

## **These Are the People in My Neighborhood: Housing Integration and Resegregation in Middle Grade Novels from *Iggie's House* to *This Side of Home***

While contemporary novels highlighting criminal justice inequities in gritty YA books like *The Hate U Give* and *All American Boys* have garnered significant critical acclaim, less attention has been paid to books that embody a more subtle gauge of the state of American community diversity, that of neighborhood integration.

As the U.S. Justice department has been shifting towards less oversight of public school districts under federal court order to remedy racially identifiable schools (Brown, 2016), American students are more likely than ever to attend classes with students of similar socio-economic backgrounds. If *Brown Vs. Board of Education* found segregated schools inherently unequal, the same expectation has never been explored in private life. Authors have long grappled with presenting authentic neighborhood as backdrops for children's daily experiences. Midcentury fictive depictions in children's books tended towards a melting pot idealism, giving way to a self-conscious realism rife with allusion urban decay and white flight that persists today.

But for every child who sees their own family's story as the Carter family in Angie Thomas's debut novel move from their close-knit community to a newer, safer, and more sanitized suburb, there are other readers who either remain in decaying cities or are forced to more makeshift and transient housing situations. Renee Watson's work is among the first to confront the gentrification and displacement through rising rents and property values hollowing out long standing communities in her native Portland.

Building on Rudine Sims Bishop's seminal construction of children's books as both necessary mirrors and windows, this paper considers the messages of home and community in balance, through construction of city block or small town as alternately melting pot or safe haven, and probe how middle grade problem novels that attempt inter-personal dynamics before addressing inter-neighborhood conditions are effectively subverting Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Thomas, E. (2016, May 17). "On the anniversary of Brown v. Board, new evidence that U.S. schools are resegregating." *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2016/05/17/on-the-anniversary-of-brown-v-board-new-evidence-that-u-s-schools-are-resegregating>