

Representing the Spectrum: Autism in the United States Children's Choice Book Award Nominees, 2014-2024

Amanda Harrison

Assistant Professor

University of Central Missouri

Cynthia Parkhill

Library Technician II

Santa Rosa Charter School for the Arts

Andrea Dyche

LCSW, LSCSW

ABSTRACT: This study examines the 66 books featuring autistic characters in a main or secondary role nominated on the United States' Children's Choice Book Awards lists from 2014-2024. The books for this study were examined using directed critical qualitative content analysis guided by a framework of Critical Autism Studies (CAS). CAS critiques the deficit model of autism that often defines how autistic individuals are understood. Several themes emerged in terms of how autism is described as a difference in communication and behavior, with individuals showing a variety of sensory needs. While these characters often needed a variety of support from schools, therapists, and their families, they also sometimes showed evidence of special knowledge or skills. Unfortunately, the number of books showing autistic main characters who have agency over their own lives is still a tiny percentage of books nominated for state award nominees.

Keywords: critical autism studies, Children's Choice nominees, children's literature, diversity in children's literature



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Journal of Radical Librarianship, Vol. 11 (2025) pp.36-85. Published 13 April 2025.

Introduction

Librarians are increasingly aware of the need to diversify their collections (Bishop, 1990; Naidoo, 2014; Philippi & Calzada, 2022). They often include their state's Children's Choice nominee list in their yearly collection development plan (Philippi & Calzada, 2022; Ross, 2018). While research has looked at the diversity in the nationally named children's awards, such as Newbery, Caldecott, and the like, fewer studies have looked at these Children's Choice awards and the nominees presented yearly to children (Berridge & Thomas, 2013; Kidd & Thomas, 2016; Kurz, 2012; Koss et al., 2018; Koss & Paciga, 2020). Finally, as we have seen, it is not enough for diverse characters to be merely represented in a book. Diverse characters, even those with a disability, need to have agency (Marshall & Rodick, 2023). As Children's Choice nominees are often promoted to children by a trusted adult, teacher, or school librarian, their books need to include a thoughtful and nuanced look at all kinds of diversity, including neurodiversity (Webber et al., 2024; White, 2022). Many of the national book awards, such as the Newbery, Caldecott, or Schneider book awards, have a body of research related to their inclusion of diversity or disability in the books nominated (Kaney, 2013; Koss et al., 2018; Koss & Paciga, 2020; Dornback, 2019). However, research on the Children's Choice nominees is less common, and therefore, it is unknown how often state book award nominees include diversity in their titles. This study identifies the books nominated for state Children's Choice Awards from 2014-2024 which include an autistic character. Books were read and coded via a directed critical qualitative content analysis, framed by Critical Autism Studies (CAS), to provide a view of how autistic characters were represented and if these stories, individually or as a whole, provide a holistic view of the autism spectrum.

Literature Review

The timeframe of this study, 2014-2024, saw changes in how autism is both understood and diagnosed, initiated by the publication of the 5th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) (American Psychological Association, 2013). Giles (2014) notes that this change did not merely subsume the category of Asperger's within the autism spectrum, but it impacted the online Asperger's community as a whole and jumpstarted a "gradual shift over time towards self-advocacy within the autism community" (p. 192). Furthermore, critical studies of neurodivergence, such as CAS and other alternative perspectives, began to "question the assumption of neurotypicality" (Rosquist et al., 2020, p.3) that had previously dominated scholarship. Jang et al. (2014) found an increase in studies in autism research from 1994 to 2014.

In the academic fields of both librarianship and literature, studies began to consider how autism was discussed and described in popular culture (Black & Tsumoto, 2018; Irwin, Goldsmith, & Applegate, 2015). As Bittner & Superle (2016) note in *Prizing Children's Literature: The Cultural Politics of Children's Book Awards*, "critical approaches to literary analysis allowed children's literature to become a space for literary study" (p.77). In particular, Children's Choice nominees at the state book award level occupy a unique niche in promoting reading, elevating student voice and choice, and connecting students with "high-quality literature to engage and encourage children to read" (Bang-Jensen, 2010, p.169). Regardless, these nominees are not immune to the challenges of lack of

diversity (Henderson, 1996; Kurz, 2012; Leclerc, 2019).

Changing Understandings of Autism

The term Autism was first used by psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911 to describe a symptom of schizophrenia, another term he coined. “According to Bleuler, autistic thinking was characterized by infantile wishes to avoid unsatisfying realities and replace them with fantasies and hallucinations. “‘Autism’ defined the subject’s symbolic ‘inner life’ and was not readily accessible to observers” (Evans, 2013, p.3). Bleuler’s definition of schizophrenia was broader than current DSM-V criteria, leading many autistic children to be diagnosed as having Childhood Schizophrenia (Pina-Camacho et. al, 2016).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the diagnoses of autism, childhood schizophrenia, and childhood psychosis were used interchangeably, depending on the institution where the diagnosis was established (Pina-Camacho et al., 2016). The DSM-I (1952) and DSM-II (1968) “still conceptualised autism as a form of child psychosis” (Pina-Camacho, et al, 2016, para. 3). The DSM-III (1980) was the first to list autism as a separate diagnosis from childhood schizophrenia and classified autism as under Pervasive Developmental Disorders. The DSM-III also provided comprehensive diagnostic criteria for autism for the first time. The diagnostic criteria continued to be refined through DSM-III-R (1987) and DSM-IV (1994), leading to the broadening of the concept of autism. The DSM-5 moved autism and related diagnoses to a single Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (American Psychological Association, 2013). DSM-5 also allowed for dual diagnoses of ASD and co-occurring conditions, such as psychiatric disorders or genetic disorders (Lordan, et, al., 2021).

Critical Autism Studies

While autism is diagnosed and understood via a medical lens, Critical Autism Studies (CAS) was coined in 2010 by Davidson and Orsini as a challenge to the neurobiological, medical, and social deficit models (Davidson & Orsini, 2013; Elmadagli, 2023). Their initial conceptualization of CAS “had three core strands: advancing enabling narratives of autism to challenge deficit-focused constructions; a focus on power relations within the autism field; and a commitment to developing new analytical frameworks and theoretical approaches to study the nature and culture of autism” (Milton & Ryan, 2023, p. 1). A fourth strand “locates the work of autistic academics, activists, and professionals at the centre of the discipline” (Milton & Ryan, 2023, p. 1). In particular, Milton & Ryan (2022) note that CAS challenges “deficit-focused” constructions of autism (p. 47) and locates the work of autistic people at the “centre of the discipline” (p. 48). O’Dell et. al. (2016) notes that “We share a concern with dominant constructions of autism as they are largely (but not exclusively) located within a neurobiological frame, and <they> seek to challenge dominant understandings of autism as a neurological deficit, instead focusing on autism as an identity that is materially and discursively produced within specific sociocultural contexts” (p. 2). CAS is a subset of critical disability studies (Woods et al., 2018) and has been used to examine media portrayals of autistic characters (Aspler et al., 2022).

Research About Autistic Characters in Literature

Not all studies of autistic characters in literature have explored autism from a critical

lens. On the one hand, research on autism in books has looked at its portrayal in specific types of literature or media, such as picture books, nonfiction, genre novels, etc. (Jones, 2023; Kelley et al., 2018; Nankervis, 2022; Ucar, 2021). On the other hand, some studies have evaluated books about autistic characters which seem to be specifically designed to promote empathy or teach others, specifically other children, about autism (Azano et al., 2017; Lancrenon, 2021; Sigmon et al., 2016). A few studies have taken critical approaches, such as Hayden and Prince's (2023) review of strength-based representations of disability in picture books, Cho's (2020) critique of autistic stereotypes in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Jin's (2022) review of representation of developmental disabilities including autism in children's literature and Venker and Lorang's (2024) review of children's books about autism. Of these critical approaches, the first three studies, Hayden (2023), Cho (2020), and Jin (2022) look at only a combined total of 11 books about autistic characters. Venker and Lorang's (2024) review is much more extensive; although primarily concerned with picture books, they note that "systematic, high-quality research on children's books about autism, [is needed] including content analyses and studies that determine what messages these books send to their intended audience: children" (p.452).

State Book Award Nominees

In the United States, Children's Choice state book awards are often heavily promoted in schools and public libraries to children, and each year, state book award lists seek to promote the best in literature to students in their state (Crow, 2010; Lehman, 1991). The lists are often created by librarians, teachers, or other selected committee members, with children voting on the winners from the pre-selected group of nominees (Lehman, 1991; Yokota, 2011). School and public libraries, along with classroom teachers, often purchase copies of the state book award nominees every year and include these types of purchases in their collection development plans (Contra Costa County Library, 2024; Fink, 2015; Vineyard Children's Library, 2023). While larger national prizes such as the Newbery and Caldecott are often critiqued for being too literary or elitist (Kidd & Thomas, 2017; Strauss, 2008) Children's Choice nominees provide a balance between literary excellence and "child appeal" and are geared towards creating a choice-led community of readers in a school or public library or classroom (Lehman, 1991). Almost every state has its own Children's Choice book award, with many states offering many different Children's Choice lists for a total of 198 different nomination lists available across the United States, from PreK-12th grade (Smith, 2024). The nomination criteria for the Children's Choice book awards focus on quality, child appeal, and other characteristics as well such as recent publication dates, diversity, and interest range (Alabama Camellia Children's Choice Book Award, 2014; Arkansas State Library, 2024a; Arkansas State Library, 2024b; Arizona Library Association, 2024; Association of Illinois School Library Educators, 2025a; California Young Reader Medal, 2024; Colorado Council International Reading Association, 2024; Delaware Department of Education, 2024; Florida Association for Media in Education, 2024; Georgia Children's Book Awards, 2024; Kentucky Association of School Librarians, 2024; Land of Enchantment Book Award, 2024; Maine Student Book Award, 2025; Michigan Reading Association, 2024; Minnesota Youth Reading Awards, n.d.; Missouri Association of School Librarians, 2024; New Jersey Library Association, 2023; New York State Reading Association, 2025; North

Carolina Library Association - Youth Services Section, 2025; Nutmeg Book Award, 2025; Oregon Library Association, 2024a; Oregon Library Association, 2024b; Pacific Northwest Library Association, 2024; Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, 2024; Salem State University, 2025; State Library of Louisiana, 2025; State of Rhode Island, 2024; Virginia State Literacy Association, 2024). Sometimes, books are bound by even more specific criteria, such as having a living or American author; or by excluding series, or sequel books; likewise previous wins on national awards sometimes exclude inclusion (Alabama Camellia Children's Choice Book Award, 2014; Arkansas State Library, 2024a; Colorado Council International Reading Association, 2024; Indiana Library Federation, 2022; Kentucky Association of School Librarians, 2024b; Minnesota Youth Reading Awards, 2024b; Oklahoma Library Association, 2021; Pacific Northwest Library Association, 2024; Pennsylvania School Librarians Association, 2024b; South Dakota Library Association, 2024; State of Rhode Island, 2024; University of Southern Mississippi, n.d.; Vermont Department of Libraries, 2025; Volunteer State Book Award; n.d.; Wyoming Library Association, 2025).

Methodology

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How often are autistic characters included in the state book award nominees from 2014-2024?

RQ2: How are autistic characters and autism portrayed in the state book award nominees from 2014-2024?

Books were selected for the study if they included an autistic character that was: a) identified in the story, b) identified by the author in interviews, book back matter, etc.) identified in a review, d) identified in tags via databases such as Novelist, Children's Comprehensive Database (CLCD) or A Novel Mind. The book must also have been nominated by one of the 50 state Children's Choice nominees lists from 2014-2024. Therefore, a book such as *Rookie of the Year* by Bildner (2016) was selected, as the book's summary identifies one character, Red, as being on the autism spectrum. However, that is not explicitly named in the text. *Rookie of the Year* also fit the criteria for nomination due to its inclusion on the Young Hoosier Book Award nominee list for 2018-2019.

To identify books for this study, the database *NoveList*, the *Children's Literature Comprehensive Database*, and *A Novel Mind* were referenced to find books published from 2010-2023 with characters identified as autistic or neurodivergent. Books with autistic characters on state Children's Choice book nominee lists were included in a spreadsheet database. As books were selected for inclusion in the study, author interviews, blogs and websites, or other written matter, book summaries, and book reviews were examined. These works provided additional content about the author's intention, background, or experience with neurodiversity. In particular, researchers noted whether the author identified themselves as autistic or neurodivergent in either the text or other matter, how the autistic character was identified, whether the autistic character was

a person of color or LGBTQIA+, whether the character's gender was female or male, or they had another gender identity, and if they were a secondary or main character in the story. Next, each book was read and coded to determine how autism or characteristics of autism were described in the text. The researchers then used a critical content analysis approach to focus specifically on issues of stereotyping, representation, and power related explicitly to the concepts raised by CAS.

Coding and Analysis

In order to explore how autistic characters were represented in the books nominated for the state Children's Choice book award, we conducted a directed critical qualitative content analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis is used to "examine meanings, themes, and patterns, that may be manifest or latent in a particular text" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 308). This study also used directed content analysis as it was guided by prior research, which helps identify key concepts or variables as initial coding categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Two researchers were involved in the coding process and coded the books by hand with frequent debriefing sessions to increase inter-coder reliability. An electronic codebook with examples of codes was also used to increase the dependability of how data was collected. Appendix A highlights the codes that were marked in each text.

Theoretical memos were saved during the extensive reading and coding process. These memos allowed the researchers to make notes on insights that deserved more attention, reflect informally on the data, and talk together about the data (Bergin, 2018). The data was analyzed based on concerns suggested in Critical Autism theory, such as how autism is conceptualized, which includes a critique of medical and deficit models of autism as well as stereotyping; autistic identity and how it was defined and shared by either the autistic character or others; and community and culture, or how autistic people interact and are interacted with in the world (Milton & Ryan, 2023). As Johnson et al. (2016) note, "Adding the word 'critical' in front of content analysis signals a political stance by the researcher, particularly in searching for and using research tools to examine inequities from multiple perspectives" (p. 4).

Researchers in this study have a diverse range of experiences that reflect on their understanding of the core concepts of this study. Assistant Professor Amanda Harrison has interests in diversity in children's literature, a former committee member for the William Allen White children's book award in Kansas, and a member of the Diverse Book Finder community of practice (William Allen White Children's Book Award, n.d.; Diverse Book Finder, 2025). She is also the parent of an autistic child. Graduate student Cynthia Parkhill brings her lived experience as an autistic person to our discussion of autistic characters among books in state readers' choice awards. It is important to emphasize this statement of positionality because the "Autistic voice is not always present in Autism research" (Waldock and Keats, 2024, p. 288). She additionally possesses other characteristics that have been historically "neglected within research" into autism (Waldock and Keats, 2024, p. 290): being assigned the sex of "female" and diagnosed autistic in adulthood as well as identifying as LGBTQIA+. Third researcher, Andrea Dyche is a clinical social worker, LCSW. She provided information about the

background of autism as a clinical diagnosis for the literature review.

Findings

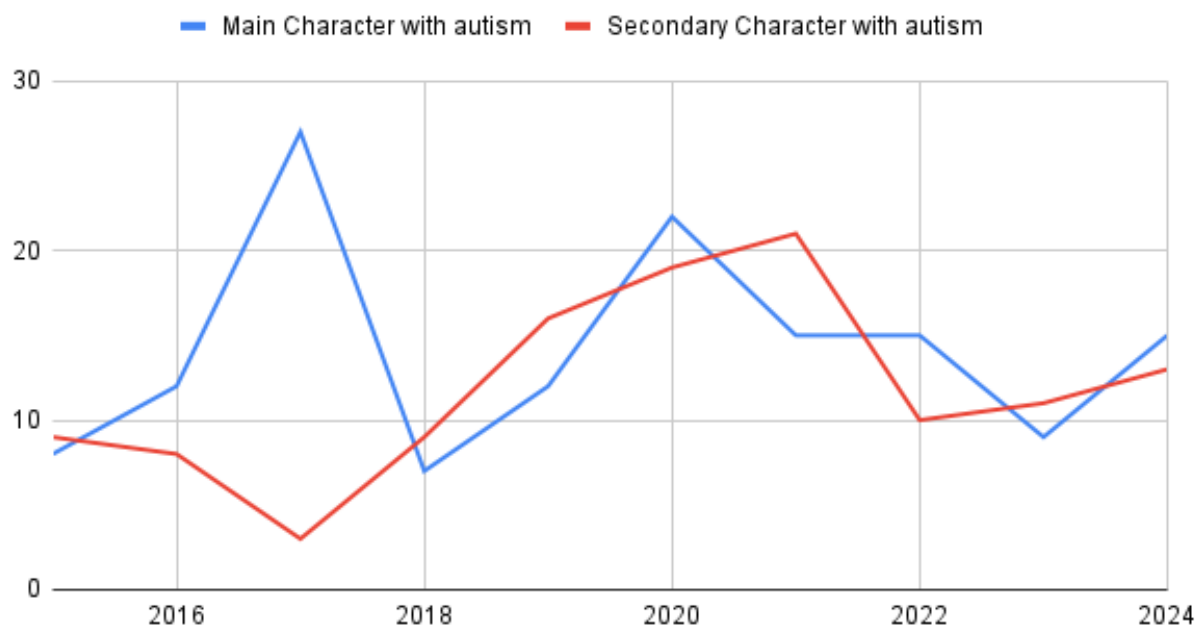
Sixty-six books were identified as including autistic characters in a main or secondary role as seen in Appendix B. These books were nominated 262 times on state Children's Choice book award lists, from 2014-2024. Some books have a greater number of nominations but fell outside of the time frame guidelines. States had a wide range in the number of times they nominated a book with an autistic character, from a high of 17 nominations to a low of zero. More books included an autistic character as a secondary character rather than a main character and they were more often male than female. BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, trans, and nonbinary characters constituted a low percentage of the books nominated. Autistic authors wrote 18% of the books nominated and the number of nominations for books by autistic authors was highest in years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Main vs. Secondary Characters

Books were examined to determine if autistic characters were presented as main or secondary characters. In 37 instances, or 54.4% instances, the autistic character was the story's main character, and in 31 instances, or 45.5%, the secondary character. However, these numbers do not provide all the information. In several cases, other characters are presented as being neurodivergent. For example, in the book *Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?* the two main characters are not referred to in the text as being autistic (Vaught, 2019). However, only the character with higher support needs is explicitly labeled by the publisher as autistic. Likewise, in *Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse*, the main character is labeled as autistic, while the secondary character, Springer, notes, "Maybe I'm 'on the spectrum,' too," (Vaught, 2019, p. 28). The author of this book, Vaught, highlights in her author's note, "Jesse is not my first neurodivergent character, but she is my first character who identifies as having Autism Spectrum Disorder. I tried to honor some of my own experiences through her, which feels like a big personal step" (p. 309). Figure 1 shows the number of books with a main autistic character vs a secondary autistic character and how that changes throughout the decade.

Figure 1

Number of Book Nominations per year, main character vs secondary character



Book Nominations by State

Table 1 outlines the number of nominations per state that included autistic characters. However, it is worthwhile to note that some states vary widely in the number of Children's Choice Awards, and subsequently in the number of nominations each year. For example, Hawaii has only one Children's Choice nominee award, the Nēnē Award (The Nēnē Award, 2024) while a state such as Michigan, offers the five different Great Lakes Great Books, Children's Choice Awards, for grades K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12 (The Great Lakes Great Books Award, 2021).

Table 1

Book Nominations per State

States with 10-17 nominations

Georgia, Iowa, Maryland, Illinois, Indiana

States with 6-9 nominations

Hawaii, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Oklahoma, Vermont, Arkansas, Kansas, New Jersey, Tennessee, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina

States with 1-5 nominations

Alabama, West Virginia, Wyoming, California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Wisconsin, Pacific Northwest, Delaware, Mississippi, Nebraska, Texas, New Mexico, South Dakota, Massachusetts, Nevada, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Washington

States with 0 nominations

Utah
North Dakota

Note: Alaska, Idaho, Montana are part of the Pacific Northwest Library Association

Characteristics of Autistic Characters

Autistic characters were coded as male, female, nonbinary or trans. They were also coded according to their race/ethnicity and whether they were a main or secondary character. The main characters were equally male or female, while secondary autistic characters were more likely to be male. Nonbinary and trans characters, while not common, appeared as main characters in the books selected for the study. Figure 2 highlights the intersection between gender and main vs secondary character status.

Figure 2

Intersection of gender and main vs secondary character status

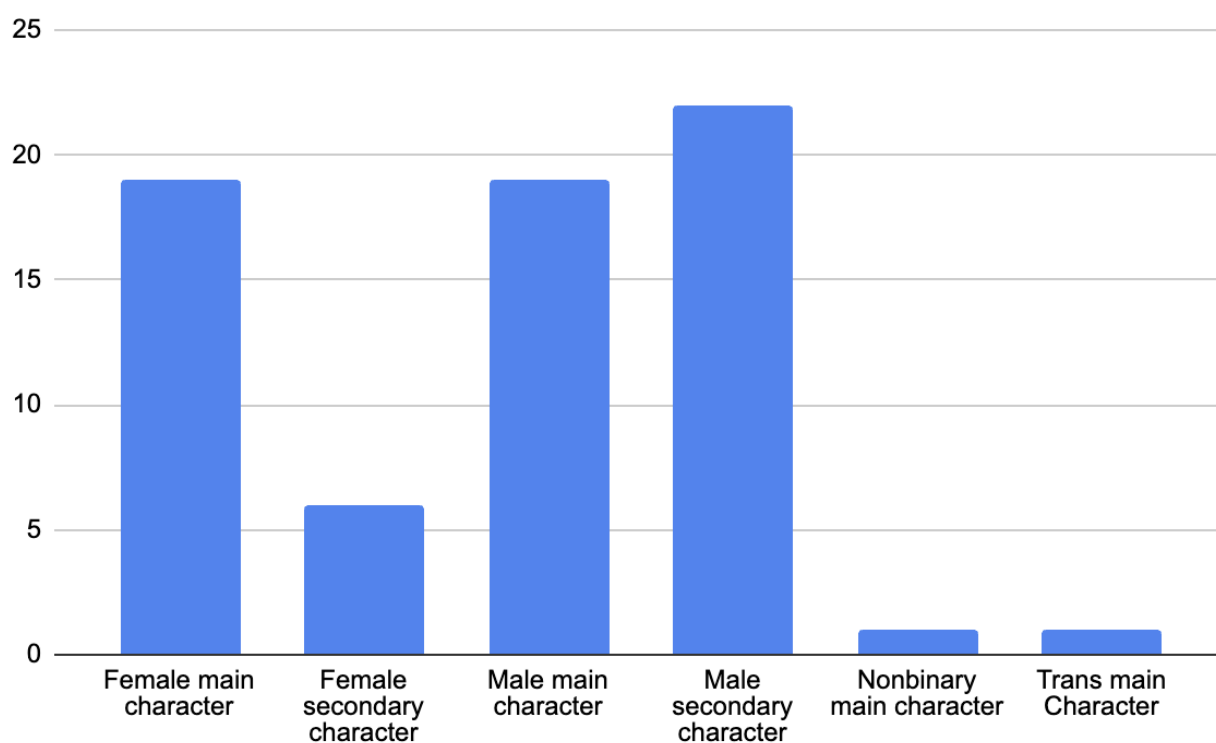
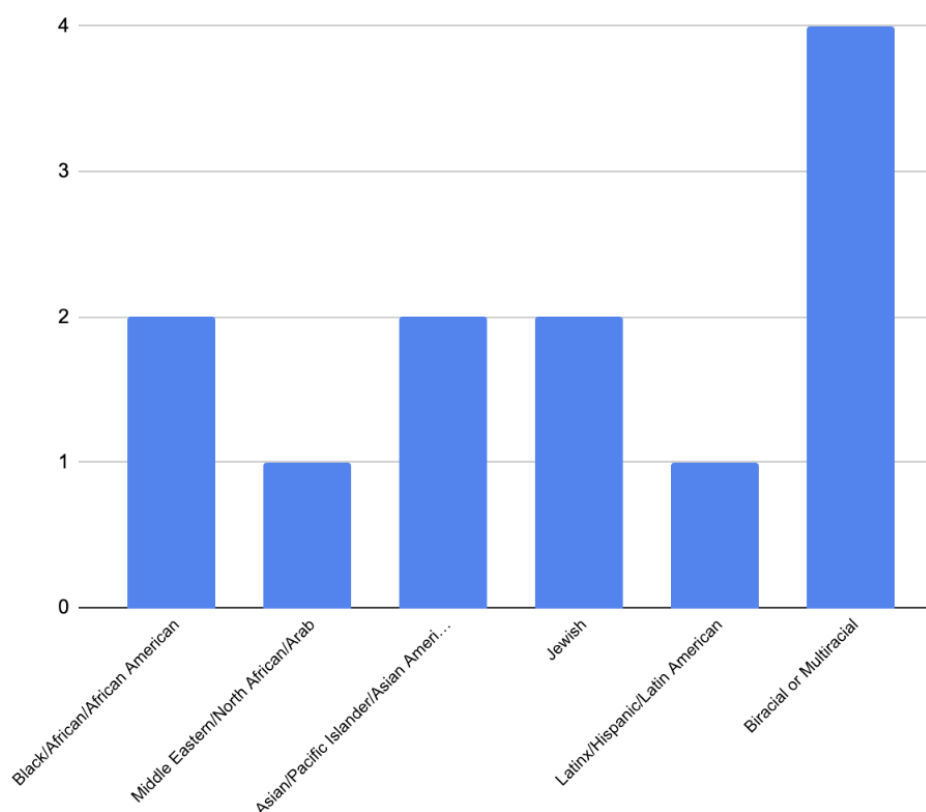
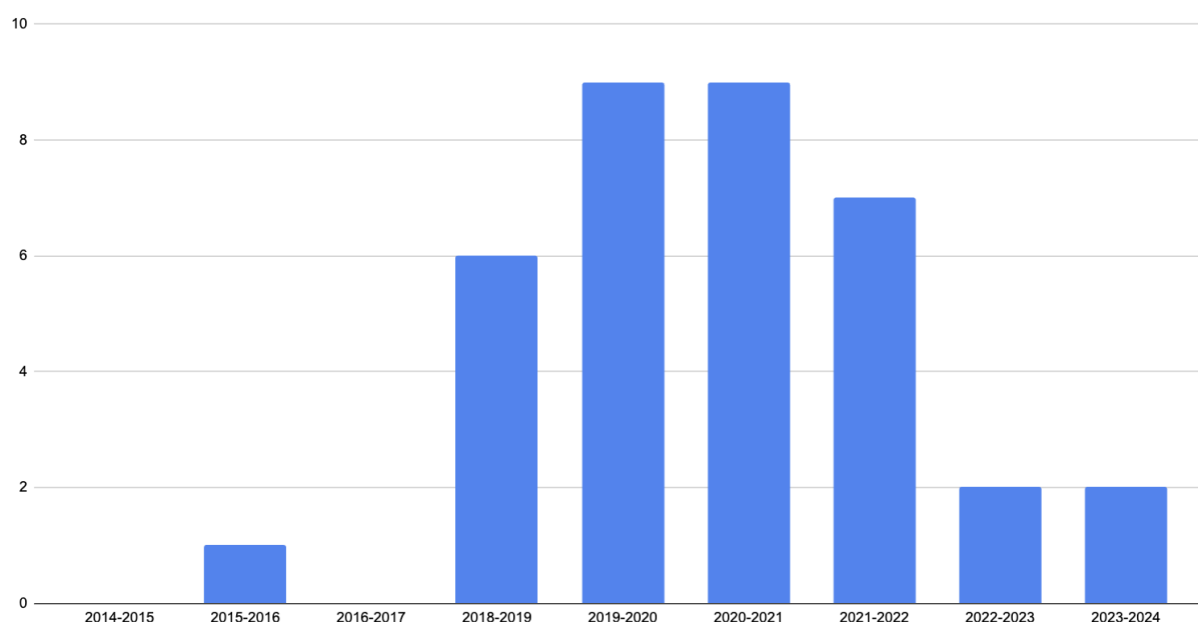


Figure 3 highlights the number of autistic characters of race and ethnicity other than white. 12 characters were a race or ethnicity other than white.

Figure 3*Intersection between autistic characters and race/ethnicity*

OwnVoices & Autism Identity

Among the 66 books in our study, 12 were written by authors who identified themselves as autistic in an author's note, website, or other publication. The 12 unique titles were nominated a total of 36 times. Figure 4 includes a longitudinal view of the years in which these books were nominated. These books, often termed, #OwnVoices, following a distinction made by Corinne Duyvis in 2015, helps librarians and readers identify and tag books in which the author is a member of the community they are writing about. (Duyvis, 2024). However, challenges in the #OwnVoices term made some authors feel pressured to out parts of their identity. For this reason, the hashtag is no longer used by many in the diverse books community (Macchia, 2022). Likewise, many authors who have written characters with experiences of autism have started to realize or question how some aspects of their own lives seem to match the description. However, a number of challenges arise in the context of obtaining a complete medical diagnosis, such as medical gatekeeping, financial barriers, and the changing criteria (de Broize, et. al, 2022; Hus & Segal, 2021). Authors that had books included in our study that identified challenges in obtaining their own medical diagnosis include Arnold (2017) *A Boy Named Bat*, and struggled with determining how best to share the autistic experience, even when they shared that diagnosis (Arnold, 2023; Sass, 2022a).

Figure 4*Longitudinal view of book nominations written by autistic authors*

Discussion

RQ1: How often are autistic characters included in the state book award nominees from 2014-2024?

This selection of books seems to follow a general diagnostic bias in that autistic characters are shown as more often male than female, which is also seen in child and adolescent psychology research (Loomes et. al, 2017). For example, there appears to be a diagnostic gender bias, meaning that girls who meet the criteria for ASD are at disproportionate risk of not receiving a clinical diagnosis. A small percentage of the autistic characters were individuals of color and an even smaller selection identified as LGBTQIA+. The rate at which autistic characters are also people of color is significant due to a perception in society “that autism is a white condition” (Garcia, 2021, p. 175). Garcia (2021) cited study findings concerning age of diagnosis for 406 children in Philadelphia: “It found that white children were diagnosed at 6.3 years of age while Black children were diagnosed at 7.9 years of age and they required more time in treatment before they were diagnosed ... Years later, the CDC <Centers for Disease Control and Prevention> confirmed that Black and Hispanic children get diagnosed later than white children” (p. 178). In this case, the low percentage of LGBTQIA+ autistic individuals is also notable, primarily because research has suggested that autistic individuals are less likely to identify as heterosexual or cisgender (Weir et al., 2021).

RQ2: How are autistic characters and autism portrayed in the state book award nominees, from 2014-2024?

Portrayals of autistic characters often invoke traits associated with autism: including communication challenges, sensory sensitivities, and characteristic behaviors such as stimming. These portrayals are not always deficit-based, however, and an autistic character may possess unique knowledge and skills, often in connection with a special interest. An autistic character may have access to supportive resources and therapies, typically in conjunction with an official diagnosis of autism. Not every character who can be coded “autistic” has an official diagnosis, and our study considered ways that autistic characters were identified, as well as who did the identifying.

Communication

Many autistic characters struggle with communication. While some autistic characters were nonverbal, other communication challenges fell under the category of communicating differently than neurotypical characters through formulaic speech, repetitive language, or echolalia. Other characters used repetitive language, repeating words they had heard from movies or TV. Echolalia was also represented, and a character would repeat the words that were said to them. In *The Thing About Jellyfish*, the character Suzy has trouble taking turns in conversations; instead, she engages in what her mother called “constant-talking” (Benjamin, 2015, p. 51). This “constant-talking” involved interesting facts that Suzy read about in books; later, when her best friend dies, she retreats into silence. While assisted communication devices are one-way autistic characters can communicate, they were less evident in the text. *The Space We’re In* by Balen (2019) and *Planet Earth is Blue* by Panteleakos (2019) are books where the autistic character learns to use exchangeable picture cards for communication. These devices are also available electronically, as shown in *How to Speak Dolphin* by Rorby (2017). However, not all assisted communication processes are considered appropriate. The book *Real* by Cujec & Goddard (2021) features a type of assisted communication called Facilitated Communication (FC), which is discouraged as an unscientific and harmful intervention by numerous organizations such as the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP); American Academy of Pediatrics; and International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) among others (Boynton, 2023). In this book, the main character, Charity, could only type communicated responses if someone held her hand. This book is noted as being inspired by the life of co-author Peyton Goddard.

Sensor Sensitivities

One of the challenges that many neurodivergent people face is the challenge of sensory sensitivities. Many sensory sensitivities were mentioned in the books selected, which included all five senses. Touch and hearing were both significant challenges for many characters. In *How to Build a Hug: Temple Grandin and Her Amazing Squeeze Machine*, by Guglielmo (2018), we see how sensory sensitivities impact autistic characters, Temple Grandin fled her classroom and cafeteria because “No one understood that when the classroom fan WHIRRED, Temple imagined a dentist’s drill. That to her, the voices in the loud, stinky cafeteria ROARED like a jet engine, and the school bell CLANGED like a woodpecker knocking on her head” (p. 7). Likewise, in *Finding Gossamyr*, Denny is celebrating his birthday (Rodriguez, 2013). While the other characters sing Happy Birthday to him, the images show him holding his hands over his ears. When his dad

reaches down and touches his shoulders, he becomes upset, shouts, and leaves the table, upending the birthday cake (Rodriguez & Ellerton, 2013). Other characters struggled with bright lights or colors or itchy clothes. In *Me and Sam-Sam handle the Apocalypse*, by Vaught (2019), the main character, Jesse, lights some shirts on fire in the backyard fire pit so she will no longer be forced to wear them.

Behaviors

Sensory sensitivities and communication challenges often manifest in specific behaviors such as repetitive movements such as flapping, stimming, or melting down. Stimming could be the result of a strong emotional state, not necessarily always a negative one. Characters who became overwhelmed with sensory overload would often meltdown, which was evident by screaming, crying, hitting oneself, or running. In addition, differences in behavior, even if neutral or not disruptive, were often portrayed by characters in a negative light. For example, in *A Boy Called Bat* by Arnold (2017), the character Bat “sometimes flapped his hands, when he was nervous or excited or thinking about something interesting. Some of the kids at school seemed to think that was *hilarious*” (p.2). In *How to Speak Dolphin*, by Ginny Rorby (2015) the reader is introduced to the autistic character Adam when his sister, Lily, the main character, details an incident that occurred when she invited a friend over to her house:

Adam’s weirdness was just starting back then. The next day at school, she told everyone how “the retard” spent the entire time babbling and staring at his fingers, which he wiggled in front of his face, how he went stiff as a board when Mom picked him up, and screamed bloody murder when the phone rang. (p.5)

Special Supports

Many books featured autistic characters attending special schools and participating in occupational, physical, and talk therapies. Other characters participated in a regular school but had special paraprofessionals, assistants, or accommodations to help them succeed in a typical school environment. These supports are sometimes focused on academics, but in other cases, they are school-based programs designed to help the autistic character fit in socially through small structured conversational or play groups such as in *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend* by Dicks (2012) and *The Elephant in the Room* by Sloan (2021). Other occupational or physical therapy-based supports helped characters with fine or gross motor skills. In many cases, these special schools seem to be directly related to the behaviors manifested by the autistic character. In *The Space We’re In* by Balen (2019), the secondary character Max goes to a particular school because he bit a child at his nursery school; his sister describes the situation to a nurse:

Next she asks about brothers and sisters and I nearly choose to say no but then I say Max. I tell her about his flapping and melting and noises and biting and the new school. She asks what Max likes to do and I think that’s a strange question so I answer a bit slowly about Goodnight Moon and the washing machine and drawing but not talking. (p.57).

In some cases, families went to great lengths to access special school supports. In *How Journal of Radical Librarianship*, Vol. 11 (2025) pp. 36-85

We Roll the family has just moved on behalf of younger brother, Julius, “Because the Boulder public schools hadn’t been ‘equipped’ to meet his special needs” (p. 7).

Many books showed the importance of a sibling relationship to support a character with autism. Fifteen books included a relationship between a neurotypical main character and an autistic sibling, 5 included a sister as the autistic character, and 10 included an autistic brother. In all these books, the main character is a neurotypical sibling who feels responsible or is asked to be responsible for the autistic sibling, whether older or younger. Another book, *Remember Dippy* by Vernick (2013) has a similar role, but in this case, the secondary character is an older cousin.

Unique Knowledge & Characteristics

Autistic characters are often shown to have unique types of knowledge or skills. Sometimes, this unique knowledge is tied to a special ability, such as being very good at math. In other situations, the main character has a unique interest that they have learned and researched and have become highly knowledgeable about. For example, in *Because of the Rabbit*, by Lord (2019), the character Jack knows many random facts and often shares them at inappropriate times. However, his particular interest in animals and skill at relating to them reinforces his new friendship with the main character, Emma.

The extreme version of this unique knowledge is seen in the character of the autistic savant. In the author’s note to *Navigating Early*, Vanderpool (2013) notes that inspiration from the book *Born on a Blue Day: Inside the Extraordinary Mind of an Autistic Savant* “was a springboard” to create the character of Early Auden:

He would also be considered a savant, a person who exhibits extraordinary ability in a highly specialized area, such as mathematics or music. I chose not to use the terms autism or savant in the book because most people in 1945 would have been unfamiliar with them, and most people with autism would have been undiagnosed. A person like Early would have just been considered strange. (p.298).

Autistic characters are often also portrayed as being very routine-oriented and as having a strong interest in truth, justice, and things being done correctly. In the book *Rain Reign*, by Martin (2014), the character Rose goes out of her way to find her dog’s original owner, even though she loves and would rather keep the dog herself. Lying is also often challenging for autistic characters. For example, in *A Boy Called Bat* by Arnold, the main character, Bat “hardly ever lied. It made him feel itchy” (p.36). Likewise, Jesse in *Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse*, by Vaught (2019), states, “‘I don’t tell lies,’ I assured him. ‘Dad says I’m honest to a fault. But I’m not sure how honesty could be a fault. It’s a virtue, right?’” (p. 22.)

Identifying Autism

One of the major areas of interest in this study was a critical look at how an autistic character was identified or not in the book, following the concepts of Critical Autism Studies (CAS), which identifies the subsequent neurobiological, medical, and social

deficit models that are so often part of this conversation. We found that characters were identified as autistic or “other” by themselves, by other characters in the story, by the medical establishment, or sometimes only in an author or publisher’s note. The when of the book’s publication and setting also reflected changes in how autism has been identified over time. Finally, how we understand appropriate language has changed, and characters, much like regular people, do not always use the accepted language of the time even if they understand the difference.

Historical Model

The ways in which autism is identified in the text depend on when the book was written and published as well as the book’s setting. This is primarily due to a reliance on a medical model to define what is and what is not autism. Earlier books, written before the 2013 DSM-5 often utilize the term Asperger’s. In some books, such as *Colin Fischer* by Miller (2012) and *When My Heart Joins the Thousand*, by Steiger (2018) the character even references this change within the story itself.

For most of my childhood, my diagnosis was PDD-NOS - pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. They changed it to Asperger’s when I was fourteen. In the next volume of the DSM, the Asperger’s diagnosis was dropped, so technically my condition doesn’t even exist anymore; if I ever go back to the doctor, they’ll presumably have to find some other label to stick on me. The specific words don’t matter. I’ll always be this way. (Steiger, 2018, p.292)

Some books with story settings that are set before this time frame also use older language that is no longer acceptable or considered appropriate today. For example, the character Nova, in the book, *Planet Earth is Blue*, is referred to as mentally retarded. In an author’s note, Panteleakos tells readers that the term “mental retardation” was finally reclassified as “intellectual disability” in 2013 (pg. 498). In other cases, characters in stories that are historical fiction are not labeled with diagnostic criteria but instead idiosyncratic terms such as “the strangest of boys” (Vanderpool, 2013, p. 1), or as having a Thorn, such as in *The Case of the Deadly Desperadoes* by Lawrence (2012). “My foster ma Evangeline used to say that when God gives you a Gift he always gives you a Thorn in your side to keep you humble” (p. 2). P.K. goes on to describe ways in which the Thorn provides a benefit through picture-perfect memory, exceptional hearing, and mathematical skills, while challenges include not showing emotion and not understanding how to read other people’s emotions and intentions.

Institutional Identification

Many books showed evidence of the character being identified as autistic by a doctor or school. *The Girl Who Thought In Pictures: Temple Grandin* by Mosca (2019) and *Temple Grandin* by Montgomery (2012) offer nonfiction portrayals of autistic and autism expert Temple Grandin. Grandin was initially diagnosed by doctors as having brain disability before autism was more clearly understood as a diagnosis. When she was a child, doctors encouraged her mother to put her away in an institution (Chandler, 2015).

In *Rain Reign*, by Martin (2014), a book notable for being nominated for 26 state lists,

Journal of Radical Librarianship, Vol. 11 (2025) pp. 36-85

the main character uses her diagnosis as a script to both introduce herself and engage with others. “My official diagnosis is high-functioning autism, which some people call Asperger’s syndrome. Do you have a diagnosis?” (p. 6). Other characters find a way to share a medical diagnosis that gives them back agency, such as Michael McCreary (2019) in his book *Funny, You Don’t Look Autistic*. He notes that he was diagnosed but then self-identifies what that means to him:

I was diagnosed with autism at the age of five. I wasn’t diagnosed as a comedian until much later, though I always loved to perform and make people laugh. When I started doing stand-up in my teens, I realized that I could use comedy to help demystify autism and break down stereotypes. Being autistic has its challenges, sure, but it’s not all PSAs of empty swings blowing in the wind set to Sarah McLachlan music. There’s plenty to laugh about too” (p. 9, 10).

Identified by Self

The ways in which autistic individuals self-identify vary. Many autistic people prefer identity-first language rather than people-first language, but this is not universal (Wooldridge, 2023). The American Psychological Association (2020) acknowledges that both approaches to language “are designed to respect disabled persons” and that using “person-first” and “identity-first” approaches are both fine and permissible “unless or until you know that a group clearly prefers one approach, in which case you should use the preferred approach” (p. 137). In *My Rainbow*, the co-author, Trinity Neal (2020) chose person-first language to refer to herself in the story as a “kid with autism.” Her author’s bio describes her as a “A Black transgender girl on the autism spectrum.” A reviewer (Kirkus, 2020) held an overall positive view of this book but notably critiqued Trinity’s preference for person-first language and imposed identity-first language when describing Trinity, stating, “Apart from the use of person-first language (“kids with autism”) instead of identity-first language, Neal and Neal emphasize that all aspects of Trinity’s identity deserve celebration and make her a masterpiece” (para. 1).

Other books selected in this study include characters who reframe or self-identify what autism means to them. For example, Mia, the main character in the graphic novel *Speak Up* by Burgess (2022) is medically diagnosed with autism. Her mother is always trying to get her to hide or eliminate her autistic qualities, trying to get her to act more “normal.” When Mia reveals herself as autistic, she is disputing the medical, deficit-based view of autism and tells everyone that her autism is the source of her creativity and strength. Mia has hidden behind a masked online persona for nearly the entire book, and the quote expressed is from her first public performance, where she removes her mask and lets people see who she is.

*This is me, this is me.
This is me and I’m proud of that.
I’m creative, hard to see.
I freak out but I’m brave,
and I’m proud of that.*

*They say my autism
gives me chains,
they say it hurts my family.*

*But my autism sets me free.
Cos this is me and
I'm proud of that (pg. 255).*

Self-identification by a character often captured by the highs and lows of being autistic. For example, in *We Could Be Heroes* by Finnegan (2020), the main character identified autism and autistic characteristics in the following way:

A'a was how Hank felt when he had a meltdown A'a was the worst feeling ever. A'a was the thing he didn't like about having autism" (p. 24).

It took about fifteen minutes to get from Masie's to Hank's, but by the time they got home, the a'a feeling had lessened and Hank, though tired, could at least tell his mom many amazing facts about his rocks, which was one of the good things he did like about his autism. He could reel off a lot of interesting facts about important things, like rocks (pp. 61-62).

Identified by Other Characters

Autistic characters are often labeled by other characters in a story. These labels often quantified what autism meant for that particular character, such as this quote from *Remember Dippy* by Vernick (2021) "A regular kid summer. That was something Mem would never get—because he wasn't a regular kid" (p.101). In *Team Players*, Lupica (2018) includes a character, Sarah who excels at baseball skills such as throwing, running, or hitting a baseball. Nevertheless, the main character, Cassie, notes

Her name was Sarah, and right away Cassie knew there was something different about her. But that was before anybody saw her run down a ball in the outfield, or throw, or swing a bat.

"She's special," Cassie's dad told her before softball tryouts began that night. "Are you talking about special needs, Dad?" Cassie said (p. 15).

Name calling was a frequent feature of a notable identification by other characters such as in *Colin Fischer*, when fellow character, Wayne, states, "'I know you're like a really smart retard or something. I mean.... what the hell is wrong with you?'" (Miller, p.151). Sometimes these names occurred in real life, such as in the nonfiction book *Silent Days, Silent Dreams* by Say (2017). "He was called abusive names like Crazy Jimmy, the Dummy, and the Retard," Say stated in an author's note (p.60).

Identified as Maybe

In a few books, characters were identified as maybe autistic. In a few cases, this was because autism testing was suggested but was not undertaken, such as in *Tune It Out* by Sumner (2020). In *Tune It Out*, the main character, Louise, has a sensory processing

disorder. Louise writes that her teachers suggested autism testing to her mother, who declined to pursue it, but that ultimately, the teachers had already decided and treated her differently. In *Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse* (2019), the main character, Jesse, has autism and befriends a secondary character, Springer. In the book, Springer suggests, “Maybe I’m ‘on the spectrum,’ too” (pg. 28). In response, Jesse shrugs and says, “Who cares?” (pg. 28). Other characters seem to find Springer’s characteristics also similar to autism and ask him themselves, “‘Are you autistic, too?’ Sharp asked Springer. Springer hesitated. ‘I don’t know’” (pg. 198).

In *The View from the Very Best House in Town* by Trehan (2022) again, we have a main character, Asha, who is autistic yet does not know if her best friend, Sam, is the same:

Asha bites her lip hard. Does he really not know? Her parents have drilled into her that she’s not supposed to ask other kids about their diagnoses or differences, not even Sam, but surely he’s autistic like her, right? They spent five years in speech together (p. 13).

A later conversation seems to clarify that Sam is autistic, but his parents do not want to mention it.

Sam’s dad reaches over and touches her arm. “Again, just to clarify, are you referring to the fact that he’s on the autism spectrum?” he says. Sam’s chest tightens, and next to him, his mom goes still. His parents never say those words out loud if they can help it (p. 228).

Getting an autism diagnosis can be timely, costly, and challenging for many reasons, including financial reasons (de Broize et al., 2022; Hus & Segal, 2021; MacKenzie et al., 2023). In *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend*, Dicks (2012) discusses in an author’s note how having a diagnosis or label can be beneficial if it allows for therapies and support but challenging if it reduces the character to a stereotype and inhibits growth. In the book, Max is not identified as having a specific diagnosis, and his parents disagree about this process:

“That’s the problem,” Max’s dad says, his forehead turning red and blotchy. “Not every expert agrees and you know it!” When he speaks, it’s like he’s firing words from a gun. “No one knows what is going on with Max. So how is my guess any worse than a bunch of experts who can’t agree on a thing?”
“The label isn’t important,” Max’s mom says. “It doesn’t matter what is wrong with him. He needs help” (p.16.)

Identified as Intersectional

Autism is just one of the many identities that these characters have in their lives. Other identities include persons of color and/or LGBTQIA+ identities. In the books selected for inclusion on state book award nominee lists, 5% of the autistic characters identified as LGBTQIA+. As mentioned earlier, this figure is lower than anticipated, as research indicates that autistic individuals are less likely to identify as heterosexual or cisgender

(Weir et al., 2021). Of course, as they are young people, they are still exploring aspects of their identity, such as Ellen, who is questioning gender here in *Ellen Outside the Lines* by Sass (2022):

I pick at the hem of my shorts, eyeing their dresses that pool around them on the bed. If clothes don't make you a boy or a girl, what does? Hair? Makeup? And how do you know if you're nonbinary? (p. 224).

18% of characters were individuals of a race or ethnicity other than white, including multi-racial, African American, Asian American, Indian American, Latino, and Jewish heritage. Of the BIPOC characters, one was trans.

Author or Publisher Identification

In several books, the main character was not explicitly labeled as autistic in the text, but this information was available in an author's note, interview, or publisher information. *Chester and Gus* was one such book,

As any parent of a young child with autism can tell you, nonverbal communication is an essential piece of getting through most days. The idea of Chester and Gus came to me after watching our dog, Buddy, and our autistic son, Ethan, have one of these "conversations" when they were alone ("Author's Note," pg. 251).

Lord (2019), author of *Because of the Rabbit*, shared in her author's note that she has an autistic son. Walz, the author of *Last Pick* (2018), also included information in an interview related to the book,

Creating Wyatt was always a bit tricky for me. I never specifically mention in the books that he has autism because I didn't want the reader to bring their own preconceived ideas about what that means. I think that many of us believe we know what it means to have autism, but the reality is that though there are certainly common factors within the autism community, the differences from one person to another are profound. We're all human, and being human means experiencing the world in your own unique way. I needed to let the reader see Wyatt as a full human that just so happened to have a "disability" (Forney, 2019, para 6).

Other books such as *Mighty Jack* (Hatke, 2016), *Sweetie* (Zuill, 2019), *The Thing about Jellyfish* (Benjamin, 2015), and *The Real Boy* (Ursu, 2013) include characters who are not explicitly named in the text as autistic. These books include characters Maddy, Sweetie, Suzy, and Oscar, who have many characteristics of autism. In a few cases, more than one character presents as autistic, but only the higher needs character is explicitly stated. For example, when creating her two main characters for the book *Anybody Here Seen Frenchy?*, Connor (2022) intended that both of them would be autistic, but Connor explicitly labels neither of them in the book's text. Connor "wanted to put the character before what might be called their disability or their neurodiversity" (Sutton, 2021, para.

15). But in its description, publisher Katherine Tegan Books explicitly labeled Frenchie, but not Aurora, as autistic.

Researching Autism

Many authors referenced how they became interested in or completed research on autism as they undertook the writing of their book. For example, Choldenko (2009) referenced the Autism Research Institute in her acknowledgments for *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, the first in the series that includes books included in this study, *Al Capone Does My Homework* and *Al Capone Throws me a Curve*. The Autism Research Institute has a controversial reputation for creating the “Defeat Autism Now!” treatment protocol that was discontinued in 2011 for its lack of scientific evidence, its potential for harm, the financial burden it imposed, its controversial therapies, and its connection to eugenics — not to mention its belief in the discredited notion that vaccines cause autism (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2023). In *Team Players*, by Lupica (2018), there is no specific author’s note regarding research into autism. However, the main character goes online to learn more about autism when Sarah, a girl with Asperger’s, ends up on her team. She lands on the website Autism Speaks, which the autistic community has challenged due to its framing of autism and bad financial practices (Cushman, 2023). It also seems notable that Lupica’s (2018) publication frames the character Sarah as having Asperger’s even though the terminology had changed five years earlier with the publication of the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Other authors referenced particular experts or sensitivity readers, such as Friend (2018), Martin (2014), and O’Donnell (2015). In some cases, the author’s note or bio was a chance for the author to share their experiences teaching or otherwise working with individuals with autism (Walz, 2018), or having a child with autism (Bailey, 2019; Finnegan, 2020; McGovern, 2017; Patrick, 2020). In other cases, authors researched by talking to parents or teachers of individuals with autism rather than specifically with autistic individuals (Connor, 2022; Rorby, 2015). The author’s note was also an opportunity for some authors to self-identify themselves on the autism spectrum; Vaught (2019) writes in her author’s note, “Jesse is not my first neurodivergent character, but she is my first character who identifies as having Autism Spectrum Disorder. I tried to honor some of my own experiences through her, which feels like a big personal step” (p.308-309).

Long Term Projects

Autistic characters often suffer from the people in their lives planning aspects of their next steps or their independence from the family unit. This often relates to how the family sees their potential independence, character development, and full development as a human. For example, this quote from *Things I Should Have Known*, by LaZebnik (2018):

“What’s the long-term goal with them, anyway?” James asks. “I mean do people like them get married? Do they have kids?”

“People like them?”

“You know what I mean.” (p.93).

Later in this story, the sister tries to set Ivy up for a relationship but seems stuck on finding her sister an autistic partner. She previously tried to connect Ivy with an autistic boy at her school. However, when Ivy self-identifies as gay, Chloe says to a friend, “So now all I have to do is find a lesbian with autism who lives nearby and is roughly Ivy’s age and who’s available” (p.258). Misconceptions and prejudices exist in the world concerning autistic people — and the character of Alvie challenges and addresses these prejudices head-on in Steiger’s *When My Heart Joins the Thousand* (2018). One example is the “pervasive” myth about disabled people: that they are “incapable of or disinterested in sex” (Stevens, 2021). In *When My Heart Joins the Thousand*, Alvie overhears a conversation between one coworker, Toby, and another, whom Alvie has nicknamed “Unibrow.” When Toby expresses sexual interest in Alvie, Unibrow says, “Gross. You’re sick, man” (Steiger, 2018, p. 37). Alvie is irritated that Unibrow considers Toby’s sexual attraction to her “so repulsive” (Steiger, 2018, pg. 48). “Does he assume that just because I’m different, I’m incapable of having a sexual relationship with anyone? That I’m unable even to feel desire?” (Steiger, 2018, pg. 48). Other books that show autistic characters as capable of relationships and love include *The Love Letters of Abelard and Lily* by Creedle (2019), *What to Say Next*, by Buxbaum (2017), *Tonight we rule the world* by Smedley (2021) and “A Curse, A Kindness” a short story by Duyvis in the edited *Unbroken: 13 Stories by Disabled Teens* compilation (Nijkamp, 2018). Unfortunately, autism contributes to challenges in making and operating in relationships. In the Smedley (2021) book, the main character with autism struggles to break off an abusive relationship and notes, “Hookup apps are murder on my ASD.” (p. 231).

Stereotyping

Autism can come with challenges, but it is important to make sure that autistic characters do not lose their own agency or become merely drivers for other characters to learn and grow. Beckett et. al, (2010) explored literature about disabled characters and found the following problematic themes, the “individual/tragedy model view of disability” (p.379); the “‘Happy ever after’ endings” (p.380); the “‘curio’ stereotype” (p.381); and the “‘lesson to us all’” (p.381) opportunity. Many stories hold instances of discussing these topics directly such as LaZebnik’s (2018), *Things I Should Have Known*:

“You know, if we were pushing our siblings in wheelchairs, people would be nice to them and to us. They’d be like, Oh, the poor disabled people and their wonderful siblings! Let’s hold doors for them! But Ivy and Ethan ...they basically look like everyone else, with just these tiny differences in how they behave and move. And that bugs people. They don’t know what to do with that. It’s like people have a place in their brain for normal, and they have a place in their brain for something obviously wrong, but they can’t deal with something just a little bit different. And that makes them uncomfortable. And when people are uncomfortable, they act like jerks.”(p.125).

Other books fall more into the individual/tragedy model view of disability such as Kehoe’s (2014) *The Sound of Letting Go*, in which the main character Daisy feels imprisoned in her house, while she views her brother Steven as being imprisoned in his

mind, “And the emotion I feel isn’t sorry but anger at being imprisoned in an autism family” (p.80). *How to Speak Dolphin* by Rorby (2017) is another book in which the tragedy model of disability is evident from comments by the main character, Lily, such as, “Adam is their worst nightmare, and Don pays them big-time to take him” (p. 197) and

It occurs to me for the first time that I’ll probably never have a boyfriend and no one will ever want to marry me. I’ll spend my life as Adam’s sister, a carrier of the autism gene, if there is such thing (p.197).

Other books showed some evidence of the “Happy ever after” endings such as the book *How to Build a Hug*, about autistic celebrity Temple Grandin (Guglielmo, 2018). Finally, many books highlighted instances of the “lesson to us all” even if it was not the only theme within the book. For example, in *Because of the Rabbit*, by Lord (2019), the main character, Emma, learns to be a better friend through the experience of befriending Jack. Here the emphasis is on Emma’s character development rather than Jack’s. In *Team Players* by Lupica (2018), a driving force throughout the book is the main character, Cassie attempting to befriend the autistic character Sarah and help her. Ultimately, Cassie apologizes to Sarah, saying, “I never thought you were stupid.... But I didn’t give you credit for being as smart as you are. Which makes me a little bit stupid.” Sarah responds, “You think I didn’t know you were pitying me?” (p.209).

The book, *Real* by Cujec shows the “lesson to us all” as a main theme. With a tagline, *I am intelligent*, the story highlights a young girl, Charity, who at the beginning of the book cannot speak, but who ends up using Facilitated Communication to share her experiences and advocate for students who have been placed in a special school where they are suffering from abuse and academic neglect. The “lesson to us all” focus is evident in the afterward by Cujec which states, “the experts ...labeled her ‘severely mentally challenged.’ They could not see her brilliant mind trapped inside” (p.258).

Implications for Librarians & Authors

White (2022) notes the need for librarians to include neurodivergencies as part of their collection development plan for diverse books. Librarians can also learn more about Critical Autism Studies and Disability Studies to read critically when encountering books with autistic or disabled characters. Including autistic characters in the library is important, but it is also vital to ensure that collections aren’t limited to what Adichie (2009) calls the “single story.” Patrons deserve to see a variety of autistic characters who have agency and who collectively represent different races, backgrounds, and genders (Derman-Sparks, 2013). As Derman-Sparks (2013) notes, “Depending on the quality of the book, they can reinforce (or undermine) children’s affirmative self-concept, teach accurate (or misleading) information about people of various identities, and foster positive (or negative) attitudes about diversity” (para. 1) Librarians are often those who serve on state book nominating committees (Association of Illinois School Library Educators, 2025b; Buckeye Children’s and Teen Book Award, 2025; Florida Association for Media in Education, 2024b; Georgia Children’s Book Awards, 2024; The Great Lakes Great Books Award, 2021; Kentucky Association of School Librarians, 2024b; Maine

Student Book Award, 2025; Missouri Association of School Librarians, 2024; Nebraska Golden Sower Children's Award, 2024; New Jersey Library Association, 2023; North Carolina Library Association — Youth Services Section, 2025; Nutmeg Book Award, 2025; The Nēnē Award Hawaii's Children's Choice Book Award; n.d.; Oklahoma Library Association, 2021; Oregon Library Association, 2024a; Oregon Library Association, 2024b; Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, 2025; State of Rhode Island, 2024; Texas Library Association, 2025; University of Southern Mississippi, n.d.; Washington Library Association, n.d.; William Allen White Children's Book Award, n.d.; Wyoming Library Association, 2025; Youth Services Division of the Delaware Library Association, 2012). Therefore, librarians and other committee members need to understand how to select stories that are not stereotypical representations of autism.

One way librarians can ensure that their books provide a holistic view of neurodiversity is by targeting their efforts on books written by autistic authors. Of the 66 books in our study, 12 were written by autistic authors, or 18%. Autistic authors can provide a perspective on autistic characters that is based in authenticity and personal experience. Reviewing the author's website, dust jacket or other material can help determine how the author identifies and their personal experience with the subject matter (Derman-Sparks, 2013).

As librarians expand the diversity of their collections relating to books with autistic characters, *The Autism Books by Autistic Authors Project* (2024) is an ongoing attempt to catalog all books, nonfiction, and fiction written about and related to autism by autistic authors. The project is searchable by topics and by age of the target audience: Picture books, middle grade, and teen and young adults. The catalog is also searchable by year of publication. Another website, *A Novel Mind*, offers information for "exploring mental health and neurodiversity representation in children's fiction" (A Novel Mind, 2024).

Conclusion

This study identified the books nominated for state Children's Choice awards from 2014-2024 which included an autistic character and examined these books by a directed critical qualitative content analysis, framed by Critical Autism Studies. The study found that 66 books were nominated for a total of 262 nominations among the state lists. States had a wide range of nominations, from 0 to 17 in the decade timespan. In these books, autistic characters were more often male than female, white than people of color, and secondary characters than main characters. Books showed a wide variety of characteristics of autism, both in ways that were nuanced and in ways that were more stereotypical. The ways in which autism was identified in the text often related to general themes of the story, including identification by institution, self, author or publisher, other characters, intersectional identification and identification as maybe. Author notes, interviews and publisher summaries often identified additional information relevant to the text. Authors used notes to share research they had done and their connections to the autistic community if relevant. Finally, themes such as long-term prospects and stereotyping were considered to determine how autistic characters were portrayed as a whole and what children might learn from these books about how autistic characters might live their lives.

References

- Adichie, C. N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story*. [Video]. TEDGlobal.
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story
- Alabama Camellia Children's Choice Book Award. (2014). *Alabama Camellia Children's Choice book award: Rules and description*. (2014).
<https://alabamacamelliaaward.weebly.com/school-librarians.html>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Neurodevelopmental Disorders. In *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- Arkansas State Library. (2024a). *Arkansas teen book award*.
<https://library.arkansas.gov/programs/book-awards/arkansas-teen-book-award/>
- Arkansas State Library. (2024b). *Arkansas choice book awards*.
<https://library.arkansas.gov/programs/book-awards/>
- Arnold, Elana K. (2023, June 14). My beautiful brain. *Elana K. Arnold*.
<https://elanakarnold.com/my-beautiful-brain/>
- Arizona Library Association. (2024). *Grand Canyon Reader Award books—Rules*.
<https://www.grandcanyonreaderaward.org/rules>
- Aspler, J., Harding, K. D., & Cascio, M. A. (2022). Representation matters: Race, gender, class, and intersectional representations of autistic and disabled characters on television. *Studies in Social Justice*, 16(2), 323–348.
<https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v16i2.2702>
- Association of Illinois School Library Educators. (2025a). *Bluestem nominations form*.
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdh49WodzjEOw5cenSpv9mqpDeeJUHED9LmMil4nTv3JpQ9pQ/viewform>
- Association of Illinois School Library Educators. (2025b). *Bluestem steering committee*.
<https://aisled.org/bluestem/>
- Azano, Amy Price, et al. “Understanding the Puzzle Behind the Pictures: A Content Analysis of Children's Picture Books About Autism.” *AERA Open*, vol. 3, no. 2, Apr. 2017, p. 233285841770168. DOI.org (Crossref),
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417701682>
- Azano, A. P., Tackett, M., & Sigmon, M. (2017). Understanding the puzzle behind the pictures: A content analysis of children's picture books about autism. *AERA Open*, 3(2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417701682>

- Bang-Jensen, V. (2010). A Children's Choice program: Insights into book selection, social relationships, and reader identity. *Language Arts* 87(3), 169-176
- Beckett, A., Ellison, N., Barrett, S., & Shah, S. (2010). 'Away with the fairies?' Disability within primary-age children's literature. *Disability & Society*, 25(3), 373-386.
- Bergin, T. (2018). *An introduction to data analysis: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. Sage Publications.
- Berridge, G., & Thomas, J. (2013). Questioning the validity of a state reading list, *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 5(2), 143-156.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and using books for the classroom*, 6(3), ix-xi.
- Black, R. S., & Tsumoto, C. A. (2018). Portrayal of adolescents with autism spectrum disorders in young adult literature. *Exceptionality Education International*, 28(1).
- Booth, E., & Narayan, B. (2021). "That Authenticity is Missing": Australian Authors of#OwnVoices Fiction on Authorship, Identity, and Outsider Writers. *The ALAN Review*.
- Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Sasson, N., Gernsbacher, M. A., Natri, H., & Botha, M. (2023). Anti-ableism and scientific accuracy in autism research: A false dichotomy. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 14, 1-8.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1244451>
- Boynton, J. (2023) Is anything real in Cujec and Goddard's book "REAL?" Facilitated Communication.org. <https://www.facilitatedcommunication.org/blog/is-anything-real-in-cujec-and-goddards-book-real>
- Buckeye Children's and Teen Book Award. (2025). *Nominate*.
<https://bcbookaward.info/nominate/>
- California Young Reader Medal. (2024). Frequently asked questions.
<https://www.californiayoungreadermedal.org/faqs#faq10>
- Chandler, D. L. (2015). *Temple Grandin: Look at what people can do, not what they can't*. MIT News Office. <https://news.mit.edu/2015/temple-grandin-talk-0318>
- Cho, S. (2020). Rethinking genre conventions: Exploring detective formulas and autistic stereotypes in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. *CLUES: A Journal of Detection*, 38(2), 90-99.

- Colorado Council International Reading Association, (2025). Colorado children's book award. <https://www.mhaloin.com/book-awards.html>
- Contra Costa County Library. (2024). *Collection development plan*. <https://ccclib.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/72/2024/06/COL-CollectionDevPlan-2024E.pdf>
- Crow, S. (2010). Children's Choice book award programs: Effective weapons in the battle to get and keep kids reading. *School Library Connection*, 26(9), 1-3. schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/2203354.
- Cushman, O. (2023, May 11). *The Autist papers: The problem with Autism Speaks*. Massachusetts Daily Collegian. <https://dailycollegian.com/2023/05/the-autist-papers-the-problem-with-autism-speaks/>
- de Broize, M., Evans, K., Whitehouse, A. J., Wray, J., Eapen, V., & Urbanowicz, A. (2022). Exploring the experience of seeking an autism diagnosis as an adult. *Autism in Adulthood*, 4(2), 130-140.
- Delaware Department of Education (2024). *Delaware Diamonds 2024–2025*. https://education.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/digital_de/delaware-diamonds-2024.pdf
- Derman-Sparks, L. (2013). *Guide for selecting anti-bias children's books*. Teaching for Change. <https://www.teachingforchange.org/selecting-anti-bias-books>
- Diverse Book Finder. (2025). *Welcome! What is Diverse Book finder?* <https://diversebookfinder.org/>
- Dornback, S. (2019). *Exploring the Schneider Family Book Award, 2004-2018: A case study history and content analysis*. [Doctoral dissertation, Texas Woman's University.] ProQuest dissertations.
- Duyvis, C. (2024). #Ownvoices. CorinneDuyvis.net. <https://www.corinneyduyvis.net/ownvoices/>
- Elmadagli, C. (2023). The future of Critical Autism Studies (CAS): Thinking through critical discourse studies and postcolonial feminism. *Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2833-1508.1143>
- Evans, B. (2013). How autism became autism: The radical transformation of a central concept of child development in Britain. *History of the human sciences*, 26(3), 3-31. doi: 10.1177/0952695113484320
- Fink, L. (2015, November 7). The ripple effect of award lists. National Council of Teachers of English. <https://ncte.org/blog/2015/11/the-ripple-effect-of-award-lists/>

- Florida Association for Media in Education. (2024a). *Sunshine State Young Reader's Award*. <https://www.floridamediaed.org/ssyra.html>
- Florida Association for Media in Education. (2024b). *About: Sunshine State Young Reader's Award*. <https://www.floridamediaed.org/about-ssyra.html>
- Forney, L. (2019, January 24). *Graphic novel weekly 1/24/19: Interview with Jason Walz, creator of "Last Pick."* Geek Dad. <https://geekdad.com/2019/01/graphic-novel-weekly-1-24-19-interview-with-jason-walz-creator-of-last-pick/>
- Garcia, E. (2021). *We're not broken: Changing the autism conversation*. Harvest.
- Georgia Children's Book Awards. (2024). *2024-2024 GCBA Picturebook committee members (for 2026 award)*. University of Georgia. <https://coe.uga.edu/events/georgia-childrens-book-awards/>
- Giles, D. C. (2014). 'DSM-V is taking away our identity': The reaction of the online community to the proposed changes in the diagnosis of Asperger's disorder. *Health*, 18(2), 179-195.
- Hayden, H. E., & Prince, A. M. (2023). Disrupting ableism: Strengths-based representations of disability in children's picture books. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 23(2), 236–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798420981751>
- Henderson, S. A. (1996). A content analysis of of values presented in Newbery Medal winners and Sequoyah children's book award winners. [Master's thesis, Oklahoma State University]. <https://openresearch.okstate.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/0f4a93f9-9ebb-4cc2-8185-0548b1b68395/content>
- Hus, Y., & Segal, O. (2021). Challenges surrounding the diagnosis of autism in children. *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, 17, 3509-3529.
- Hutchinson, C. (2020, Nov 14). *PNW author's book on neurodivergent teen was inspired by her own child*. Seattle Refined. <https://seattlerefined.com/lifestyle/pacific-northwest-author-cat-patrick-book-tornado-brain-neurodivergence>
- Indiana Library Federation (2022). *Young Hoosier Book Award participation and voting*. <https://www.ilfonline.org/yhba>
- Iowa Association of School Librarians. (2025a). *Iowa Children's Choice Award: Purpose of the Iowa Children's Choice Award*. <https://www.iasl-iowa.org/awards/book-awards/iowa-childrens-choice-4-6>
- Iowa Association of School Librarians. (2025b). *Iowa Teen Award: Purpose of the teen award*. <https://www.iasl-iowa.org/awards/book-awards/iowa-teen-award-6-9>
- Journal of Radical Librarianship*, Vol. 11 (2025) pp. 36-85

- Irwin, M., Goldsmith, A.Y., & Applegate, R. (2015). The real deal: Teen characters with autism in YA novels. *Journal of Research on Libraries & Young Adults*, 6. <https://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2015/04/the-real-deal-teen-characters-with-autism-in-ya-novels/>
- Jang, J., Matson, J. L., Adams, H. L., Konst, M. J., Cervantes, P. E., & Goldin, R. L. (2014). What are the ages of persons studied in autism research: A 20-year review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 8(12), 1756-1760.
- Jin, C. (2022). The representation of developmental disabilities in children's picture books: Analysis of five picture books. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Educational Research*, 4(1), 113–128.
- Johnson, H., Mathis, J., & Short, K. G. (Eds.). (2016). Critical content analysis as a research methodology. In *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature* (pp. 1–14). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315651927>
- Jones, S. C., Gordon, C. S., & Mizzi, S. (2023). Representation of autism in fictional media: A systematic review of media content and its impact on viewer knowledge and understanding of autism. *Autism*, 27(8), 2205–2217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231155770>
- Kaney, P. L. (2013). Representations of disability in youth literature: A discourse analysis of award winning books. [Doctoral dissertation, Emporia State University]. <https://dspace01.emporia.edu/handle/123456789/3264>
- Kelley, J. E., Barrio, B. L., Cardon, T. A., Brando-Subis, C., Lee, S., & Smith, K. (2018). DSM-5 Autism Spectrum Disorder symptomology in award-winning narrative fiction. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 53(2), 115–127.
- Kelley, J. E., Cardon, T. & Algeo-Nichols, D. (2015). DSM-5 Autism Spectrum Disorder symptomology in fictional picture books. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 50(4), 408–17.
- Kentucky Association of School Librarians. (2024a). *Kentucky Bluegrass Award*. <https://www.kasl.us/kba>
- Kentucky Association of School Librarians (2024b.) Kentucky Bluegrass Award nominee list nomination/selection guidelines. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cSrR6uHZNuQ0WCAzdrGJZTcNUzq_L8vkQqB_JpJA118/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.kt4whmnpfz1b
- Kidd, K. B., and Thomas, J.T. (Eds.). (2017). *Prizing Children's Literature: The Cultural Politics of Children's Book Awards*. Routledge.

- Kirkus Reviews. (2020, July 15). [Review of the book *My Rainbow*, by T. Neal]. *Kirkus Review*, 88(14).
- Koss, M. D., Johnson, N. J., & Martinez, M. (2018). Mapping the diversity in Caldecott books from 1938 to 2017: The changing topography. *Journal of Children's Literature* 44(1).
- Koss, M. D., & Paciga, K. A. (2020). *Diversity in Newbery Medal-Winning Titles: A Content Analysis*. 16(2).
- Kurz, R. F. (2012). Missing faces, beautiful places: The lack of diversity in South Carolina Picture Book Award nominees. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 18(2), 128-145.
- Lancrenon, A. (2021). *The politics of di/visibility: Narrative positioning and disability representation in children's literature* [PhD, Illinois State University].
<https://doi.org/10.30707/ETD2021.20211012065804061323.999977>
- Leclerc, K. (2019, June 1). When a list is more than just a list. *Nerdy Book Club*.
<https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2019/06/01/when-a-list-is-more-than-just-a-list-by-kirsten-leclerc/>
- Lehman, B. A. (1991). Children's Choice and critical acclaim: A unified perspective for children's literature. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 30(3), 1–20.
- Land of Enchantment Book Award. (2024). New Mexico student choice: Land of Enchantment book award. <https://sites.google.com/view/loe-book-award/home>
- Loomes, R., Hull, L., & Mandy, W. P. L. (2017). What is the male-to-female ratio in autism spectrum disorder? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 56(6), 466–474.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2017.03.013>
- Lordan R, Storni C., & De Benedictis C.A. (2021). Autism Spectrum Disorders: Diagnosis and treatment. In: Grabrucker, A.M., (Ed.). *Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Exon Publications. DOI: 10.36255/exonpublications.autismspectrumdisorders.2021.diagnosis
- Macchia, G. (2022, May 18). Replacing #OwnVoices: Promoting diverse library books With specificity. *We Need Diverse Books*. <https://diversebooks.org/replacing-ownvoices-promoting-diverse-library-books-with-specificity/#:~:text=The%20%23OwnVoices%20hashtag%20was%20created,identity%20of%20their%20main%20characters.>

- MacKenzie, K. T., Mazefsky, C. A., & Eack, S. M. (2023). Obtaining a first diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder: descriptions of the diagnostic process and correlates of parent satisfaction from a national sample. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53(10), 3799-3812.
- Maine Student Book Award. (2025). *How does the Maine student book award work?* <https://sites.google.com/view/mainestudentbookaward/about/the-committee>
- Marshall, T. R. & Rodick, W. H. (2023). The search for more complex racial and ethnic representation in grade school books. Executive Summary, The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/rti/the-search-for-more-complex-racial-and-ethnic-representation-in-grade-school-books/>
- Michigan Reading Association. (2024). *Great Lakes Great Books 2026-2027 nomination form*. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScTeyE84Ai4A0ebSdn2tw3JHDMZy13-maYFpYsDk3q87h7OZA/viewform>
- Milton, D. & Ryan, S. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge international handbook of Critical Autism Studies*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Minnesota Youth Reading Awards. (2024a). *About the Maud Hart Lovelace award*. <https://myrahome.org/About-MYRA>
- Minnesota Youth Reading Awards. (2024b). *Suggest a title for the SOTN Award*. <https://myrahome.org/suggest-sotn>
- Missouri Association of School Librarians. (2024). *Awards and lists: Readers awards*. <https://maslonline.org/awards/>
- Moss, H. (2020, April 15). *Diverse autistic authors Are changing neurodiversity representation in books*. <https://diversebooks.org/diverse-autistic-authors-are-changing-neurodiversity-representation-in-books/>
- Naidoo, J. C. (2014). *The importance of diversity in library programs and material collections for children*. Association for Library Service to Children, American Library Association.
- Nankervis, M. (2022). Diversity in romance novels: Race, sexuality, neurodivergence, disability, and fat representation. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 38(2), 349–363. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-022-09881-6>
- Nebraska Golden Sower Children's Award. (2024). *About the Golden Sower award*. <https://sites.google.com/site/nebraskagoldensower/about-the-award>

- New Jersey Library Association. (2023). *Garden State Children's book awards*.
<https://njlamembers.org/content/garden-state-childrens-book-awards>
- New York State Reading Association. (2025). The Charlotte awards.
<https://www.nysreading.org/Charlotte-Awards>
- North Carolina Library Association - Youth Services Section (2025). *North Carolina Children's Book Award: FAQ*. <https://nccba.blogspot.com/p/faq.html>
- Nutmeg Book Award (2025). *FAQS*. <https://www.nutmegaward.org/about/faqs>
- O'Dell, L., Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, H., Ortega, F., Brownlow, C., & Orsini, M. (2016). Critical autism studies: Exploring epistemic dialogues and intersections, challenging dominant understandings of autism. *Disability & Society*, 31(2), 166–179.
- Oklahoma Library Association. (2021). *Policy manual for Sequoyah book awards Committee & Donna Norvell book award*.
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.oklibs.org/resource/resmgr/handbook/ola_sequoyah_policy_manual21.pdf
- Oregon Library Association. (2024a). *Beverly Cleary Children's Choice award*.
<https://ola.memberclicks.net/bccca-home>
- Oregon Library Association. (2024b). *Oregon reader's choice awards*.
<https://www.olaweb.org/orca>
- Pacific Northwest Library Association. (2024). *YRCA FAQ – Pacific Northwest Library Association*. <https://pnla.org/young-readers-choice-award/yrca-faq/>
- Pennsylvania School Librarians Association. (2024a). *Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice award*. <https://www.psla.org/pennsylvania-young-reader-s-choice-awards-program>
- Pennsylvania School Librarians Association. (2024b). *The Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice awards program, 2024-2025*. https://84d75090-d5b5-412d-bbd4-e81ae856e478.filesusr.com/ugd/fbad5c_7a00f552bf2c4bfdb140896571c2a07c.pdf
- Philippi, L., & Calzada, B. (2022). Why collection development is important. *Knowledge Quest*, 50(4), 8-13.
- Pina-Camacho, L., Parellada, M., & Kyriakopoulos, M. (2016). Autism spectrum disorder and schizophrenia: boundaries and uncertainties. *BJPsych Advances*, 22(5), 316-324.
- Randolph, A. (2013). *The portrayal of the family unit in Children's Choice award books*
- Journal of Radical Librarianship*, Vol. 11 (2025) pp. 36-85

(Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University).

Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award. (2025). *Evaluator's committee*.
<https://www.rebeccacaudill.org/about/evaluator-s-committee>

Rosquist, H.B., Chown, N. & Stenning, A. (Eds.). (2020). *Neurodiversity studies: A new critical paradigm*, Taylor & Francis.

Ross, N. H. (2018). *Sparkling Readers' Motivation: School Librarians' Promotion of the Bluestream Award Books* (Doctoral dissertation, Judson University).

Salem State University. (2025). *Massachusetts Children's Book Award*.
<https://www.salemstate.edu/mcba>

Sass, A.J. (2022a, April 7). Balancing authentic and accessible: A. J. Sass on autistic representation in Ellen Outside the Lines. *We Need Diverse Books*.
<https://diversebooks.org/balancing-authentic-and-accessible-a-j-sass-on-autistic-representation-in-ellen-outside-the-lines/>

Sigmon, M. L., Tackett, M. E., & Azano, A. P. (2016). Using Children's picture books about autism as resources in inclusive classrooms. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 111–117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1473>

South Dakota Library Association. (2024). *SDLA children's book awards*.
<https://www.sdlibraryassociation.org/page/ChildrensAwards>

State Library of Louisiana. (2025). *Louisiana Readers' Choice*.
<https://library.la.gov/services/for-the-public/louisiana-readers-choice/>

State of Rhode Island. (2024). *Rhode Island children's book award selection and submission criteria*. <https://olis.ri.gov/programs-and-support/reading-programs/rhode-island-childrens-book-award/selection-and-submission>

Strauss, V. (2008, December 16). Critics Say Newbery-Winning Books Are Too Challenging for Young Readers. *Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/15/AR2008121503293_pf.html

Sutton, R. (2021, Dec. 16). Leslie Connor talks with Roger. *Notes from the Horn Book*.
<https://www.hbook.com/story/leslie-connor-talks-with-roger-2021>

Texas Library Association. (2025). *Program Participation*. <https://txla.org/tools-resources/reading-lists/texas-bluebonnet-award/voting-guide/>

The Autism Books by Autistic Authors Project. (2024). Books by year of publication.
<https://autismbooksbyautisticauthors.com/>

- The Great Lakes Great Books Award (2021). *The Great Lakes Great Books Award*. Michigan Reading Association. <https://michiganreading.org/Great-Lakes-Great-Books>
- The Nēnē award Hawaii's Children's Choice Book Award (2024). *About the Nēnē award*. <https://www.neneaward.org/>
- Ucar, S. B. (2021). *Representing Dis/ability in Young Children's Books* [San Francisco State University]. <https://doi.org/10.46569/20.500.12680/d217qw01w>
- University of Southern Mississippi. (n.d.). Magnolia book awards. <https://aquila.usm.edu/exhibit/magnolia-book-awards/faq/>
- Venker, Courtney E., and Emily Lorang. "A Commentary on Children's Books about Autism: What Messages Do They Send about Neurodiversity?" *Autism Research*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2024, pp. 452–58. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.3081>.
- Venker, C. E., & Lorang, E. (2024). A commentary on children's books about autism: What messages do they send about neurodiversity? *Autism Research*, 17(3), 452–458. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.3081>
- Vermont Department of Libraries. (2025). *Red Clover book award*. <https://libraries.vermont.gov/red-clover-book-award>
- Vineyard Children's Library. (2023). *Vineyard children's library: Collection development policy*. https://vineyard.lib.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2023/03/collection_development_policy.pdf
- Virginia State Literacy Association. (2024). *Nominate a book for consideration for Virginia Readers' Choice*. <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScE4-S1b6bMr2oBC3o4u8zQUndBLvdF4FZxDuSHz66k9hc9OQ/viewform>
- Volunteer State Book Award. (n.d.). *Policies and procedures for VSBA committees*. <https://sites.google.com/view/volunteer-state-book-award/resources/helpful-tools/policies-and-procedures-for-vsba-committees>
- Waldock, K. E., & Keates, N. (2023). Autistic voices in autistic research: Towards active citizenship in Autism research. In D. Milton & Ryan, S. (Eds.). *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Autism Studies* (pp. 288-302), Routledge.
- Washington Library Association. (n.d.). *Sasquatch Committee*. <https://www.wla.org/sasquatch-committee>

- Webber, C., Santi, E., Cebula, K., Crompton, C. J., & McGeown, S. (2024). Representation of neurodivergence in fiction books: Exploring neurodivergent young peoples' perspectives. *Literacy*, 58(3), 322–334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lit.12369>
- Weir, E., Allison, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2021). The sexual health, orientation, and activity of autistic adolescents and adults. *Autism Research* 15(4). p. 2342-2354.
- White, A. (2022, March). Collection development for neurodivergent students. *School Library Connection*. www.schoollibraryconnection.com/content/article/2275034
- William Allen White Children's Book Award (n.d.). *Who is on the book selection committee?* <https://wawchildrensbookaward.com/joining-the-award-selection-committee>
- Woods, R., Milton, D., Arnold, L., & Graby, S. (2018). Redefining Critical Autism Studies: A more inclusive interpretation. *Disability & Society*, 33(6), 974–979. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1454380>
- Wyoming Library Association. (2025). *Indian Paintbrush book award (Grades 4-6)*. https://www.wyla.org/Indian-Paintbrush-Book-Award#IP_guidelines
- Yokota, J. (2011). Awards in Literature for Children and Adolescents. In S. Wolf, K. Coats, P. Enciso, & C. Jenkins (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843543.ch34>
- Youth Services Division of the Delaware Library Association. (2012). *Bylaws*. <https://dla.lib.de.us/files/2015/02/YSD-Bylaws.pdf>
- Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. In *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science* (pp. 308–319). Libraries Unlimited.

Appendix A

Codes in text

Character

- male / female / non-binary
- LGBTQIA+
- BIPOC
- main character
- secondary character
 - sibling
 - friend
- character development

Physical Characteristics / Behaviors

Communication

- nonverbal
- communicates differently
 - tone
- assisted communication device
- repetitive
- echolalia

Sensory sensitivities

- touch
- hearing
- sight
- smell
- food

Physical Behaviors

- repetitive
- masking
- stimming
- freaking out

Personality

- difficulty changing plans
- difficulty lying
- difficulty looking others in the eye

Special Needs

- therapies
 - occupational therapies
 - school support
 - talk therapy
- special schools
- special treatment at school

Knowledge

- savant like skills/knowledge

- special interests
- unique perception
- lack of knowledge
 - inability to read expressions / tone of voice
- social cues

Relationships

- siblings
- parents
- friends
- others

Autism Identified

- by author
- publisher note
- character (self-identified)
- other characters
- doctor

Appendix B

Book titles and corresponding awards 2014-2024

Titles	State Book Award Lists
A Boy Called Bat	Blue Hen Book Award, 2020-2021, Middle Reader Bluestem Award, 2019-2020, Children's Buckeye Children's and Teen Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 3-5 Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2019-2020, Intermediate Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2019-2020, Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, 2019-2020, Grades 3-5 Maine Student Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-6 Massachusetts Children's Book Award, 2018-2019; Children's Book Nene Award, 2019-2020 Nevada Young Readers' Award, 2020-2021, Young Reader North Carolina Children's Book Award, 2019-2020, Junior Books Nutmeg Book Award, 2019-2020, Elementary Prairie Bloom Award, 2019-2020, Grades 2-3 Virginia Readers' Choice Award, 2018-2019, Elementary Young Hoosier Book Award, 2020-2021, Intermediate
A Friend for Henry	Arkansas Diamond Primary Book Award, 2021-2022 VA Reads, 2021-2022, Primary
A Kind of Spark	Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, 2023-2024, Grades 3-5 Massachusetts Children's Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-6 Sequoyah Book Awards, 2022-2023, Grades 3-5 Rhode Island Middle School Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 6-8 Evergreen Teen Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 6-8 Sasquatch Reading Award, 2023-2024, Grades 3-6
A Whole New Ballgame	Bluestem Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Children's Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2019-2020 Nutmeg Book Award, 2017-2018, Grades 4-6 Sunshine State Young Readers Award, 2017-2018, Grades 3-5, Maine Student Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-8 Rhode Island Children's Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-6 Virginia Readers' Choice, 2017-2018, Elementary, Grades 3-5

Al Capone Does My Homework	Mark Twain Readers Award, 2015-2016, Grades 4-6
Al Capone Throws Me a Curve	Garden State Children's Book Awards, 2020-2021, Fiction
Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?	Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 3-5 Great Stone Face Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-6 Sequoyah Book Awards, 2023-2024, Grades 3-5
Because of the Rabbit	Alabama Camellia Award, 2021-2022, Grades 4-5, Fiction Bluestem Award, 2022, Grades 3-5 Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-6 William Allen White Award, 2021-2022, Grades 3-5 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, 2021-2022, Grades 3-5 Maud Hart Lovelace Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Golden Sower Award, 2021-2022, Grades 4-6 North Carolina Children's Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 2-5 Sequoyah Book Awards, 2020-2021 - Children's, Grades 3-5 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-6 Rhode Island Children's Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Virginia Readers' Choice, 2020-2021, Elementary, Grades 3-5
Benji, the Bad Day and Me	Delaware Diamonds Award, 2019-2020, Grades K-2
Can You See Me?	Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2022-2023, Grades 3-6
Caterpillar Summer	Sunshine State Young Readers Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Georgia Children's Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 4-8 Bluestem Award, 2022-2023, Grades 3-5 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Magnolia Award, 2021-2022, Grades 6-8 Golden Sower Award, 2021-2022, Grades 4-6 South Carolina Children's Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Bluebonnet Award Nominees, 2020-2021, Grades 3-6

Chester and Gus	Young Hoosier Book Award, 2019-2020, Intermediate Books for Grades 4-6 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-6 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2018-2019, Grades 3-6 South Carolina Children's Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 3-5 Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-8* Sasquatch Reading Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-6
Colin Fischer	Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2015-2016, Tween category Oregon Reader's Choice Award, 2014-2015, Middle School Division
Ellen Outside the Lines	Georgia Children's Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-8
Every Shiny Thing	Georgia Children's Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 4-8 South Carolina Junior Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 6-8
Finding Gossamyr	Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2015-2016, Graphic Novels, Grades 4-6
Funny, You Don't Look Autistic	Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2020-2021, Tween Non-fiction
Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen!	Nutmeg Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-6 Garden State Children's Book Awards, 2022-2023, Fiction Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2021-2022, Grades 3-6
How to Build a Hug	Magnolia Award, 2019-2020, Grades K-2
How to Speak Dolphin	Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-6 Buckeye Children's Book Award, 2016, Grades 3-5
How We Roll	Colorado Blue Spruce Young Adult Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 7-12 Sequoyah Book Awards, 2019-2020, Grades 9-12 Rhode Island Middle School Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8
Last Pick	Young Hoosier Book Award, 2021-2022, Grades 6-8 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2019-2020, Graphic Novels, Grades 4-9 Garden State Teen Book Awards, 2020-2021, Grades 6-8

Lupe Wong Won't Dance	Young Hoosier Book Award, 2023-2024, Middle Grade Books Vermont Golden Dome Book Award, 2021-2022, Grades 4-8 Sasquatch Reading Award, 2022-2023, Grades 3-6
Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse	Mark Twain Readers Award, 2021-2022, Grades 4-6
Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend	Nutmeg Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 7-8
Mighty Jack	Arkansas Teen Book Award, 2017-2018; Grades 7-9 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2017 - 2018, Graphic Novel Delaware Diamonds, 2017-2018, Grades 6-8 Little Maverick Graphic Novel Reading List, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5 Maine Student Book Award, 2017-2018 South Carolina Junior Book Award, 2018-2019, Junior Books Young Hoosier Book Award, 2018 - 2019, Intermediate Maine Student Book Award, 2017-2018, Grades 4-6 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2018-2019, Intermediate
Music for Tigers	Nevada Young Readers' Award, 2022-2023, Grades 3-5 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2023-2024, Grades 3-6
My Rainbow	Maryland Blue Crab Young Reader Award, 2020-2021

Navigating Early	Georgia Children's Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 4-8 Nēnē Award, 2014-2015, Grades 4-6 Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 4-8 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 6-8 Iowa Teen Award, 2015-2016, Grades 6-9 William Allen White Award, 2015-2016, Grades 6-8 Magnolia Award, 2014-2015, Grades 6-8 Mark Twain Readers Award, 2015-2016, Grades 4-6 Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Reader's Choice Award, 2015-2016, Grades 7-9 Land of Enchantment Book Award, 2014-2015, Young Adult Division NCSLMA YA Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 6-8 Rhode Island Children's Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 3-6 Volunteer State Book Awards, 2014-2015, Middle School Division Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Reader's Choice Award, 2015-2016, Grades 7-9
Now You Say Yes	South Carolina Junior Book Award, 2023-2024, Junior Books
Planet Earth is Blue	Nutmeg Book Award, 2022, Grades 4-6 Sunshine State Young Readers Award, 2020-2021, Grades 3-5 Georgia Children's Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 4-8 William Allen White Award, 2021-2022, Grades 6-8 Great Stone Face Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades 4-6 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2021-2022, Grades 6-8 Prairie Pasque Award, 2021-2022, Grades 4-5 Virginia Readers' Choice, 2021-2022, Grades 6-8

Rain Reign	Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2016-2017, Intermediate category Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-6 Colorado Children's Book Award, 2017-2018, Grades 3-5 Georgia Children's Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-8 Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Reader's Choice Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-6 Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-8 Bluestem Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-6 Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-6 William Allen White Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2015-2016, Grades 3-5 Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, 2016-2017, Grades 6-8 Maine Student Book Award, 2015-2016, Grades 4-8 Massachusetts Children's Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-6 Mark Twain Readers Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-6 Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Reader's Choice Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-6 Garden State Children's Book Awards, 2016-2017, Fiction Land of Enchantment Lizard Reading List, 2016-2017, Grades 6-8 North Carolina Children's Book Award, 2015-2016, Grades 2-5 Sequoyah Book Awards, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2015-2016, Grades 3-6 Rhode Island Children's Book Award, 2015-2016, Grades 3-6 South Carolina Children's Book Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5 Prairie Pasque Award, 2016-2017, Grades 4-5 Volunteer State Book Awards, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5 Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2015-2016, Grades 4-8 Golden Archer Award, 2016-2017, Grades 3-5
Real	Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2022-2023, Grades 3-6
Remember Dippy	Charlotte Award Nominees, 2015-2016, Grades 9-12
Rogue	Truman Readers Award, 2015-2016, Grades 6-8

Rookie of the Year	Young Hoosier Book Award, 2018-2019, Intermediate
Silent Days, Silent Dreams	Great Lakes Great Books Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-5
Slider	Sunshine State Young Readers Award, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8 Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 4-8 William Allen White Award, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8 Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8 Maine Student Book Award, 2018-2019 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 6-9 Garden State Teen Book Awards, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8 Charlotte Award, 2020-2021, Middle School Division South Dakota Young Adult Reading Program, 2018-2019, Grades 6-8* Bluebonnet Award Nominees, 2018-2019, for Grades 3-6
Summerlost	Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, 2017-2018, Grades 4-6
Superstar	Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 4-6 Sunshine State Young Readers Award, 2019-2020, Grades 3-5 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 4-6 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2019-2020, Grades 3-5 Garden State Children's Book Awards, 2019-2020, Fiction Sequoyah Book Awards, 2018-2019, Grades 3-5
Sweetie	Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades K-3 Golden Sower Award, 2020-2021, Grades K-3 Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award, 2021-2022, Grades K-3 Red Clover Award, 2020-2021, Grades K-4 Washington Children's Choice Picture Book Award, 2020-2021, Grades K-3
Team Players	Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2021-2022, Grades 3-6

Temple Grandin	Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2014-2015, Tween category Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 4-6 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2014-2015, Grades 6-8 William Allen White Award, 2014-2015, Grades 6-8 Great Lakes Great Books Award, 2013-2014, Grades 6-8 Land of Enchantment Book Award, 2015-2016, Young Adult Division Flicker Tale Children's Book Award, 2013-2014, Non-Fiction Books Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2013-2014, Grades 4-8*
The Case of the Deadly Desperados	Nevada Young Readers' Award, 2014-2015, Intermediate Division
The Elephant in the Room	California Young Reader Medal, 2023-2024, Middle School/Junior High Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award, 2023-2024 Golden Archer Award, 2023-2024; Middle Great Stone Face Book Award, 2022-2023 Iowa Children's Choice Award, 2023-2024 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2022 - 2023, Grades 3-5 Keystone to Reading Book Award, 2022-2023, Middle School North Carolina Children's Book Award, 2023 - 2024, Junior Books Rhode Island Middle School Book Award, 2022-2023 South Carolina Children's Book Award, 2023 - 2024, Children Sunshine State Young Reader's Award, 2022 - 2023, Grades 6-8 Volunteer State Book Award, 2022 - 2023, Grades 6-8 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2023 - 2024m Intermediate
The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: Temple Grandin	Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2019-2020, Non-fiction category Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2018-2019, Picture Book Category, Grades K-3
The Love Letters of Abelard and Lily	Nevada Young Readers' Award, 2019-2020, Grades 7-12

The Passing Playbook	Georgia Peach Book Award for Teen Readers, 2022-2023, Grades 9-12 Gateway Readers Award, 2023-2024, Grades 9-12 Rhode Island Teen Book Award, 2022-2023, Grades 7-12
The Real Boy	California Young Reader Medal, 2016-2017, Intermediate Division William Allen White Award, 2015-2016, Grades 6-8 Maine Student Book Award, 2014-2015 Great Lakes Great Books Award, 2014-2015
The Someday Birds	Young Hoosier Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 6-8 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-6 Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2018-2019, Grades 4-8*
The Sound of Letting Go	Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2015-2016, Teen category
The Space We're In	Young Hoosier Book Award, 2021 - 2022, Intermediate
The Stars Beneath Our Feet	Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2018-2019 North Carolina Young Adult Book Award, 2018-2019, Middle School Nutmeg Book Award, 2020-2021, Middle School Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, 2019-2020, Volunteer State Book Award, 2019 - 2020, Grades 6-8 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2019 - 2020, Middle Grade
The Thing about Jellyfish	Arkansas Teen Book Award, 2016 - 2017, Grades 7-9 Black-Eyed Susan Book Award, 2016 - 2017, Grades 6-9 Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, 2016 - 2017, Grades 5 and Up Garden State Teen Book Award, 2017-2018, Fiction, Grades 6-8 Georgia Children's Book Award, 2016 - 2017, Grades 4-8 Indian Paintbrush Book Award, 2016 - 2017 Iowa Teen Award, 2019 - 2020, Grades 6-9 Iowa Teen Award, 2018 - 2019, Grades 6-9 Isinglass Teen Read Award, 2016 - 2017 Land of Enchantment Book Award, 2017 - 2018, Grades 6-8 Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award, 2018 - 2019, Division II Rhode Island Teen Book Award, 2016-2017 Virginia Readers' Choice Award, 2017-2018, Middle Volunteer State Book Award, 2017-2018, Grades 6-8 West Virginia Children's Book Award, 2015-2016

The Unforgettable Logan Foster	Nēnē Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-6 Bluestem Award, 2023-2024, Grades 3-5 Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-8 Kentucky Bluegrass Award, 2023-2024, Grades 3-5
The View from the Very Best House in Town	Volunteer State Book Awards, 2023-2024, Grades 3-5
Things I Should Have Known	South Carolina Young Adult Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 9-12
Tonight We Rule the World	Georgia Peach Book Award for Teen Readers, 2023-2024, Grades 9-12
Tornado Brain	Truman Readers Award, 2022-2023, Grades 6-8
Tune it Out!	Bluestem Award, 2022-2023, Grades 3-5 William Allen White Award, 2022-2023, Grades 6-8 Great Stone Face Book Award, 2022-2023, Grades 4-6 Sequoyah Book Awards, 2021-2022, Grades 3-5 South Carolina Junior Book Award, 2022-2023, Grades 6-8 Volunteer State Book Awards, 2021-2022, Grades 3-5
Unbroken	Garden State Teen Book Awards, 2020-2021, Grades 9-12
Watchdog	Nēnē Award, 2019-2020, for Grades 4-6 Nēnē Award, 2020-2021, for Grades 4-6 Nēnē Award, 2021-2022, for Grades 4-6 Young Hoosier Book Award, 2019-2020, Grades 4-6 Bluebonnet Award Nominees, 2019-2020, for Grades 3-6 Virginia Readers' Choice, 2019-2020, Middle School, Grades 6-8
We Could Be Heroes	Massachusetts Children's Book Award, 2023-2024, Grades 4-6 VA Reads, 2021-2022, Middle Grade
West Meadows Detectives: The Case of the Snack Snatcher	Beverly Cleary Children's Choice Award, 2017-2018, for Grades 2-3
What to Say Next	Florida Teens Read, 2018-2019, Grades 9-12 Georgia Peach Book Award for Teen Readers, 2018-2019, Grades 9-12 Nevada Young Readers' Award, 2019, Grades 7-12 Volunteer State Book Awards, 2019-2020, Grades 9-12

When My Heart Joins the Thousand	Nutmeg Book Award, 2022, High School List, for Grades 9-12
---	--

Note: As mentioned in the text many of the books on the list were also nominated for lists prior to 2014 or post 2024. Those nominations were not included here.

**South Dakota Young Adult Reading Program is now the South Dakota Teen Choice Book Awards*

**Vermont Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award is now the Vermont Golden Dome Book Award*

Appendix C

Book selected for the study

Books that are cited in the article include an *

*Arnold, E. K. (2017). *A boy called Bat*. Walden Pond Press.

*Bailey, J. (2019). *A friend named Henry*. Chronicle Books.

*Balen, K. (2019). *The space we're in*. Margaret Ferguson Books.

*Benjamin, A. (2015). *The thing about jellyfish*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Bildner, P. A (2015). *A whole new ballgame*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

*Bildner, P. (2016). *Rookie of the year*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

*Burgess, R. (2022). *Speak up!* Quill Tree Books.

*Buxbaum, J. (2017). *What to say next*. Delacorte Press.

*Choldenko, G. (2013). *Al Capone does my homework*. Dial Books.

*Choldenko, G. (2018). *Al Capone throws me a curve*. Wendy Lamb Books

Condie, A. (2016). *Summerlost*. Dutton Books for Young Readers

*Connor, L. (2022). *Anybody here seen Frenchie?* Katherine Tegen Books

*Creedle, L. (2017). *The love letters of Abelard and Lily*. Clarion Books.

*Cujec, C. & Goddard, P. (2021). *Real*. Shadow Mountain.

Davis, M. (2017). *Superstar*. HarperCollins.

*Dicks, M. (2012). *Memoirs of an imaginary friend*. St. Martin's Press

*Finnegan, M. (2020). *We could be heroes*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers

Fitzsimmons, I. (2021). *The passing playbook*. Dial Books.

*Friend, N. (2018). *How we roll*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux

*Guglielmo, A. (2018). *How to build a hug: Temple Grandin and her amazing squeeze*

machine. Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Harley, B. (2021). *Now you say yes*. Peachtree.

*Hatke, B. (2016). *Mighty Jack*. First Second.

Hautman, P. (2017). *Slider*. Candlewick.

Higuera, D. B. (2020). *Lupe Wong won't dance*. Levine Querido.

Jensen, C. & Morrison, L. (2018). *Every shiny thing*. Amulet Books.

Kapit, S. (2020). *Get a grip, Vivy Cohen!* Dial Books.

*Kehoe, S. W. (2014). *The sound of letting go*. Viking Books for Young Readers.

*Lawrence, C. (2012). *The case of deadly desperados*. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers.

*LaZebnik, C. (2018). *Things I should have known*. Clarion Books.

*Lord, C. (2019). *Because of the rabbit*. Scholastic Press.

*Lupica, M. (2018). *Team players*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

*Martin, A. M. (2014). *Rain Reign*. Felwel & Friends.

*McCreary, M. (2019). *Funny, you don't look autistic*. Annick Press.

McDunn, G. (2019). *Caterpillar summer*. Bloomsbury Children's Books.

*McGovern, C. (2017). *Chester and Gus*. HarperCollins.

McIntosh, W. (2017). *Watchdog*. Delacorte Press.

McNicoll, E. (2021). *A kind of spark*. Crown Books for Young Readers.

Miller-Lachmann, L. (2013). *Rogue*. Nancy Paulsen Books.

*Miller, A. & Stentz, Z. (2012). *Colin Fischer*. Razorbill.

*Montgomery, S. (2012). *Temple Grandin*. Clarion Books.

Moore, D. B. (2017). *The stars beneath our feet*. Knopf Books for Young Readers.

*Mosca, J. F. (2019). *The Girl Who Thought In Pictures: Temple Grandin*. The Innovation Press.

*Neal, T. & Neal, D. (2020). *My Rainbow*. Kokila.

*Nijkamp, M. (2018). *Unbroken: 13 stories starring disabled teens*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

*O'Donnell, L. (2015). *West Meadows detectives: The case of the snack snatcher*. Owlkids.

*Panteleakos, N. (2019). *Planet earth is blue*. Wendy Lamb Books.

*Patrick, C. (2020). *Tornado brain*. Nancy Paulsen Books.

Peters, S. (2022). *The Unforgettable Logan Foster*. HarperCollins.

Pla, S. J. (2018). *Benji, the Bad Day and Me*. Lee & Low Books.

Pla, S. J. (2017). *The someday birds*. HarperCollins.

*Rodriguez, D. (2013). *Finding Gossamyr*. Th3rd World Studios.

*Rorby, G. (2017). *How to speak dolphin*. Scholastic Press.

*Sass, A. J. (2022b). *Ellen outside the lines*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

*Say, A. (2017). *Silent days, silent dreams*. Arthur A. Levine Books.

Scott, L. & Westcott, R. (2020). *Can you see me?* Scholastic Press.

*Sloan, H. (2021). *The elephant in the room*. Rocky Pond Books.

*Smedley, Z. (2021). *Tonight we rule the world*. Page Street YA.

*Steiger, A.J. (2018). *When my heart joins the thousand*. HarperTeen.

*Sumner, J. (2020) *Tune it out!* Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Trehan, M. (2022). *The view from the very best house in town*. Walker Books US.

- *Ursu, A. (2013). *The real boy*. Walden Pond Press.
- *Vanderpool, C. (2013). *Navigating Early*. Delacorte Press.
- *Vaught, S. (2019). *Me and Sam-Sam handle the apocalypse*. Simon & Schuster.
- *Vernick, S. R. (2013). *Remember Dippy*. Cinco Puntos Press.
- *Walz, J. (2018). *Last pick*. First Second.
- *Zuill, A. (2019). *Sweety*. Schwartz & Wade.