

Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

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Editors' Introduction: With Concern and Hope

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The 2022-2023 academic year was an exciting one for *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*. In June 2023, we oversaw the publication of RDYL's first issue on the Illinois IOPN platform; presented alongside our fellow children's literature journal editors at the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) annual conference; and hosted the BIPOC Breakfast at that same conference. One of the most exciting aspects of ChLA was meeting so many new BIPOC scholars and learning about their research! And earlier in 2023, we worked together with the Illinois iSchool Center for Children's Books to host an emerging Asian American children's literature scholar panel. This coming year also holds much promise, as we formalize our relationship with the Center for Children's Books and continue to partner to promote events and scholarship on campus and beyond.

Meanwhile, the world around us struggles. As we write this introduction, we breathe a sigh of relief as our government avoids a shutdown, but worry about chaos in the House of Representatives. The ongoing and escalating conflict in Palestine and Israel is distressing and warrants critical attention. Too many people—including children—remain unhoused, unsafe, and underfed. Earthquakes, shootings, and other natural and human-caused disasters remind us that we have much to do in the way of caring for our earth and one another. People still target trans youth just for being who they are instead of supporting them in becoming the best versions of themselves. And, most directly related to this journal, a small number of misguided people continue to challenge the many excellent diverse books that are being published for young readers.

We are reminded that our work in academia matters only to the extent that it makes the world a better place for all. RDYL's mission is to “publish scholarship attending to issues of diversity, equity, social justice, inclusion, and intersectionality in youth literature, culture, and

media,” but it doesn’t end there. By fulfilling our mission, we work toward a better collective future, one in which we all give and receive joy, empathy, and peace. We hope that each issue of RDYL does some small measure of this work.

Therefore, it is with both concern and hope that we present RDYL 5.2, now the second issue to be published at the University of Illinois. Across 4 essays, 1 book review, and beautiful artwork, RDYL continues to fulfill its mission to publish high quality research on diversity in youth literature. We begin with Ji Hyun Hong’s analyses of return migration experiences as portrayed in young adult literature in “Return Migration Experiences Portrayed in K-pop Literature: *Somewhere Only We Know* and *Comeback: A K-pop Novel*.” Hong looks at the ways in which young adult novels portray the experiences of overseas Koreans who return to Korea to participate in the intense K-pop industry, specifically asking to what extent and how they discuss identity and belonging. We were inspired by Hong’s article to ask artist Sun Oh to create the cover art, “Purple Train.”

Sara Austin’s “White Girls in the Apocalypse: Race, Gender, and Sexuality at the End of the World” asks us to consider, as Robin Bernstein does, who exactly is considered innocent, and how is that innocence conceptualized and commodified? Her incisive look at whiteness is in conversation with Ebony Elizabeth Thomas’ criticism that media generally—and young adult literature specifically—does not have the capacity to “imagine” the innocence or humanity of Black girls in the way that it does white girls.

Doricka Menefee’s “‘Well, That’s What She Gets...’: Black Teenage Girls’ Sexual and Reproductive Choice in Young Adult Literature” is a sobering look at how Black girls are treated in terms of their sexual choices, bodily autonomy, and parenting choices, and also how they advocate and care for themselves and for others. In keeping with the theme of care, Amber

Moore and Leah Kelley thoughtfully examine how girls care for themselves and for one another in “‘This is No Time for Being Underwater’: Ableism, Rape Culture, and Care Work in *The Nowhere Girls*.” In particular, they examine the character of Erin, an Autistic victim-survivor of sexual violence and her journey to becoming an activist and advocate for her fellow survivors.

RDYL is also proud to continue to review the exciting and important new books being published in the field of children’s literature. As more and more diverse topics are covered, these book reviews are an important resource that journals provide. To that end, Cristina Rhodes and Nithya Sivishankar have carefully co-edited a book review for RDYL 5.2: Kit Kavanaugh’s review of Abbye E. Meyer’s *From Wallflowers to Bulletproof Families: The Power of Disability in Young Adult Narratives* (2022).

We hope, as we did, that you will learn something new from each of the articles and the book review published here. In the coming years, RDYL will continue to publish general and special topics issues that are of immediate and pressing relevance to not only academia, but to everyone who is part of the youth literature ecosystem.

Works Cited

Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York UP, 2011.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*. New York UP, 2019.