, communities, and life experiences (Gunn et al., 2022). Through reading and discussing diverse characters and representations in children's literature, children can develop the ability to understand their own emotions as well as those of others. Diverse characters and stories in children's literature also influence children's understanding of their own identities and those of others (Bishop, 1990; N. J. Johnson et al., 2018). Children become more engaged in literature when they identify with characters and experiences presented in the books, enhancing self-efficacy and connection to the characters (N. J. Johnson et al., 2018).

Children's learning about themselves and the world through literature is not limited to racial backgrounds. Buchanan and colleagues (2020) argue that avoiding topics and stories featuring Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) characters reinforces a heteronormative view of family and marginalizes

students whose families are considered ‘othered’ (p. 179). The representation of gender diversity and diverse family forms in society through children’s literature helps students feel included and recognized as valued members of their community. Children’s literature and representations of diverse groups and cultures can be a medium to discuss concepts of right and wrong, justice, and fairness in society. Educators can use literature about mixed-race characters to initiate discussions on race and identity, highlighting the arbitrary nature of racial categorization in the U.S. (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). Discussions about shifts in themes, character diversity, and the portrayal of social issues in historical and contemporary literature reflect societal changes and attitudes.

Children’s Literature in Classrooms in the United States

Literacy Development

Children's literature plays a pivotal role in the educational development of young learners. It serves as a powerful tool for promoting literacy, fostering emotional intelligence, and enhancing cultural awareness. Children's literature is instrumental in developing literacy skills, such as vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking abilities. By adopting diverse literature, educators can introduce basic literacy concepts aligned with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Domke et al., 2024). In the U.S. classroom, children's literature fosters disciplinary literacy by integrating content-area curriculum and children's literature (Ryan & Lipp, 2025). Historical texts inspire rich conversations about disciplinary and racial literacies (La Croix et al., 2024).

Emotional Intelligence

Children's literature not only teaches literacy skills but also fosters empathy, helping children understand and share the feelings of others (Lain, 2019). Stories that depict diverse characters and experiences allow children to explore their own emotions and develop empathy for others. Books that address themes such as friendship, family, and overcoming challenges provide opportunities for students to reflect on their feelings and learn valuable life lessons. By carefully selecting quality books for the classroom, educators have opportunities to scaffold children's understanding of differences and to avoid single stories (Tschida et al., 2014). Children's literature that portrays unhoused individuals can be used to increase children's awareness of homelessness and encourage them to understand diverse socio-economic statuses and social justice issues (Waller & Sullivan-Walker, 2023). Award-winning picturebook biographies offer students opportunities to reflect on accomplishments and overcome challenges through real-life stories (Chung & Chaudhri, 2021).

Cultural Awareness

The inclusion of diverse literature in the classroom is essential for promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity. Books that feature characters from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds help students understand and appreciate diversity. Children's literature serves as both a mirror and a window, allowing children to see themselves reflected in the stories and to gain insights into the lives of others (Bishop, 1990). Educators can use diverse children's literature to facilitate discussions about identity, community, and social justice, fostering a more inclusive learning environment (W. F. Johnson et al., 2025). The lack of diverse religious representation is also

an issue. According to Misco and Patterson's (2007) survey, preservice teachers feel comfortable discussing political and racial conflicts but are less at ease addressing controversial issues such as sexual orientation, sexual harassment, and religious conflict. As children's literature can address contemporary social issues and encourage critical thinking, educators can help students develop a broader perspective on the world by presenting stories that include characters from various backgrounds and experiences. This approach not only enhances students' academic skills but also prepares them to be empathetic and informed global citizens.

Theoretical Framework

Children's literature serves as a powerful medium through which societal values and perspectives are both reflected and transmitted (Yokota & Teale, 2016). These literary works are not merely stories for entertainment; they are social products that encapsulate the cultural, moral, and ideological underpinnings of the time in which they were created. By examining children's literature, one can discern the prevailing social norms, attitudes towards various social issues, and the aspirations of a society for its younger generation. For instance, books addressing themes, such as gender roles (Coats, 2018) and gender and racial diversity (Crisp et al., 2018; Koss & Paciga, 2020), provide insights into the evolving discourse on these topics. Children's books serve as a medium through which children can mirror themselves, see the world, and transform their views by passing through the sliding door (Bishop, 1990).

Children's literature published and awarded in the U.S. can demonstrate these mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to understand U.S. values and viewpoints. This theoretical framework posits that children's literature is a mirror of society, offering a unique lens through which to study the interplay between literature and social values. By analyzing the themes and narratives within these literary works, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, moral, and ideological currents that shape a society's worldview and its aspirations for future generations.

Methodology

The current study employs descriptive content analysis to evaluate the representations in awarded and acclaimed literature for elementary and middle school students.

Data Collection

Three researchers compiled a comprehensive database of children's books from four stakeholder categories: librarian awards affiliated with the American Library Association (ALA) Youth Media Awards, educator awards, industry expert awards, and recognized Top 100 lists. Detailed information on each category is available in previous research (Chung et al., 2024). A total of 4,244 titles from 23 awards and acclaimed lists were included in the database. Titles appearing in at least three of the four categories were selected for analysis, resulting in a corpus of 86 titles, which were then classified into grade-level bands: PreK-2, 3-5, and 6-8. Then further analysis was processed to focus on the main character(s) of literature to identify their representations, resulting in 59 titles.

Data Analysis

The present study adopted a priori coding themes and processes from the previous research (Koss & Paciga, 2020) to ensure a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the data. Three researchers collaboratively coded 15% of the titles using the priori scheme, discussing to reach consensus. An additional 5% of the titles were double coded to ensure consistency in applying the coding scheme. The remaining titles were divided and coded independently by one researcher, with opportunities to address any questions. The coding framework included variables such as race/ethnicity, gender, and ability, each defined and categorized based on established guidelines. The content analysis focused on gender, character type, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, and sexual orientation. Frequency counts of key variables in the books were compared across different grade-level bands. Two exemplar titles were chosen for each grade-level band to illustrate the various ways the priori coding scheme was applied.

Race/Ethnicity

The coding framework for race and ethnicity was based on guidelines where race is identified through self-association with social groups, and ethnicity indicates Hispanic/Latinx origin. Middle Eastern individuals, not separately classified, were specifically coded due to their significant presence in schools. Terminology was aligned with standards from major children's book award committees.

Gender

Gender coding utilized a binary male/female scheme, despite its theoretical limitations and lack of inclusivity. Gender was determined using pronouns, gender-specific language, and visible gender in images. Characters without clear gender indicators were coded as neutral, acknowledging the limitations of binary classification.

Ability

Characters were assumed to be able-bodied unless explicitly indicated otherwise through text descriptions or adaptive devices in illustrations. The coding framework categorized disabilities into physical, social-emotional, and cognitive domains. Multiple disabilities were recorded when applicable, and the research team documented language observed in titles, noting deviations from contemporary recommendations for people-first language.

Findings

The analysis of the collected literature answered the following research question: 1) What types of characters are featured in U.S.-based award-winning and acclaimed children's books? and 2) Do they reflect contemporary U.S. children? Based on the analysis of the characters featured in U.S.-based award-winning and acclaimed children's books, it appears that these books do not fully reflect the diversity of contemporary U.S. children.

Gender representation of main characters varies by grade level, with more male main characters in books for younger and upper grade audiences and more female main characters in grades 3-5 (see Figure 1). There are no instances of sexual representations outside the male/female binary.

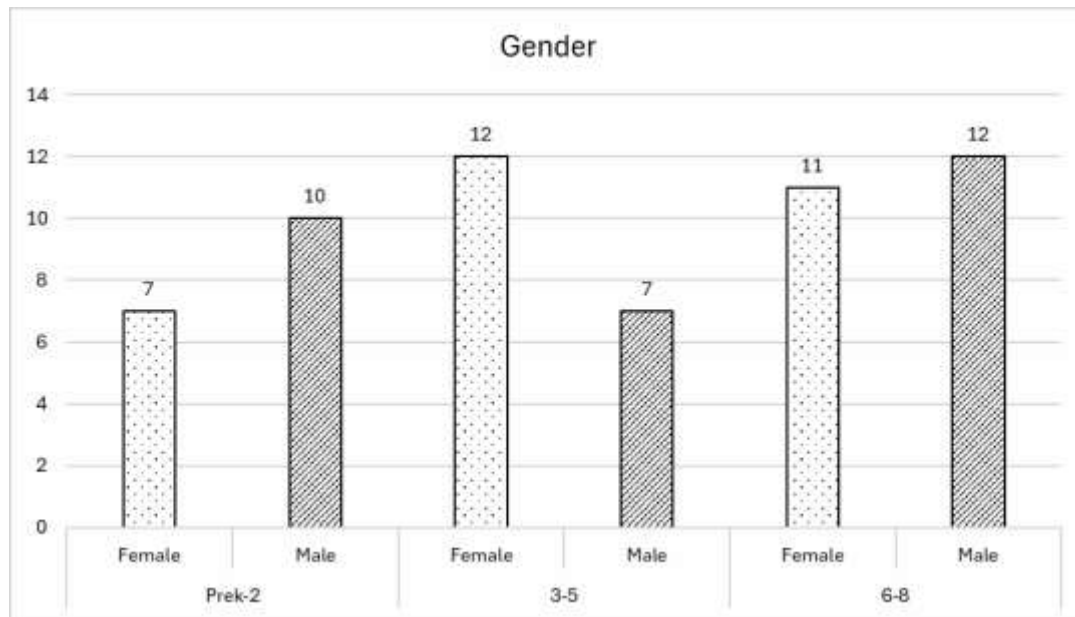


Figure 1. Gender Representation of Main Character(S)

Regarding race and ethnicity, White characters outnumber other racial groups across all grade bands, with the presence of White and Black characters increasing with age (see Figure 2). Other minority groups, such as Asian, American Indian, Latinx, and Middle Eastern, are less visible across the grade bands.

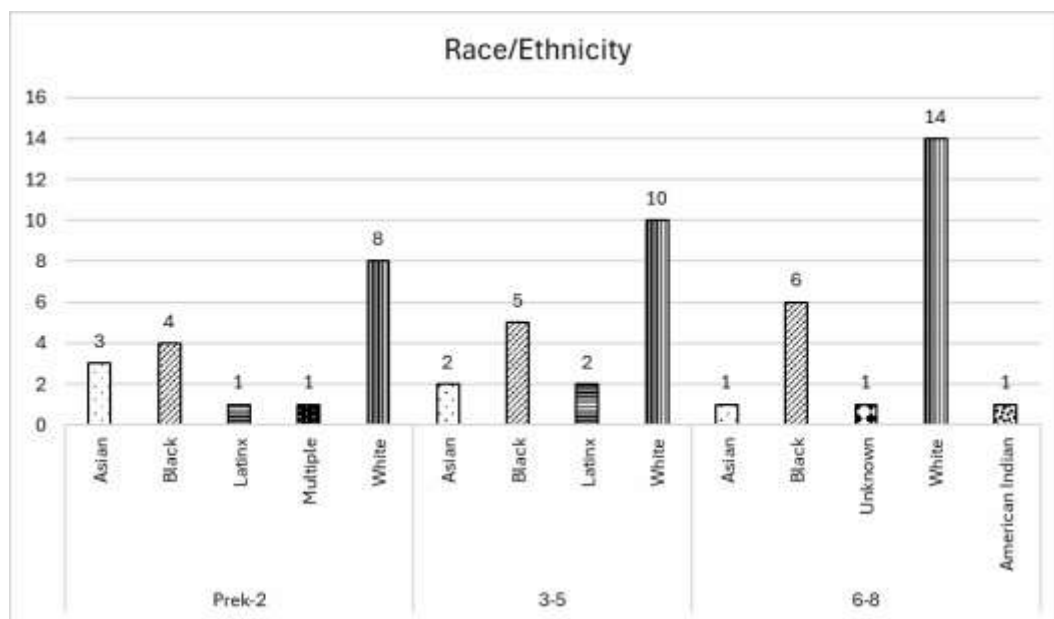


Figure 2. Race/Ethnicity Representation of Main Character(S)

Overall, the data indicates a lack of main characters of varying disability in acclaimed literature for K-8 students

(see Figure 3). Most of the characters with disabilities wear eyeglasses. One text in the Grade 3-5 band includes an elderly main character who temporarily uses a cane. One book in the Grade 6-8 band features a main character with burned hands caused by a fire.

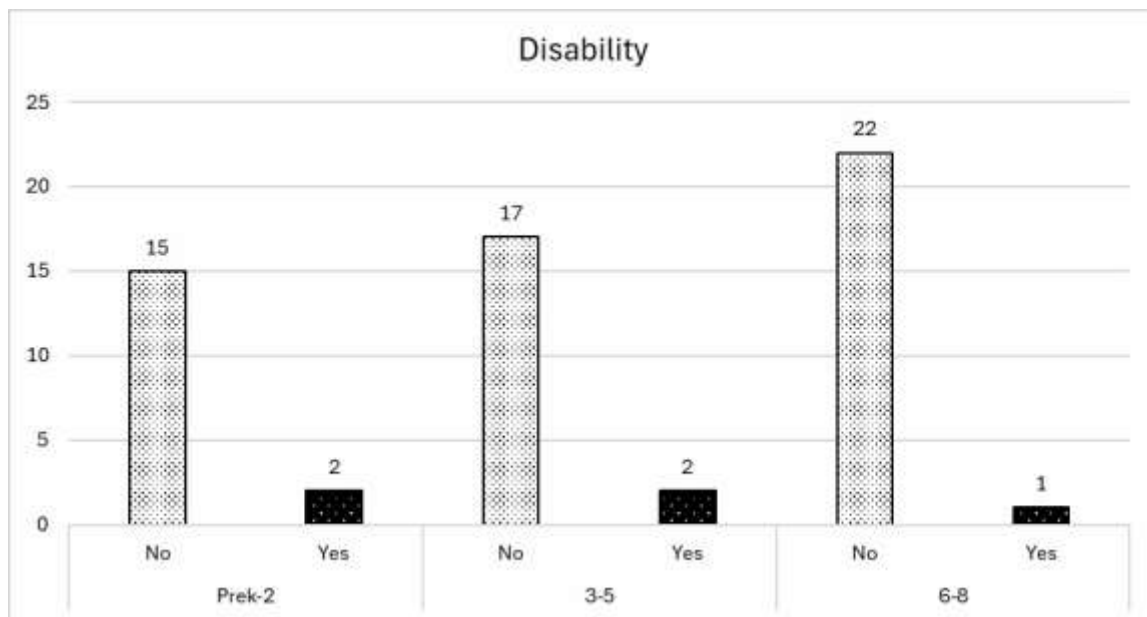


Figure 3. Disability Representation of Main Character(S)

Depictions of religious activities and values, particularly Christianity, increase across the grade- level bands (see Figure 4). In the Grade 6-8 band, books include characters with Native Spirit, Jehovah's Witness, and Buddhist beliefs.

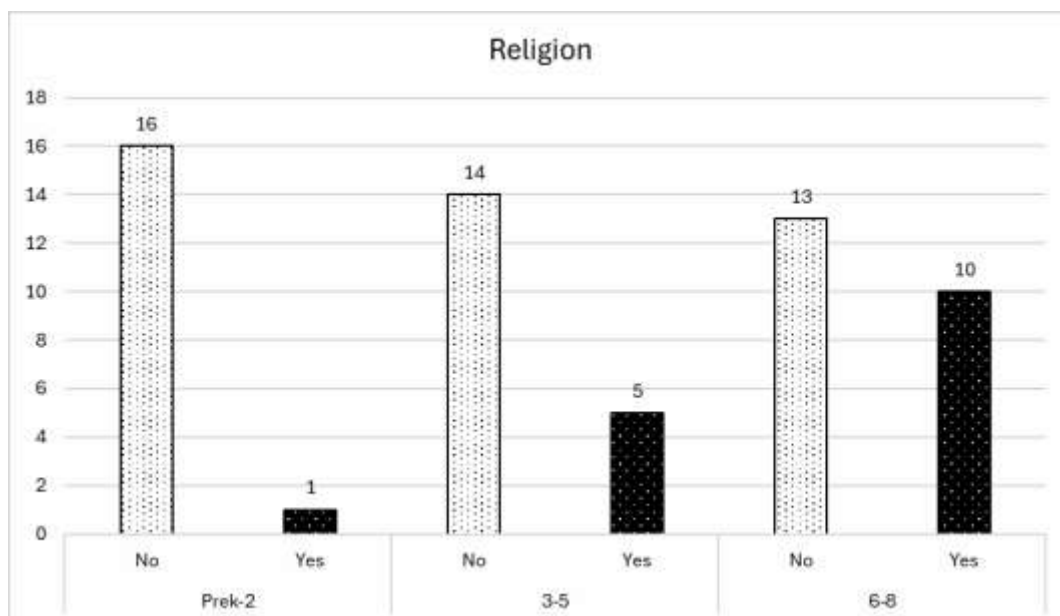


Figure 4. Representation of Religion of Main Character(S)

While U.S.-based award-winning and acclaimed children's books do feature a variety of characters, they fall short

in fully reflecting the diverse identities and experiences of contemporary U.S. children. There is a need for greater inclusion of diverse gender identities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, disabilities, and religious beliefs to better represent the rich diversity of today's youth in the U.S.

Discussion

The current study investigated whether awarded and acclaimed books reflect the diversity of today's U.S. populations in classrooms. The findings can help educators and stakeholders enhance awareness of diverse books in award lists and highlight the role of educators in exposing these books to children and global audiences. Although these books alone cannot fully represent the diverse U.S. population, they reflect efforts by various stakeholders, including book award communities, scholars, and educators, to promote aspects of contemporary U.S. society such as different ethnicities, cultures, and abilities.

Quality and Quantity of Diverse Representation in Acclaimed and Awarded U.S. Children's Literature

The findings of this study highlight both the quality and quantity of diverse representation in acclaimed and awarded U.S. children's literature across different grade levels. The study indicates a diverse gender representation, with a balance of male and female main characters across the grade levels. However, the representation of non-binary or gender non-conforming characters is absent, reflecting a gap in the inclusion or recognition of diverse gender identities. This highlights the need for more inclusive literature that represents the full spectrum of gender diversity (Koss & Paciga, 2020).

White main characters dominate literature, with their numbers increasing across the grade levels. Black main characters, while fewer in number than White characters, also show an increase across the grade levels. However, the representation of Latinx characters is notably lacking, especially in the 6-8 grade band, where no Latinx main characters are present. This underrepresentation is concerning given the growing Latinx population in the U.S. and the importance of reflecting this demographic in children's literature. Additionally, the representation of American Indian characters is invisible in PreK and 3-5th grade literature, further emphasizing the need for more inclusive and representative stories. Global audiences would not see those invisible groups throughout the acclaimed and awarded U.S. literature although they live in this country, essential erasing them from the narrative.

The study also reveals that characters with disabilities are primarily depicted through the use of eyeglasses, a common item among contemporary people. This limited representation does not adequately reflect the diverse experiences of individuals with disabilities. Research indicates that such portrayals often fail to capture the complexity and variety of disabilities, leading to a narrow understanding among readers (Crisp, 2015; Koss & Paciga, 2020; McNair, 2016; Ricks et al., 2023). Temporary disabilities or age-related disabilities do not fully represent the needs and strengths of people with congenital disabilities. For instance, a critical analysis of disability representation in young adult literature highlights the importance of depicting a range of disabilities to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive narrative (Curwood, 2013). As empathy begins with awareness (Lain, 2019), there is a need for literature that includes a broader range of disabilities. This would

provide children with a more comprehensive understanding of different abilities and foster empathy and inclusion.

The number of religious representations increases across the grade levels, but most of these representations are centered around Christianity. Although Christianity is often considered the dominant religion in the U.S., it is not an official religion according to the U.S. Constitution (Smith, 2024). Research highlights the importance of including diverse religious perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of different faiths (Miskec, 2011). Focusing on a single religion fails to introduce children to the rich diversity of religious beliefs that exist and can marginalize those who do not follow the Christian faith. To support the right to religious freedom and promote a more inclusive understanding of different faiths, it is essential to include literature that represents a variety of religious backgrounds.

The findings underscore the importance of both the number and diversity of human representations in children's literature. Although it is crucial to have a significant number of diverse characteristics, the quality of these representations is equally important. Educators must critically evaluate the books they select for their classrooms (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Tschida et al., 2014), ensuring that they include literature that reflects the diverse identities and experiences of contemporary children. By doing so, educators can create a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment, helping students to see themselves and others in the stories they read (Gunn et al., 2022).

U.S. Children's Literature to Promote Equity and Inclusion

The inclusion of diverse books in curricula and school libraries is essential for promoting equity and inclusion. However, can we say that the awarded and acclaimed books truly reflect the diversity of today's U.S. populations? The predominance of White characters and the underrepresentation of other racial and ethnic groups, as highlighted in our study, align with previous research (Koss et al., 2018). Given that our research includes titles from the inception of the included awards, it is significant to acknowledge the historical predominance of White characters. This underscores the need for teachers to stay informed about recently awarded books, that have the potential to feature diverse characters. Our study emphasizes the importance of including characters with disabilities, various religions, and low socioeconomic status backgrounds to foster inclusivity and empathy. As efforts to adopt children's literature with diverse characters and backgrounds support children's perspectives on the world (Gardner- Neblett et al., 2023), it is essential to continually emphasize the importance of diverse books to promote equity and inclusion.

The findings of this study have significant implications beyond the U.S. context. Diverse books can play a crucial role in promoting global understanding and empathy among students from different cultural backgrounds. International audiences can be aware of acclaimed and awarded U.S. children's literature's efforts of diverse representations in gender, race, disability, and religion, although there is lack of representations of certain groups of people. The current representation of racial groups in the lists reflects the gap of Latinx representations in acclaimed literature compared to the U.S. demographics. Increasing diversity within countries, driven by factors like migration and changing demographics, is a significant global trend, with many countries experiencing this

shift (Poushter & Fetterolf, 2019). By incorporating literature that reflects a wide range of identities and experiences, educators worldwide can foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This approach not only benefits students in understanding their own societies but also prepares them to engage with the global community. Additionally, the emphasis on diverse characters and stories can help challenge stereotypes and promote social justice on an international scale. As educational systems around the world strive to create more inclusive curricula, the insights from this study can inform policies and practices that support diversity and inclusion in children's literature globally.

Discussion of Exemplar Cases Across Grade Bands

Knuffle Bunny (Willems, 2005) and *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015)

Two exemplar titles were chosen for each grade level band to demonstrate the various ways each coding scheme was applied. For the PreK-2 grade band, the selected titles were *Knuffle Bunny* (Willems, 2005) and *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015). *Knuffle Bunny*, a Caldecott Honor book, features Trixie, a young White girl from an urban, likely upper middle-class background. The story humorously depicts Trixie's distress when she loses her beloved stuffed animal, Knuffle Bunny, during a trip to the laundromat with her father. The narrative focuses on everyday urban activities such as visiting the laundromat, going to school, and walking through a park, without explicitly addressing themes of religion or disability. Especially, the setting of a laundromat represents a common urban activity in the U.S. due to limited apartment space, and the communal and convenient services laundromats provide. The traditional gender roles are evident as Trixie's mother quickly notices the missing toy, while her father remains unaware and takes her to the laundromat.

In contrast, *Last Stop on Market Street*, another Caldecott Honor book, follows CJ, a young Black boy from a lower-middle-class family. The story captures CJ's bus ride with his grandmother after church, highlighting socioeconomic issues as CJ questions why they don't own a car and live in a less affluent area. Their journey on the bus and visit to a soup kitchen—a place where free meals are provided to those in need—introduce readers to a diverse array of characters, reflecting the multicultural urban setting in the U.S. due to the diverse population that cities attract. The family's routine of attending church and participating in community service reflects how Christianity is commonly practiced in American culture. The book includes characters with visible disabilities, such as individuals with a cane or in wheelchairs, promoting inclusivity. The strong bond between CJ and his grandmother showcases traditional gender roles, with the grandmother serving as a nurturing and guiding figure.

Ramona Quimby, Age 8 (Cleary, 2020) and *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017).

For the 3rd-5th grade level band, the two exemplar books selected were *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* (Cleary, 2020) and *A Different Pond* (Phi, 2017). *Ramona Quimby, Age 8* follows the adventures of Ramona, a young White girl growing up in a lower middle-class family in the U.S. Ramona navigates challenges such as responsibilities and social dynamics, reflecting universal childhood experiences. The Quimby family faces financial difficulties, even though both parents work to make ends meet, which reflects many contemporary middle-class U.S. families. The family's tradition of attending church represents Christianity, reflecting the religious beliefs commonly held in

America, where Christianity is the most widely practiced religion, despite the country not having an official religion and ensuring religious freedom (Smith, 2024).

In contrast, *A Different Pond* introduces us to Bao, a young Asian American boy of Vietnamese descent. The United States is the top country for accepting immigrants, more than any other country in the world (Batalova, 2025). Immigrants in the U.S. hail from almost every nation, showcasing the country's longstanding role as a place where people come to pursue new opportunities and improve their lives. Bao's story is deeply rooted in his family's refugee experience and their lower socio-economic status. The narrative follows Bao and his father as they fish in a pond, a poignant activity that connects Bao to his cultural heritage and family history. The story also reflects the economic challenges faced by many immigrant families in the U.S. The portrayal of the father's multiple jobs and fishing to supplement their meals presents the hardships and resilience of immigrant families. Both Ramona and Bao's stories offer distinct perspectives on life that can be appreciated by a global audience. Ramona's narrative focuses on the trials and tribulations of a U.S. childhood, whereas Bao's story provides insight into the immigrant experience and the challenges faced. Both stories have the potential to resonate with a global audience as they describe personal growth and resilience through childhood experiences and family dynamics.

New Kid (Craft, 2019) and *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Paterson, 1987)

The two books selected for the 6th-8th grade level band are *New Kid* (Craft, 2019) and *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Paterson, 1987), two titles that offer distinct yet equally important perspectives on childhood and adolescence. *New Kid* follows the journey of Jordan, a 12-year-old Black boy navigating life as a middle-class child. Jordan's story revolves around his experiences at a new, predominantly White private school, where he grapples with issues of identity, belonging, and cultural differences. His narrative highlights the challenges and triumphs of adapting to new environments, especially those that depict racial differences, a theme that resonates universally with children facing similar transitions. For international audiences, it's important to note that Jordan's experiences reflect broader themes of multiculturalism and diversity, which are prominent in urban settings in the United States. The U.S. is known for its diverse population, particularly in cities, where people from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds coexist. This multicultural environment fosters a rich tapestry of cultural practices and interactions, making stories like Jordan's relatable to children worldwide who may face similar challenges in diverse or new settings.

In contrast, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* introduces us to Gilly, a young White girl from a lower-class background. The story resonates with universal themes such as identity struggles, a sense of belonging, and resilience. Gilly's story tells of her life in foster care, where she struggles with feelings of abandonment and the desire for a permanent home. It's important to understand the context of foster care in the United States. Foster care is a system where children who cannot live with their biological families are placed in temporary homes with foster parents. This system aims to provide stability and care for children in need, but it can also bring challenges related to feelings of abandonment and the search for a permanent home. Her foster mother, Trotter's motivation by her Baptist faith reflects the significant role religion can play in providing moral guidance and community support in the U.S. as well.

Overall, the books introduced and analyzed in this study enrich the reader's understanding of the diverse ways children experience and interpret their worlds, fostering empathy and cultural awareness among young readers worldwide. As a medium to understand societal values and perspectives (Yokota & Teale, 2016), global readers can gain awareness of U.S. values and its diversity of cultures by exploring the characters, settings, and themes in award-winning and acclaimed literature. However, these books also highlight a lack of representation and awareness of diverse populations as discussed in the other studies (Crisp et al., 2018; Koss & Paciga, 2020). The absence of disabled characters, whether as main or supporting characters, suggests a need for greater global awareness and inclusion of these populations as active agents who can lead the stories. Considering the diverse religions in U.S. society and across the world, different religious beliefs and backgrounds should be introduced to younger generations to enhance their empathy and understanding of differences.

Conclusion

Overall, the analysis of awarded and acclaimed children's books reveals a significant gap in the representation of contemporary U.S. children. Although these books feature a variety of characters, they predominantly depict White characters and lack sufficient representation of other racial and ethnic groups, gender diversity, religious diversity, and characters with disabilities. This disparity underscores the need for educators to critically evaluate and select diverse literature that reflects the rich diversity of today's youth. By incorporating books that include a wide range of identities and experiences, educators can promote equity, inclusion, and empathy in their classrooms. Additionally, the universal themes and cultural awareness fostered by diverse literature can resonate with global audiences, encouraging critical thinking and appreciation of diverse narratives worldwide. It is essential to continually advocate for and emphasize the importance of diverse books to ensure that all children see themselves reflected in the stories they read. For global readers, the significance of diverse children's literature extends beyond the borders of the U.S. The representation of varied identities and experiences in children's books can foster a more inclusive and empathetic global society. By exposing children to stories from different cultures and backgrounds, we can cultivate a generation that values diversity and is equipped to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. Diverse literature not only enriches the reading experience but also bridges cultural gaps, promoting mutual understanding and respect among global communities.

Recommendations

To foster equity and inclusion in education, diversifying classroom libraries is essential. Educators should include books that represent a wide range of identities and experiences, such as race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, and sexual orientation. This ensures all students see themselves reflected in literature, promoting a sense of belonging. Critical evaluation of children's literature, professional development for educators, and community support can lead to a more engaging and relevant collection of books. As discussed, U.S. acclaimed and awarded books may not fully represent all diverse populations. Therefore, ongoing research and attention to diverse identities in children's literature are crucial. Promoting empathy and critical thinking through diverse literature fosters discussions about justice and fairness. Encouraging students to think critically about characters and stories helps them relate these narratives to their own lives and the world around them.

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