



Incidental Diversity

by LYNSEY BURKINS

Historically speaking, diverse books are often “issue books,” in which the character’s Identity forms the core of the story. Books about protagonists of colour would automatically be about racism, immigration, or poverty; books about disabled characters would automatically be about their changed life, people’s skewed perceptions, or “overcoming” disability.

—Corinne Duyvis

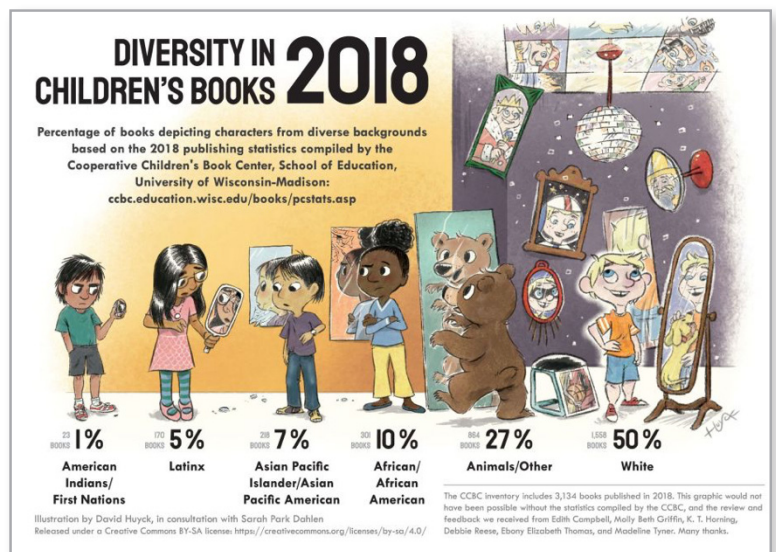


LITERACY CHAMPION: LYNSEY BURKINS

Lynsey Burkins has been a passionate educator for over 18 years in Dublin, Ohio. Lynsey is a graduate of Bowling Green State University and received her MA from The Ohio State University. She is a member of NCTE and is Chair of the Build Your Stack Committee. Lynsey loves to share her practice and write about ways literature and transformational literacy practices can transform lives each and everyday! Lynsey also writes for the Teacher

Books Readers blog. She lives for the moments when children see themselves in books and recognize that their stories matter too.

Over the past decade it has been increasingly clear that books that represent the global majority are not being published at the rate of books about the white experience. The [Social Justice Books: A Teaching for Change Project](#), created a [graphic](#) that represents the percentage of that have been published from diverse backgrounds. The creators, David Huyck and Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, used images, numbers, and words to illustrate the issue we are facing. In 2018, the percentage of communities depicted in books were as follows: 1% American Indian, 5% Latinx, 7% AAPI, 10% Black, 27% animals or other, and 50% White.



In 1998, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop pushed our thinking and understanding of the power of books being windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. She taught us that children need windows in books to learn about people and communities that are different from their own. Children also need mirrors in books to see people and communities that are like them in some way.

Still, in 2021 we don't have enough mirrors for most of our children. In addition to not having enough mirrors, the books that do show children from a marginalized communities often have a storyline about the struggles of that community, issues facing the community, or how that community has had to overcome injustices.

We need books that represent the communities and people that make up our world. We need both kinds of books. Books that help us understand the trauma that people have faced and books that show people in incidental ways.

One to Know: Incidental Diversity

What is incidental diversity?

Incidental diversity refers to books that have characters and storylines that depict communities of people who have historically been marginalized in incidental ways. The storyline is not about the oppression or injustice that the community has historically faced. The story features BIPOC, linguistically diverse, religiously diverse, and gender non-conforming characters in incidental ways.

Why do we need incidental books?

While we do need books that teach us about injustices and histories of all people, we also need books that show communities of people experiencing the human experience of everyday life. Having both types of books prevents children from only seeing characters and people in one way. For example, if students only saw Black characters in books that deal with racism, then some students may start to form inaccurate assumptions about a group of people. Incidental books allow for all children to see people and communities in ways that connect across the human experience.

What to Do: How to Tell if a Story Is Incidental

When I'm reading a book, I ask myself:

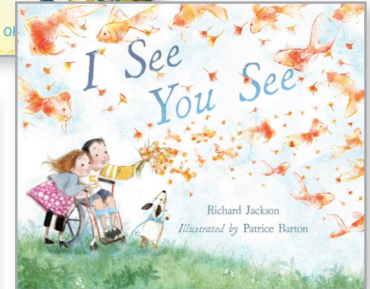
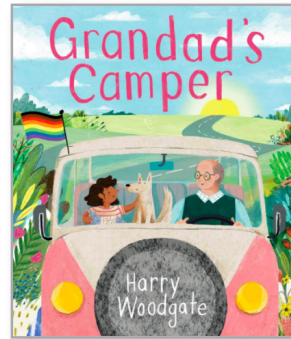
- *Does this story feature characters from a community that has been marginalized?*
- *Does the storyline acknowledge, in some way the main character's identity, without the story and themes being about a trauma facing that community?*

If I can answer yes to those questions then typically, I will consider the book an incidental diversity book. Here are some books that I was able to read and answer yes to both. These books have characters from different ethnicities, ages, abilities, languages, and races—all experiencing life and or having a fantastical experience.

***Our Favorite Day*, by Joowon Oh (author and illustrator)** *Our Favorite Day* features a girl with her grandpa on their favorite day of the week. It is their favorite day because they get to spend it together doing their favorite things.

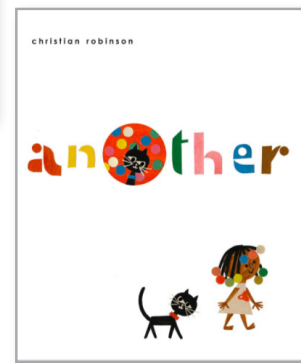


***I See You See*, by Richard Jackson (author) Patrice Barton (illustrator)** *I See You See* features a sister and brother taking their dog for a walk. During their walk, the children notice the nature around them and talk about all the ways they see ordinary ... and extraordinary things.



***Grandad's Camper*, by Harry Woodgate (author and illustrator)** *Grandad's Camper* features a little girl who is spending time with her grandad in the summer. He tells her stories about when he and his gramps went on adventures in their camper. By the end of the story, the girl and her grandad decide to go on an adventure together.

***Another*, by Christian Robinson (author and illustrator)** *Another* features a girl and her cat or is it two girls and two cats. This wordless fantasy will leave readers questioning and wondering about secret portals and other dimensions.



More to Know and Do

As an educator, I strive to read books to my students that represent our world globally. I strive to curate a classroom library where students can find reflections of themselves in many different types of situations, both joyful and historical. It is important for me to have incidental diversity books in my classroom library and to use for instruction.

Providing books that show incidental diversity doesn't stop in elementary school, but moves as children grow and learn how to be more critical readers. As children get older they will notice the lack of representation—especially in stories that are fiction, fantasy, graphic, or sci-fi. They will be searching for those books they can get lost in with characters and settings that ring familiar. Children of all ages need this fantastical representation in incidental ways to help balance the realities of a world that still has far to come in all areas of justice.

When building home libraries or reading together at home with library books, look for these engaging incidental books and also the books that help families discuss critical issues. Use them both to teach and learn from. Both types of books will help families create a picture of our world that shows many different views of our beloved reality.

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