3-9-2016

Inclusion and Representation Matter: Homogeneity in Youth Literature with Dis(Abled) Characters

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Recommended Citation
Pate, J. L. (2016). Inclusion and Representation Matter: Homogeneity in Youth Literature with Dis(Abled) Characters. Retrieved from https://ir.una.edu/libfacpresentation/1

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Inclusion and Representation Matter:
Homogeneity in Youth Literature with Dis(Abled) Characters
Jennifer L. Pate
Research and Instructional Services Librarian
The University of Alabama Libraries

Total Books Evaluated: 71
- Picture books (PB): 27
- Juvenile books (JB): 22
- Young Adult books (YAB): 22

Award Winners
- Schneider Family Book Award: 27
- Dolly Gray Award: 12

Abstract
Picture books, juvenile books, and young adult books that portray persons with disabilities have made great strides in the last thirty years. Many negative stereotypes in youth literature have been replaced by accurate, honest portrayals of individuals with intellectual and/or physical disabilities. Unfortunately, the majority of the characters, both in the protagonist role and in supporting roles, in the books with positive representations of disability are not depicted as racially or ethnically diverse. This study is a content analysis of both the descriptions of characters in the texts of books and the illustrations (if applicable) in all three categories—picture, juvenile, and young adult—to find the intersections between characters with a disability and his/her race or ethnicity. The gender of the characters with a disability will also be noted. Many of the books in this study have been awarded the Schneider Family Book Award, an award given annually by the American Library Association to authors or illustrators of books with artistic expression of disability, and/or the Dolly Gray Children’s Book Award, an award given annually by the American Library Association to authors or illustrators for books with positive representations of disability.