

Disability Representation in Children's & YA Lit

The 2016 Disabilities Statistics Annual Report notes that children living with a disability ages 0 to 17 is now 7.2% of that total population percentage of disabled individuals.

Yet, according to Disability Scoop, out of the last 131 top literary Newberry Medal and Honor awards given for children's books, only 31 from 1975 to 2009 included a main or supporting character with a disability. A study found that only ten of the 500 award-winning children's novels published between 1987 and 1991 included a disabled character.

Diversity in children's literature is critical in constructing culture and community identity. By rethinking the characters we write and read in children's and young adult literature, we can help shift the stigma associated with being disabled.

The gatekeeping of children's books that happens in publishing houses, at home, in schools, and in communities often prevents new stories, different stories, rewritten stories from being consumed, read, taught, and valued as quality literature.

Children read to learn, to escape, and to identify. Having access to books about individuals with disabilities is not only good for children with disabilities; it's good for every child. Because it can help us understand all of the "characters" in our classroom, our community, our world.

A grant funded undergraduate and graduate course allowed 11 students and one faculty member to research, study, analyze and create a comprehensive website with resources, expert talk from disabled authors, book trailers, and new and original works of children's lit that represent gaps in the current publishing.

Contributions:

A five-student team with their professor will showcase the following at their interactive workshop:

- The research and findings
- Collaboration with community partners who included K-16 students who identify as having a disability to personalize the research
- The accessible design of the website
- Book trailers
- Featured new children's stories composed by community partners and creative writers
- Free PDF downloadables for teachers, librarians, and writers

Participants will interact with the website on iPads (we bring 10 to the session) and laptops and engage in conversation about their own discoveries about this very important and often overlooked and misrepresented topic in children's literature