

Resource List: Diverse and Inclusive Reading

By Lauren Bull

With a growing body of evidence linking reading for pleasure and the development of empathy for teenagers as well as for children and adults, the question naturally arises: *Okay, but are some books better than others for encouraging and strengthening empathy in young adult readers than others?*

The answer is surprisingly simple: books that are as diverse and inclusive as their readers...or even more so! To exercise and enhance their practice of empathy, young adults need opportunities to read books that have non-Western settings, whose main characters are non-white, LGBTQ+, and/or differently abled (Diversity in YA, 2015). Youth need chances to engage with the greatest possible variety of people and perspectives; with stories that reflect the fullest spectrum of the human experience; with authors whose lives reflect underrepresented narratives as much as their writing does.

Despite the exponential growth of YA literature in recent years, publishers have been slow to respond to the call from teachers, librarians, and readers themselves for more diverse and inclusive books. With this in mind, the following resources can act as helpful aids for selection:

Diversity in YA

Diversity in YA. (2015). <http://www.diversityinya.com/category/book-lists/>

This website was co-created by authors Malinda Lo and Cindy Pon back in 2011 to provide greater visibility for non-traditional narratives in published materials for young adults. The site includes links to new releases and booklists on a variety of 'diverse' topics and themes, ranging across race, culture, gender, sexual orientation and identity, and ability spectrums. A unique feature of many lists is the distinction made between realistic and science fiction/fantasy offerings within a given theme (i.e. books with female protagonists who are lesbian, bi, or queer). Though it has been on hiatus since 2015, the site is still a valuable resource for diverse reading recommendations.

The Brown Bookshelf

The Brown Bookshelf. (n.d.). <https://thebrownbookshelf.com/>

This website is operated by a collective of ten African-American authors dedicated to promoting picture books, middle-grade, and young adult novels written and illustrated by

Black individuals. The site also acts as a landing page for the authors' "28 Days Later" initiative, in which they profile the work of a different Black author or illustrator during each day of February's Black History Month. In addition to booklists, there is information provided about publishers of multicultural children's lit, in-depth profiles of different content creators, and links to author sites. Resource lists are developed and posted each year for "28 Days Later", and are current up to 2016.

Disability in Kidlit

Disability in Kidlit. (n.d.). <http://disabilityinkidlit.com/honor-roll/>

Disability in Kidlit is a veritable treasure trove of resources and information about disability in children and young adult books, from reviews and recommendations, to interviews and general discussion. The site is run by a team of authors and editors who all have disabilities, and features content exclusively by contributors who similarly self-identify. A unique and incredibly useful component is their "Honor Roll"; a database of titles vetted by their team that can be queried according to middle-grade or teen audience, disability, genre, and publication year. Additionally, of the books recommended, many feature intersectional characters, for whom a disability is only part of their personhood, enhancing accuracy in representation.

Rainbow Booklist

Rainbow Booklist. (n.d.). <http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/>

Sponsored by the GLBT Roundtable and the American Library Association, this site puts out a yearly lists of the boldest, brightest, and best LGBTQ+ picture books, middle grade, and young adult reading materials. The lists helpfully distinguish between fiction and nonfiction titles, and also include graphic novels for different ages, as well as a cross-sectional "Rainbow Booklist Top 10" for that year. Almost 10 years in the running, the depth of content on this site is considerable, and also provides an interesting retrospective into how the landscape of LGBTQ+ literature for children has evolved over the past decade.

Rich in Color

Rich in Color. (n.d.). <http://richincolor.com/about-us/>

Broader in focus than *The Brown Bookshelf*, this website is dedicated to highlighting young adult books "starring or written by people of color or people from First/Native Nations". Featured titles are vetted by their in-house team made up of writers, editors,

readers, and teachers, with an archive containing dozens of reviews from the past several years, and current up to this year. The site also includes a release calendar, which is helpful for ensuring that readers and selectors stay current on the newest offerings, as well as a long list of links to external booklists, publisher sites, articles, blogs, and websites that continue the conversation about multicultural and multiracial representation in young adult literature.