

“How Do Multicultural Characters Feel?” An Intersectional Approach to Oppression and Activism in Multicultural Picture Books

The purpose of this research is to examine how emotional arcs of diverse characters change throughout the story in multicultural picture books. The emotional arc is the trace of the main characters’ emotional progress, their impact on other narrative elements within a story, and how those emotions are developed or changed throughout the textual and visual narration. The focus thus is on examining who are the main characters, what are their emotions, and most importantly, if they are oppressed, how they respond to their oppression throughout the story.

This study aims to extend the idea developed by the rejected master thesis of Vonnegut in 1981. The rejected research later became a fundamental study on storytelling. According to Vonnegut (2011) “stories have shapes which can be drawn on graph paper, and that the shape of a given society’s stories is at least as interesting as the shape of its pots or spearheads” (p. 285). In his theory, Vonnegut recognizes the narrative arc of common storylines and charts them across a horizontal axis representing the chronology of the events, while the vertical axis illustrating the experience of the protagonist, on a continuum of bad to good fortune. Similarly, the present study recognizes the experience of diverse protagonists, examining how their emotional arcs might reveal a recurring pattern.

In order to examine the shape of the diverse characters’ arc, the study focuses on the content of picture books originally published by Lee & Low publisher in the U.S. The sample includes two genres: realistic contemporary fiction and historical fiction. The only format that is considered is the picture book. Examining emotional changes in the sample, the study aims to examine diverse protagonists’ state of emotions from being oppressed to becoming advocates and change makers.

References

Vonnegut, K. (2011). *Palm Sunday: An autobiographical collage*. New York, NY: Dial Press Trade.