

Growth, Grit, or Gloom? An Analysis of Award-Winning Titles in the Canadian “Forest of Reading”

Much textual and visual analysis has been conducted on the winners of major children’s literature awards in the United States, but no similar scrutiny has been turned toward the titles in the Ontario Library Association’s annual “Forest of Reading” competition. Additionally, even the analysis that has been conducted on, for example, Caldecott winners, tends to focus on the portrayal of various groups of people, with an emphasis on gender and race, rather than on the mindsets and attitudes presented in the stories. This paper will examine the picture book winners from the Blue Spruce award within the Forest of Reading, from 2012 to present. The textual and visual analysis will focus on the presence (or lack) of growth mindset (Dweck) and grit (Duckworth) in these titles. Duckworth’s research on grit indicates that practice and persistence are as important to success as natural talent (if not more so), which seems a natural complement to Dweck’s finding that cultivating a growth mindset helps individuals recover from setbacks.

According to the Ontario Library Association, these particular award winners are used to “promote...reading for enjoyment and begin...to develop the readers skill in evaluating a picture book based on story, text and pictures. Readers are also provided opportunities to discuss these picture books in an authentic manner” (OLA “Individual Trees”). These award-winning regional titles, in part, answer Cynthia Chambers’s demand that “Canadians need a literature about ‘here’ because this is where we live,” while also, it would seem, playing a major part in the second half of Chambers’s argument, that “Canadians also need a form of curriculum theorizing grounded in ‘here’” (Chambers 144). Since award-winning children’s literature plays a significant role in curriculum development, and since the Blue Spruce books are linked so explicitly with early learning, it is important to examine the wealth of regional literature in the “Forest of Reading” in order to understand what lessons, both implicit and explicit, may be presented in classrooms that rely on this reader-voted program to foster literacy and student interaction.

Initial References

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