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A Decade of Disability Depictions In Newbery Award Books

H. Grow
Brigham Young University

Sharon Black
Brigham Young University - Provo, sharon_black@byu.edu

K. Egan
Brigham Young University

Tina Taylor
Brigham Young University - Provo, tina_taylor@byu.edu

K. Moss
Brigham Young University

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Authors

H. Grow, Sharon Black, K. Egan, Tina Taylor, K. Moss, Rachel L. Wadham, and Mary Anne Prater

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Hannah Grow
Brigham Young University

Sharon Black
Brigham Young University

Kellie Egan
Brigham Young University

Tina M. Taylor
Brigham Young University

Kimberly Moss
Brigham Young University

Rachel Wadham
Brigham Young University

Mary Anne Prater
Brigham Young University

Abstract: Newbery awards are conferred annually on books recognized as having made the most distinguished contribution to children's literature; these books reach a wide audience, and their depictions of characters with disabilities can influence children's perceptions and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Eight Newbery Medal and Honor books chosen from 2010 to 2019 were identified as portraying 11 main or supporting characters with a disability. Six disabilities were represented: emotional disturbance, deafness, specific learning disability, speech/language impairment, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury. Applying the Rating Scale for Quality Characterizations of Individuals with Disabilities in Children's Literature, we found most of the characterizations positive in personal portrayal, social interactions, and sibling relationships. Exemplary practices were also found in these books. We encourage school professionals to select books carefully to share with their students.

Today's classrooms are increasingly diverse, including children and youth with a variety of disabilities. In 2016 just over six million students ages 6 to 21 qualified for special education or related services because of their disabilities—9% of the total student population. About 38.6% of these students had a specific learning disability; others were receiving services for difficulties related to autism, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, or speech or language impairment, among others. These percentages have remained consistent over the past 10 years (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2018).

Additionally, the number of students with disabilities who are included for at least 80% of their day in general education classrooms has increased from 57% in 2007 to 63% in 2016 (USDE, 2018). This increased inclusion is intended to enable more social interaction involving students with and without disabilities, providing teachers and other school professionals more opportunities to promote acceptance and inclusion of students with special needs. However, sharing physical space alone will not increase socialization nor positive attitudes (Litvack, Ritchie, & Shore, 2011). One way educators can help students become more aware and accepting of each other is to incorporate

literature that includes characters with and without disabilities into their curriculum.

Character Portrayal

Not all books that include characters with disabilities portray them authentically. For example, some books may include characters whose disabilities are not consistent with symptoms validated by decades of research, or they may portray characters who are dimensionally flat, not fully developed as multifaceted individuals. Authors may emphasize the disorders, disabilities, and dysfunctions of the characters rather than balancing these challenges with their strengths, interests, and abilities. Outdated and discriminatory terms and stereotypes (e.g., *retard, handicapped, moron, suffers from, afflicted with, confined to a wheelchair*) may implicitly condone such attitudes when referring to individuals with disabilities. Characters with disabilities may be shown as unable to engage in reciprocal relationships: being ridiculed and bullied, feared and rejected, pitied or venerated. Readers may encounter them as excluded from inclusive educational and community opportunities, unable to attain valued occupations, and reliant on others to make their decisions. Their siblings may be characterized as unrealistically positive or traumatically negative. And many of their stories are told by others rather than related in their own voices, ignoring the "nothing about us without us" movement (Charlton, 1998).

Therefore, an analysis of characters with disabilities in books found frequently on library bookshelves, among classroom offerings, in online apps, and in family homes is warranted. Such an analysis can help school teachers, as well as librarians, school psychologists, social workers, and parents, to choose books that portray characters with disabilities in ways that are positive and inclusive, strengthening their own and their students' knowledge and respect for these individuals with differences (see Vaz et al., 2015).

Newbery Award

John Newbery, sometimes called "the father of children's literature," published over 100 books for children. Honoring him, the John Newbery Medal (often referred to as the "Newbery Award") is presented annually for "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" during its year of eligibility (American Library Association, 2019, para. 1). Newbery books, considered for children up to 14 years old, are selected for their potential to strengthen children's understandings, appreciations, and abilities (American Library Association, 2019). Books selected as Medal and Honor books are highly publicized, readily available, and frequently used in classrooms; thus they can play influential roles in the thinking of teachers and students.

Many scholars have evaluated Newbery award-winning books based on characteristics including age, family structure, and race/ethnicity, but few studies have analyzed treatment of characters with disabilities (Despain, Tunnell, Wilcox, & Morrison, 2015). A previous study found that portrayal of characters with disabilities has been improving since the Newbery award was initiated in 1922 (Leininger, Dyches, Prater, & Heath, 2010). However, characters with disabilities in Newbery books from the past decade have not yet been evaluated.

Study Purpose

The purpose of the current study has been to analyze the portrayal of main and supporting characters with disabilities in the Newbery Medal and Honor books from 2010 to 2019. Four research questions guided this study:

1. How do literary elements in this sample of books (e.g., characterization, setting, point of view) affect portrayal of characters with various disabilities?
2. Which disabilities are portrayed in this sample of books?
3. How do the books represent characters with disabilities in terms of personal portrayal, social interactions, sibling relationships, and point of view?
4. What exemplary practices are shown benefiting the characters with disabilities?

Method
Book Selection
We reviewed the American Library Association's website for listings of Newbery Medal and Honor books awarded between 2010 and 2019. A juvenile literature librarian with expertise in disability issues and a former Newbery Medal Selection Committee member helped the research team draw the sample of Newbery books within the date range.

Books included in this evaluation had to have one main (protagonist or antagonist) or supporting character (individual with enough presence and impact to warrant characterization) with a disability that would require special education or related services for a child. The guidelines for disabilities included descriptions of all 13 conditions outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004). Characters with illness-related impairments (e.g., cancer) and orthopedic impairments (e.g., limp) were included only if the disability appeared to have a significant negative impact on the child's educational progress (e.g., academic performance, social and emotional relationships) or the adult's ability to function in the community (e.g., interpersonal relationships, occupation,

community involvement). Characters were considered in the analysis if they were identified by the author either within the text of the book or in other credible sources (e.g., author's website, publications) as having a disability, or if they had conspicuous characteristics or symptoms aligned with one of the 13 IDEA disabilities though not diagnosed.

Two Medal and six Honor books were found including a total of 11 main or supporting characters with disabilities. Some excellent books were not analyzed because the character with a disability was only incidental to the plot. Table 1 lists the qualifying books with additional information about the characters.

Instrumentation
We used five sections of the Rating Scale for Quality Characterizations of Individuals with Disabilities in Children's Literature (Leininger et al., 2010) to evaluate each Newbery Medal and Honor book character with a disability: personal portrayal, social interactions and relationships, sibling relationships, exemplary practices, and point of view. Each section contains several items rated on a scale including 1 (*disagree*), 2 (*neutral*), and 3 (*agree*).
1. *Personal Portrayal* includes these demographic items: age, gender, race/ethnicity, and disability, as well as whether the individual is a main or supporting character. Six rated items rated focus on accurate and realistic character development, including strengths and abilities as well as challenges, along with similarities to characters without disabilities. Also, non-discriminatory person-first language is important.
2. *Social Interactions and Relationships* as a category involves six items

Table 1. *Newbery Books 2010-2019 Containing Characters with Disabilities*

Title	Award Year	Award	Character (main/supporting)	Age/Grade	IDEA Disability
Brown Girl Dreaming	2015	Honor	Jackie (main)	Birth through elementary school	Specific learning disability
El Deafo	2015	Honor	Cece (main)	Elementary school	Deafness
Hello Universe	2018	Winner	Virgil (main)	11	Specific learning disability
			Valencia (main)	Middle school	Deafness
			Chet (main)	Middle school	Emotional Disturbance
Paperboy	2014	Honor	Victor (main)	11	Speech/language impairment
Three Times Lucky	2013	Honor	Colonel (supporting)	Adult	Traumatic brain injury
The War that Saved My Life	2016	Honor	Ada (main)	10	Orthopedic impairment
When You Reach Me	2010	Winner	"The Laughing Man" (supporting)	Adult	Emotional disturbance
Wolf Hollow	2017	Honor	Toby (main)	Adult	Emotional disturbance
			Betty (main)	14	Emotional disturbance

concerning a variety of relationships (e.g., friends with and without disabilities, parents, paid personnel) emphasizing reciprocal relations, acceptance, empathy (rather than pity), positive social contributions, and respect.

3. *Sibling Relationships* is a section focused on siblings' perspectives, including varieties of emotional experiences, opportunities for growth, reciprocity of the relationship, and responsibilities within the family, along with sibling(s)' awareness of the nature of the disability and its effects on the sibling who lives with it.

4. *Exemplary Practices* evaluates five items focused on integrated citizenship, appropriate services, valued occupations, self-determination, and congruence of attitudes and practices with time periods represented.

5. *Point of View* involves two aspects: (a) whose point of view is represented (a character with or without a disability, a narrator), and (b) whether the point of view is realistic.

Data Analysis

Two researchers independently read and evaluated each book according to the rating scale; initial inter-rater agreement was 83.6%. The readers then met and came to agreement on each rating, for a final inter-rater agreement of 100%. They considered books portraying an earlier time period in terms of current standards of nondiscriminatory language, person-first language, and disability description. They evaluated point of view emphasizing whether the voices of characters with disabilities were represented accurately as their experiences were described.

The wide variety in characters with disabilities required that several approaches be applied for disability categorization: (a) when available, authors' explicit identification within the text (e.g., disability labels, reference to special education and related services, visible characteristics), (b) characters' conspicuous behaviors congruent with one of IDEA's 13 disability categories (e.g., extreme withdrawal from or desire to harm other people), (c) characters' thoughts or motivations revealed in the text (e.g., extreme or extraordinary fear, anger, resentment). Some characters portrayed with disabilities are adults whose behavior (both positive and negative) affects children.

To determine the valence of the depictions of characters with disabilities and practices affecting them, a cut-off score was determined. The average ratings between the two readers were calculated to determine a negative, neutral, or positive score (scale 1, 2, 3). Scores in the range of 1.0-1.66 were considered negative, scores in the range of 1.67-2.32 were ranked neutral, and scores in the range of 2.33-3.0 indicated positive practices and portrayals.

Results
Literary Elements
Of the 10 Newbery Medal and 30 Honor books awarded within the past decade, eight books (20%) include main and/or supporting characters with disabilities whose presence impacts the plot. Of the 11 characters in these books with disabilities, nine are main and two are supporting. Two books (25%) received the Newbery Medal and six (75%) were granted a Newbery Honor.

Most of the books are set entirely in the past ($n = 6$, 75%) and therefore include disability portrayals and language consistent with those settings. *The War that Saved My Life* (Bradley, 2016) takes place during World

War II, when 10-year-old Ada's "clubfoot" was regarded as a source of shame and reason for isolation and secrecy in London, where at the beginning of the novel she lives with her mother and younger brother, Jamie. The accuracy of the book's portrayal of this orthopedic impairment was evaluated in terms of current understanding, although the ignorance and prejudice in the setting were upheld as necessary. Language in all books was evaluated using modern-day standards. Thus epithets like "retard" and "retardo," as used by vicious bully Chet in *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2018), were considered negatively. Similarly, a negative rating was given for the vicious comment of Ada's mother in *The War that Saved My Life*, "I got stuck with a cripple" (Bradley, 2016, p. 306). Cece, a bunny who is deaf, names herself "El Deafo" (Bell, 2014) to represent her superpower persona, an empowering rather than disparaging characteristic.

Half of the books ($n = 4, 50\%$) are from the point of view of the character with the disability: Jackie in *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014), Cece in *El Deafo* (Bell, 2014), Victor in *Paperboy* (Vawter, 2013), Ada in *The War that Saved My Life* (Bradley, 2016). All are detailed, sensitive, and personal.

Jackie's first-person account of her learning disability in *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014) is honest and powerful, as she compares her first-grade self to her sister, who is recognized as "brilliant" and "gifted":

 I am not gifted.
 When I read, the words twist
 twirl across the page.
 When they settle, it is too late.
 The class has already moved on.

 I want to catch words one day.
 I want to hold them
 then blow gently,

watch them float
right out of my hands.
(Woodson, 2014, p. 169)

The personal depth and individuality as well as the moving poetry in which the book is written are stunning evidence that a learning disability does not preclude brilliance or giftedness. Jackie's voice is unforgettable.

Stories told from others' perspectives are also sensitive and authentic. *Wolf Hollow* (Wolk, 2016) in the voice of elementary student Annabelle, describes her encounters, fears, conflicts, and relationships with two individuals with disabilities: Toby, a war veteran whose post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) results in emotional disturbance and troubling behavior, and Betty, an older student whose all-consuming emotional bitterness drives her to injure fellow students (one very seriously) and cause two deaths. In *Three Times Lucky* (Turnage, 2012), a girl named Moses narrates a complex story involving her guardian, "the Colonel," whose amnesia seems to result from brain injury due to an automobile accident.

Types of Disabilities Portrayed
Eleven characters in the selected books represent six different disabilities. Emotional disturbance is most prevalent (36%; $n = 4$). Toby in *Wolf Hollow* (Wolk, 2016) suffers from post-battle PTSD resulting in isolation and bizarre behavior. Chet in *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2017) and Betty in Wolf Hollow (Wolk, 2016), though not diagnosed in the texts, have been identified in the study with characteristics related to emotional/behavioral disturbance due to persistent extreme harmful intentions and behavior. Betty's deliberate violent acts injure and kill. Chet's twisted background and malignant thoughts are revealed in chapters where he is the focus character as well as in his abuse of fellow students. "The

Laughing Man" is a supporting character, isolated from others in *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2010). Deafness is clearly represented by Cece in *El Deafo* (Bell, 2014) and Valencia in *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2017). Specific learning disability is portrayed by Jackie in *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014) and Virgil in *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2017). Other disabilities are orthopedic impairment portrayed in Ada in *The War that Saved My Life* (Bradley, 2015), speech impairment shown in Victor in *Paperboy* (Vawter, 2013), and traumatic brain injury involved with "the Colonel" in *Three Times Lucky* (Turnage, 2012). Figure 1 shows the percentages of disabilities experienced by the main and supporting characters in these Newbery books.

Representation of Characters with Disabilities
Personal portrayal. Age, gender, and race/ethnicity were the demographics analyzed. Of the 11 characters with disabilities in the Newbery books, six are male (55%) and five (45%) are female. Eight of these characters are children or adolescents (73%); three are adults (27%). Eight of the characters are White, one is Filipino (Virgil in *Hello Universe*, Kelly,

2017), one is African American (Jackie in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Woodson, 2014), and one, Cece in the graphic novel *El Deafo* (Bell, 2014), is an anthropomorphic bunny. Other ethnicities are not represented in these books.

Eight of the 11 selected characters were rated positive for personal portrayal (73%): (a) Their disability characteristics are portrayed accurately and realistically, (b) they are fully developed, displaying their strengths, interests, and abilities along with their challenges, with emphasis on similarities with peers rather than differences, and (c) non-discriminatory language is used. The average personal portrayal rating of all characters was 2.64 ($n = 11$).

Ada in *The War that Saved My Life* (Bradley, 2016) exemplifies portrayal of a positive character in negative situations. Born with talipes equinovarus (clubfoot), Ada has been imprisoned by an angry belittling mother for her first 10 years, never leaving their small apartment. Her saved life begins as she slips into a crowd of children, including her brother Jamie, who are being evacuated from London to escape bombing raids of World War II. Ada and Jamie are taken in by a

Figure 1. *Percentage of all characters with disabilities portrayed in Newbery books 2010-2019.*
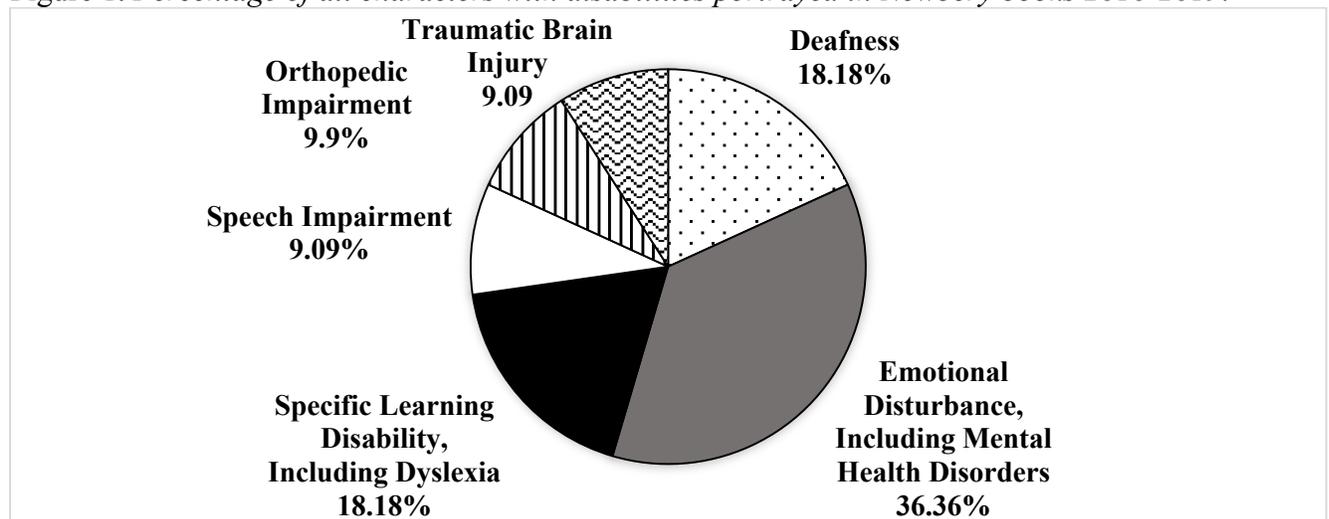
woman who has almost as many uncertainties and insecurities as they have. The three bond through feeling their way along together, finding themselves as strong, capable, loving individuals. The circumstances are not positive, but the main characters are.

Social interactions and relationships. Seven of the eleven characters with disabilities (64%) were rated as having positive social interaction scores. The characterizations with negative or neutral scores were all of individuals with emotional disturbance. The average rating for social relationships among the analyzed Newbery characters was 2.4.

Victor's socialization in *Paperboy* (Vawter, 2013), is a moving positive example. As portrayed by Vince Vawter, who lived it, the process is deep, sincere, and effortful. The 11-year- old boy, struggles with a persistent stutter, constantly fearful but applying everything his therapist teaches him. As he spends a month as a substitute paperboy, his various clients, as well as his caretaker, his father, and his best friend, do everything they can to help him communicate with them and gain some of the self-confidence he desperately needs.

Another positive example is "the Colonel" in *Three Times Lucky* (Turnage, 2012), who has lost his memory from a traumatic head injury and is so well liked in his small town that he missed being elected mayor by one vote — and he wasn't even running. Also a few "misfits" in *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2017) connect with each other in solid friendship as they embark on a quest to find their friend, Virgil, who is missing.

The most negatively portrayed character in the books described, Betty in *Wolf Hollow* (Wolk, 2016), seems to have two dimensions: miserable and mean. At age 14 Betty has

been sent to live with her grandparents because she is "incorrigible." Betty's single motivation seems to be to cause others pain, and she is clever and manipulative as she entraps and injures school children and eventually adults. Toby, whose post-war PTSD causes him to behave strangely and avoid social contact, intervenes to rescue children Betty has injured and becomes the focus of her hatred. Her scheming lies and deception destroy them both. The contrast between innocent confusion and purposeful malice brings new understanding to tragic social-moral interrelationships.

Portrayal of sibling relationships. Siblings of four characters with disabilities (36%) are portrayed in the books examined; in two books siblings are critical to the plot, in two they are part of the background affecting the individual with the disability, with little development as individuals. The average rating for sibling relationships was 2.4. All sof these relationships were rated positive, but only two of these books include siblings who are developed as independent characters: Ada's brother, Jamie, in *The War that Saved My Life* (Bradley, 2016) and Jackie's siblings, Hope, Del, and Roman, in *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014). These siblings appear to experience a range of emotions, have opportunities for growth, engage in reciprocal relationships with the family member with the disability, are not unduly burdened with caregiving and other household duties, and are aware of the disability and its effects (Meyer & Holl, 2014; Meyer & Vadasy, 2008). Ada in *The War that Saved My Life* (Bradley, 2016) and her brother, Jamie, flee the figurative as well as literal destruction threatening their London home and struggle together with fears, misunderstandings, frustrations, pain, hopes, hopelessness, and ultimately love and joy. Both learn to accept each other, caring outsiders, and most importantly,

themselves. In *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014), Jackie recounts her family's history from the American civil war era through her own infancy, childhood, and elementary years. Her two brothers and sister--each with his or her own individual outlook, interests, opinions, and talents--are beside her interacting with her and other family members throughout the extensive, detailed, and beautifully rendered memoir.

Portrayal of Exemplary Practices
The study examined exemplary practices regarding individuals with disabilities related to integrated citizenship, appropriate services, valued occupations, self-determination (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2016), and congruence of attitudes and practices with time periods represented. Six of the characters with disabilities (55%) were rated as experiencing positive standards of exemplary practices. The average portrayal of exemplary practices was a rating of 2.5.

A positive example of exemplary practices is found in the opportunities offered to Cece, the protagonist in *El Deafo*, a story based on the author's childhood, which takes place in the mid-1970s (Bell, 2014). Cece, a bunny with big ears but is deaf, is eventually given an effective hearing aid to help her in school and at home. Earlier ineffective devices are represented in bold print as this graphic novel portrays what Cece actually hears. She learns to lip read after a fashion to supplement what she can access through the hearing devices. She is invited to learn American Sign Language, but she rejects this offer. As Cece advances through school and technology advances with scientific progress, she is fitted with more advanced equipment. The teachers are instructed on how to use the various technologies in the classroom to help her. They cooperate well, although there are mishaps when her gym teacher breaks her

hearing aid and when her teachers forget to remove their microphone and she can hear them in the lounge and in the bathroom. Cece's accommodations also provide times of angst with her peers as she tries desperately to find a best friend. As she navigates a variety of peer personalities, from bossy to aggressive, many clearly do not understand her needs.

In *Hello Universe* (Kelly, 2017), Virgil, a shy, quiet boy with a specific learning disability in mathematics, and Valencia, a girl with deafness who is struggling socially, both receive support every Thursday from their teachers in the resource program at their middle school. Virgil's teacher communicates with his parents concerning his specific needs in what might be interpreted as an equivalent of an IEP meeting. But as in *El Deafo* peer interactions are not as positive. The bullying and name-calling are disappointing, but sadly realistic. The portrayal of the character with disabilities in *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009) was not rated acceptable. The homeless Laughing Man, who has emotional disturbance, is feared in the community and receives no support.

Discussion
Literary Elements
The intent of this study was to analyze Newbery winning books from the past decade that include main or supporting characters with a disability. This section includes a discussion of the results in comparison to an earlier study, limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and further research.

Of the 40 books given the Newbery Medal or Honor within the past decade, 23% include main and/or supporting characters with disabilities. This is similar to the percentage of Newbery books awarded during the time

period following the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 until 2009. In that sample of 131 books, 24% (*n*=31) include characters with a wide range of disabilities (Leininger et al., 2010), with the majority of characters having emotional disturbance and orthopedic impairments. The previous study also included characters with intellectual disabilities and autism, disabilities that are not represented in the current sample of books, which is notable considering the increased attention given to autism by TV, movies, and other media during the past decade (see Nordahl-Hansen, Øien, & Fletcher-Watson, 2018).

The percentage of accounts written from the point of view of an individual with a disability have increased since the analysis of books from 1975 to 2009, in which only 13% of the Newbery books had this close personal voice (Leininger et al., 2010). The increase to half of all books in the current sample demonstrates that such individuals are being given voices and do not have to rely on others telling their stories.

Representation of Characters with Disabilities
The depicted personal portrayal, social interactions, sibling relationships, and exemplary practices in the Newbery books are positive and either consistent with or improving on an analysis from an earlier study (Leininger et al., 2010). Considering only the books awarded the Newbery Medal or Honor between 1991 and 2009, personal portrayal and sibling relationships showed an increase in average ratings: from 2.5 to 2.64 and 2.4 to 2.6, respectively. Ratings remained the same for social interaction (2.4) and exemplary practices (2.5) over these two time periods.

It seems surprising that the way characters with disabilities are portrayed in the current sample of books is not distinctly more positive than portrayals in the 1991-2009 sample. However, the current study is limited to 11 characters, whereas the previous sample included 28 characters in its ratings.

Limitations
In addition to the limitation of the number of books analyzed in this study, other limitations should be noted. Possibly not all characters with disabilities in the Newbery books awarded between 2010 and 2019 were identified for analysis. One of the books recommended for the study, *Dead End in Norvelt*, the 2012 Newbery Award winning autobiographical work by Jack Gantos (2011), was excluded because of insufficient evidence of disability. Gantos might have been intending to portray attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and/or dyslexia, but he presented neither disorder so it could be identified. An Honor book from 2019, *The Book of Boy*, by Catherine Gilbert Murdock, was not included because the hump on Boy's back appeared to cause no physical limitations. The picture book *Last Stop on Market Street*, by Matt de la Peña (2016), includes both a blind man and a man in a wheelchair, but neither of these characters is developed sufficiently to be analyzed.

Another consideration is that the criteria for identifying characters with disabilities in Newbery books in this study were set by the authors and not validated in other studies. Additional researchers might have identified more or fewer characters, particularly with disabilities with characteristics that are more intangible or less conspicuous.

Finally, only two researchers evaluated each Newbery book. Future studies could employ more trained evaluators to gain a broader perspective on the character depictions.

Implications for Practice and Research
While not a substitute to interacting directly with individuals with disabilities, Newbery books can be used by parents as well as practitioners such as school teachers, school psychologists, social workers, and librarians to help promote acceptance and inclusion in the classroom and community. However, practitioners must be competent and knowledgeable about these disabilities in order to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and stigma (Nordahl-Hansen et al., 2018). For example, the use of derogatory epithets found in some of these books may lead children to believe such use is acceptable unless a parent or practitioner teaches them otherwise. Myers and Bersani's 2008 easy-to-use guidelines for analyzing children's books for ableism, although a decade old, is still relevant and helpful to those seeking books with authentic and inclusive representations.

The results of this study indicated that characters with emotional disorders were frequently portrayed negatively, in contrast to the characters with other disabilities, mirroring the poor outcomes of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in U. S. schools (Kern, 2015). They were typically not the type of individual their peers would want to befriend. Negative portrayals of individuals with emotional or behavioral disorders in children's literature are likely to strengthen negative stereotypes and fear—particularly with bullies like Betty and Chet as portrayed in the books discussed in this article. Often bullies who exhibit the "Three P's of Bullying" —power, pain, and persistence (see Heath, Dyches, & Prater, 2013) —have flat portrayals. Authors are encouraged to develop characters—particularly bullies with severe behavioral challenges—as multidimensional and non-stereotypic. For example, if Betty had been portrayed as sensitive and troubled by her lack of supportive family and inability to make friends instead of as hostile and destructive, readers might have been led to consider softer sides to bullies who confront them.

Students with disabilities may be drawn to this sample of books by seeing themselves in some of these characters, increasing their reflection and insight. Particularly useful is the increase in books told from the perspectives of characters with disabilities, demonstrating that they can be their own "causal agent" to make self-determined decisions for their lives when they are given appropriate support (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Forber-Pratt, Little, & Lopez, 2015; Wehmeyer, 2015). The listed discussion questions may help facilitate greater acceptance and inclusion of individuals with disabilities by their family members and peers (see Table 2).

Future studies could examine characters with disabilities in Newbery Award and Honor books from the inception of the award in 1922 until present to identify trends and improvements over time. Also studies could compare the depictions of characters with disabilities in Newbery books to characters with disabilities in books recognized by other awards, such as the American Library Association's *Schneider Family Book Award* or the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities' *Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award*.

Conclusion
Children and adolescents can be deeply affected by what they read. Impressions from characters both like and unlike themselves remain—consciously or subconsciously—to affect their thinking and behavior. Like meeting new friends, these characters share places, events, conditions, and experiences that many students may not

encounter themselves. Books that have received Newbery acclaim have been evaluated by experts as being the best that American authors and publishers have to offer. Educators who are aware of the nature and potentials of Newbery books can use them to help students decrease the *us-them* divide that is prevalent in our society.

Table 2. *Discussion Questions for Newbery Books with Characters with Disabilities, 2010-2019*

Book Title	Suggested Discussion Questions
Brown Girl Dreaming	What do you think Jackie means when she says "the words twist twirl across the page"? What can we do when a classmate reads slowly?
El Deafo	Why is Cece portrayed in some of the graphics with a bubble around her? What can we do to help people with deafness or hearing impairments feel included?
Hello Universe	Why was Virgil such an easy target for Chet? What can we do to prevent or stop bullying at school? Why is it hurtful to call someone a "retard"?
Paperboy	What did the characters in the story do to help Victor feel less embarrassed about his stuttering? How can we include people who have speech difficulties?
Three Times Lucky	Why was Colonel unable to remember his past? Do you know anyone with memory problems? What can we do to be considerate of people with memory problems?
The War that Saved My Life	What prevented Ada from going to school in London? What can we do to help people with physical disabilities feel more confident and included?
When You Reach Me	What caused the Laughing Man to act so different from everyone else? What does learning about him teach us about treating people with difficulties due to past experiences?
Wolf Hollow	Why did Toby act in ways that other people considered strange, disturbed, or even dangerous? What good things did Toby do for those who were friendly with him?

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