

Beyond Good Intentions and Chicken Soup: Young Adult Literature and Disability Diversity: How Far Have We Come?



Heather Garrison, Ph.D.

Katherine Schneider, Ph.D.

Terry Trueman

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Disability as a Social Construct

- Social vs. Individual/Biological Constructs
 - Examples: disability, gender, race, ethnicity, natural origin, age, class (SES), sexual preference, religion
 - Biological/individual characteristics may be constant but cultural perceptions of them differ and change based on social perceptions
 - Dominant cultural perceptions impact individuals from social minority groups (including people with disabilities)
- Social vs. Medical Models of Disability
- Disability Studies
- Othering vs. Multiculturalism, Inclusion, and Diversity in educational practices

Disability Discrimination



- Supports
- Services
- Education
- Expectations
- Employment
- Attitudes



= **ABLEISM!**

Ableism: Thoughts, actions, or statements that discriminate in favor of society's able-bodied majority, or favor the experiences of the able-bodied, are considered ableist in nature (similar to the terms *racist* or *sexist*).

Literature and Culture

- Literature reflects the cultural and social beliefs and values of the author and era
- Literature creates vicarious new experiences for the reader
- Literature interacts with readers' prior knowledge to alter and/or reinforce perceptions
- Literature therefore perpetuates culture for the reader

Brainstorm

Recall specific books you read as a teen that included disability content:

- How was the disability portrayed?
- Did the portrayal reflect the culture of the era in which it was written?
- Did your teachers talk about disability and how it was constructed in the story?

Past Literary Portrayals of Disability

What attitudes about the social construct of disability do these stories convey?

- *Of Mice and Men*
- *Moby Dick*
- *The Sound and the Fury*
- *A Christmas Carol*
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- *The Glass Menagerie*
- *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*
- *Oedipus*
- *As I Lay Dying*
- *King Richard III*
- *Frankenstein*
- *Madame Bovary*
- *Peter Pan*
- *Rudolph*

Why Read YA Lit with Characters with Disabilities?

- Promotes positive perceptions and combats negative stereotypes of PWD
- Creates vicarious opportunities to experience the CWD's perspectives and thoughts
- Shows CWD/PWD in a realistic manner
- Emphasizes the similarities between all people with and without disabilities
- Promotes disability as a form of diversity and fosters acceptance of PWD

Note: CWD = Character with a Disability

PWD = Person with a Disability

Why Read YA Lit with Characters with Disabilities? (continued)

- Shows CWD/PWD as worthy of writing about as a main character
- Often shows CWD in leadership position, a solver of problems, or equal participant in the story line
- Shows CWD in a variety of settings, for a variety of purposes, interacting with a variety of people
- Creates positive role models with whom readers with disabilities can identify

Three Models of Disability as Related to Books

- Moral
- Medical
- Minority



Different Types of YA Literature with Positive Portrayals of Characters with Disabilities

- Books that teach about a specific disability
- Books that revolve around a character's disability
- Books that include characters with disabilities as “everyday” characters

Five A's to Remember When Evaluating YA Lit with Disability Content

- Awards
 - Schneider Family Book Award (ALA)
 - The Dolly Gray Award (CEC)
- Attitudes
- Accuracy
- Appeal
- Accessibility



Literary Portrayals of Disability: Evaluating Attitudes

- CWD has equally active role as other characters (but is not super-person)
- CWD is accepted without having to overcome the disability or prove self in a special way
- CWD engages in age-appropriate activities and relationships with other characters
- Non-stereotypic pictures and words (person first language, watch for loaded or outdated terms)

Disability Stereotypes

- Asexual and/or Hypersexual
- Victim and/or Vengeful
- Evil and/or Noble and Heroic
- Infantile and/or Dependent (pitiabile)
- Supercrip (need to overcome disability)
- Possessing special gifts or talents because of the disability
- Assumptions about abilities (ex: talking loudly to a person who is blind)

Literary Portrayals of Disability: Evaluating Accuracy

- Author's credentials including personal experience of the disability
- Provides accurate information about the disability and disability experience in a variety of settings
- Equipment, accommodations, adaptations, or supports depicted correctly

Literary Portrayals of Disability: Evaluating Appeal

- More to the story than just the disability
- Multi-dimensional, believable characters
- Pictures
- Story line is engaging
- Age appropriate



Literary Portrayals of Disability: Evaluating Accessibility

- Refer to handout for list of providers of books in alternate formats, specialty publishers, and websites of disability poetry, history, book awards, etc.
- Consider accessibility of your website and electronic products, programming, staff attitudes

Nonfiction: What is There and What Isn't

What's There

- Living with...
- Sibling issues
- Self esteem
- Biographies
- Autobiographies

What Isn't There

- Sex
- Jobs
- Manners
- History
- Daring Books for Girls

Fiction:

What is There and What Isn't

What's There

- Relationships
 - Peers, friends, family, siblings, boy/girlfriend
- Drugs, alcohol, sex
- School issues
- Teen community
- Settings
 - Real life
 - Science fiction

What Isn't There

- Transition to college
- Historical fiction
- Intersection with other diverse identities in YA Lit:
 - LGBTIQ
 - Poverty
 - Teen parenting
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Religion

Contact Information

Dr. Heather Garrison
Associate Professor

Special Education and Rehabilitation Department
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

hgarrison@po-box.esu.edu

Dr. Katherine Schneider
Senior Psychologist, Emerita
Counseling Service
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
schneiks@uwec.edu