

Representations of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Children's Literature

Caitlin C. Williams

LS 621- The University of Alabama

“Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature equips the reader with strategies to unmask dominant ideologies, integrate what they know about themselves with what they learn about others, and translate their reading and thinking into social action.” (Bothelo & Rudman).

Throughout the study, one deduction stood out the most-there is a large divide in the number of picturebooks representing female-identified characters with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) versus their male-identifying counterparts. Additionally, picturebooks presented with the main character being on the autism spectrum were more realistic and positive, creating a better understanding of the individual struggles with this disability. Most of the books analyzed with the main character having ASD only mentioned ASD on the back cover or in the book jacket, not the actual text. There are also very few books that present non-verbal autistic individuals to readers which further contributes to stereotypes surrounding the disability that all autistic individuals present with the same characteristics and neglecting to acknowledge that autism is a spectrum disorder. Picturebooks that are written with friends or siblings of someone with ASD focus more on the challenges the sibling or friend faces in accepting the person with ASD rather than the obstacles met by the sibling/friend with ASD.

Parents, caregivers, librarians, and school personnel should ensure they have appropriate representations of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) so that all readers can understand the different levels and perhaps those individuals on the spectrum can see themselves in those picturebooks.

Recommended Articles:

- Botelho, M. J. & Rudman, M. K. (2009). *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*. Taylor & Francis.
- Holland, K. (2021, November 1). *What you need to know about nonspeaking autism*. Healthline. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health/autism/nonverbal-autism>.
- Rozema, R. (2014). *The problem of autism in young adult*. scholarworks.gvsu.edu. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2039&context=lajm>
- Weaver, C. (2008). *Characterization of autism spectrum disorders in children's picture books* (Order No. 28109580). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2499439248). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/characterization-autism-spectrum-disorders/docview/2499439248/se-2?accountid=14472>
- Yalof, J. (2021). *A study of autism in children's literature*. opencommons.uconn.edu/. Retrieved from https://opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1724&context=srhonors_theses
- Zeldovich, Linda. (2018). *The evolution of 'autism' as a diagnosis, explained*. Spectrum, 9 May 2018. <https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/evolution-autism-diagnosis-explained/>.
- Zeliadt, Nicholette. (2018). *Autism's sex ratio, explained*. Spectrum, 13 June 2018. <https://www.spectrumnews.org/news/autisms-sex-ratio-explained/>.

Recommended Picturebooks:

- Bailey, J., & Song, M. (2019). *A friend for henry*. Chronicle books.
- Bates, H., & Li, E. (2017). *A girl like tilly: Growing up with autism*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Cook, J., & DuFalla, A. (2018). *Uniquely wired: A story about autism and its gifts*. Boys Town Press.
- Gaynor, K. (2008). *A friend like simon*. Special Stories Publishing.
- Laan, Y. W.-van der, & Feldman, R. (2012). *Autism is..?* CreateSpace.
- Larson, E. M., & Strand, V. (2006). *I am utterly unique: Celebrating the strengths of children with asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism*. Autism Asperger Publishing Co.
- Mosca, J. F. (2019). *The girl who thought in pictures: The story of dr. temple grandin*. The Innovation Press.
- Rice, E., & Ord, C. (2012). *Ethan's story: My life with autism*. Anchor Group.
- Robbins, R. (2020). *Me and my sister*. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.
- Robbins, R. (2021). *Talking is not my thing!* Scallywag Press.
- Share-Strom, D., & Afshinjah, N. (2020). *Do you want to play?: Making friends with an autistic kid*. Daniel Share-Strom.
- Roberts, J. (2019). *Through the eyes of Us*. Antique Collectors Club.
- Roberts, J., & Rounding, H. (2017). *Through the eyes of me*. Graffeg.
- Thompson, M. (2011). *Andy and his yellow frisbee*. Woodbine House.
- Worthington, M., & Cowman, J. (2015). *Noah chases the wind*. Redleaf Lane, an imprint of Redleaf Press.
- Yarborough, L. L., & Merheb, N. (2018). *Nathan's Autism Spectrum Superpowers*. One Three Nine Inspired.

Recommended YA Novels:

- Erskine, K. (2011). *Mockingbird by Kathryn Erskine*. Puffin.
- Frenz, F. (2013). *How to be human: Diary of an autistic girl*. Creston Books.
- Higashida, N., Yoshida, K. A., & Mitchell, D. (2021). *The reason I jump: One boy's voice from the silence of autism*. Sceptre.
- McCoy, A. B., & Tonello, A. (2016). *Little big sister*. CSP Publishing.
- Panteleakos, N. (2019). *Planet earth is blue*. Yearling.
- Peete, H. R., Peete, R. E., & Peete, R. J. (2016). *Same but different: Teen life on the autism express*. Scholastic Press.
- Stefanski, D. (2011). *How to talk to an Autistic kid*. Free Spirit Publishing.