

An Investigation into the Impacts of Globalism on Diversity Representations in Children's Picture Book Literature Across the Western Anglosphere

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Abstract

This investigation was a cross comparison of the cultural and geographic regions of the United States, Canada, The United Kingdom/Ireland, and Australia/New Zealand as representatives of the Western Anglosphere to determine the impact of globalism on children's picture books. Mixed methods of quantitative data analysis and critical discourse analysis were used to evaluate each region separately, then those findings were compared and contrasted to determine the impact of globalism per region and across the board. Key findings revealed that while every region had shared themes promoting diversity or pushing against traditional gendered stereotypes, how and how often those themes were approached varied widely and provided a clear reflection of their importance within each region. Final results showed little economic or social evidence of increased globalism for three of the four regions, with Canada being the one exception, having the least locational self-representation, most representation of other nations, and a high level of outside influence in the fields of publisher, author, and illustrator.

Keywords

Children's picture books, globalism, Anglosphere, diversity, gender.

1. Introduction

Children's literature forms some of the earliest building blocks for the development of a child's sense of place within the world, their identity as readers, and for the impartation of societal values and norms. From a young age, children display a high level of consciousness around the differences between themselves and others, and by the time they start school they are already well on their way to solidifying opinions on the topics of race, gender, immigration, and what they believe is acceptable or unjust treatment of others (Nguyen, 2021). It is thus endlessly important for children to see themselves represented and accepted within the medium, alongside representations of others different from themselves as they form these world views. This concept utilizes the metaphor of windows and mirrors, one used to look outside of yourself, while the other reflects back at you; both components key to the development of self-worth and recognition of others as equals (Sims-Bishop, 1990). In addition to seeing a wide diversity in people, seeing a wide variety of ecosystems with their related stories is also important in teaching local customs, safety, and instilling different viewpoints of ecological beauty and wonder within children. For example, children in the Southwest of the United States are brought up on stories of the chupacabra, a desert dwelling beast who kills and drinks the blood of livestock. When they go out to play they are told to be aware of their surroundings just in case the chupacabra is nearby. This folklore uses the mythical danger of the chupacabra as a representation of all the dangers of the desert, teaching children to be aware of their surroundings rather than trying to individually tell kids to watch out for: coyotes, javelinas, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, scorpions, flash floods, and a variety of sharp and poisonous plants as they run out the door. Picture books can be used the same way, to tell stories not only for entertainment, but as a teaching tool, used to pass on knowledge of regional biodiversity and generations of human history and settlement. Through picture books, illustrations can vividly display the natural wonders and

beauty of unique biomes, reinforcing our connection and appreciation of nature. But as our world has become more globalized, intertwining both economically and socially, how has that effected our portrayal of these windows and doors within children's literature? Have our works become globalized as well, showcasing only generic ecosystems with generic casts of characters representative of no real place or culture? Or are unique ecosystems, cultures, and people being represented and spread throughout the regions in a celebration of human and biological diversity? The following research is a cross-comparison between four major regions of the Western Anglosphere to answer the overarching questions: Has an increase in globalism impacted representations of humanity and biodiversity in children's picture books? If so, how have they been affected?

The research took place across four major geographic and cultural regions of the Western Anglosphere: The United States, Canada, The United Kingdom/Ireland, and Australia/New Zealand. It was focused on picture books suitable for pre-and-early readers between the ages of 3 and 8. A selection of nearly 200 popular and awarded books were chosen between 2018-24 as representative of current trends in children's literature. Following the model set by Fairclough (2013), critical discourse analysis was used as a multi-modal analysis tool for both text and imagery to uncover the themes and power dynamics underscoring how each region values and prioritizes the topics of gender, race/ethnicity, and ecology as aspects of their unique cultures and geographical biodiversity. These aspects were selected due to their ability to be theoretically perceived in illustration as well as textual content; versus more intangible concepts of diversity such as sexuality or religion. In addition to the critical analysis of textual and illustrative content, each book had its demographic data compiled into a series of Microsoft Excel sheets to use for quantitative data analysis. This dual collection of numeric and discourse analysis was used to complete a cross-comparison of the total selections within and across the four regions to expose individuality and similarity as determinates of the impact globalism has had. Guiding this effort, the following aims of the research were formulated to break down the above stated research questions into measurable key components:

- Determine the most recognizable and accessible books for each region for the given time-period via award recognition and sales data.
- Determine where those selected books were being published.
- Compare the gender and locational demographics of both authors and illustrators to the demographics of those represented within the selected titles.
- Discover and compare how gender, race/ethnicity, and local biodiversity are textually addressed within and across regions.
- Discover and compare how gender, race/ethnicity, and local biodiversity are illustratively addressed within and across regions.
- Determine if metaphorical windows and mirrors are being represented within children's picture books for each of the selected regions.

2. Literature Review

To understand if, where, and how things have changed, a baseline of normality must first be established. Background literature on the concept of windows and mirrors was first considered, specifying what they are, why they matter, and what to look for to identify their presence or lack thereof within children's picture books. This was followed by establishing the baseline of how gender, race/ethnicity, and ecological diversity have been represented within the medium historically; used to ascertain traditional social norms versus new trends that have spread across the regions, attributable to globalism in their wide sweeping changes. The section will end with noticeable gaps in the literature, and how this research may help fill those gaps.

2.1 Mirrors and Windows: why do they matter to this investigation?

There is an abundance of background literature on the importance of diversity and inclusion within children's literature articulating in detail how failing to reflect the diversity of the human experience can have a profound impact on developing minds. As children grow up, they look around at the world to figure out their own place within it, if they do not see representations of themselves, it can negatively affect their conceptualization of self-worth, as well as put limits on what they believe is possible to achieve for themselves and those like themselves (Sims Bishop, 1990; Adichie, 2009; McCallum and Stephens, 2011). But too much exposure to images and stories reflecting only people like oneself can lead to an inflated conception of the value or worth of one human being over another, with detrimental consequences for society (Sims Bishop, 1990). This balancing act of representation and diversity is key to a society that values equality and justice. One of the places children can look and see a broader view of the world than would ordinarily be possible within the limited scope of their homes, schools, and communities is through the medium of children's picture books. Beyond this critical exposure to people different and similar to themselves, picture books actively teach our youth the norms, values, and current attitudes of a society towards every aspect of life (Nguyen, 2021). Authors and illustrators create fantastical worlds and adventures as a dual form of learning and entertainment. These stories can either resonate with something inside our youth and spark empathy and curiosity, or isolate and devalue them through negative representation or a lack of representation all together. Sometimes this is done by authors and illustrators with intention; calling attention to an issue explicitly by highlighting either conformity to, or rebellion against, the social norms they want to either reinforce or push against. But these values can also be imparted without intentionality, by showing actions or traits without direct attention or commentary, the author/illustrator is implicitly imparting the knowledge that this behaviour or trait is socially acceptable, an unquestioningly normal part of life and society (McCallum and Stephens, 2011; Nguyen 2021).

This concept of implicit acceptance also applies in reverse however, when people or characteristics are left out of the picture, it can reinforce the idea that they are less important or not socially acceptable to society, creating or reinforcing existing stereotypes through implicit rejection or bias (Adichie, 2009; Nguyen 2021). Adichie (2009) addresses the lack of that representation in her own Nigerian community growing up, stating that when she started writing stories of her own, they contained the details of little blond white kids who ate apples and joyfully discussed sunny days as a rarity because that is what she had been taught books were about, despite the fact that those features had nothing to do with her own lived experience. Her life had been devalued by the available children's literature as not important enough to be represented, and as a young child she had already internalized that message of unworthiness to the point that it did not occur to her to attempt to write about people like herself. Beyond feelings of unimportance to society, a consistent lack of metaphorical mirrors within children's literature has been linked to disengaging with books and reading all together (Niland, 2021). That disengagement has the potential to cast an ever-spreading ripple of consequence throughout a person's life and beyond as they themselves have children, who are in turn taught by example to deprioritize books and literacy as an absent factor in the home. The concepts and examples above heavily influenced the selection of questions asked for each book, looking not only at what is there, but what has gone missing from the region(s) to determine if globalism has hindered or supported these representations of windows and mirrors.

2.2 Representation of Gender in Children's Literature

Gender representation can be broken up into two parts, sheer numerical representation and the value/importance assigned to characters of different genders. Caple and Tian (2021, p.187) found that while Australia did a capable job at balancing gender in numbers, it firmly stuck to traditional gendered stereotypes in appearance and representation, with female characters illustrated in highly feminine clothing, often with make-up and jewellery added in comparison to their casually dressed male counterparts. Koss (2015) concluded that women and minorities were much more likely to be assigned

to supportive character roles than being allowed to be the star of the show. When journalist Ferguson (2019) completed an in-depth look at 2018's 100 bestselling picture books in the UK, she found that women and ethnic minorities were being silenced, quite literally; out of those one hundred titles she analysed:

Only 11 characters of colour were given speaking parts across all the 100 books and just 79 female characters mentioned in the texts also spoke, compared with 149 male characters. Speaking roles for male characters rose by 19% over the previous year, while one in five bestsellers did not feature any females at all.

The Ferguson investigation was not used to create a baseline idea of representation, her representative sample being taken so close in time proximity to this investigation, but rather was an important trend to document as a potential sign of globalism if it carried across the regions, or if this regression in equal representation was a unique behaviour to the United Kingdom. Lee (2024) discovered that when picture book biographies on notable female figures in STEM were analysed, personal information regarding their role as wives and mothers was included as relevant information. Those same traits (husband or fatherhood) were not typically noted for the male figures of the same books, perpetuating the stereotype of the role of women as the primary nurturer (Hale, 2024). Results of a cross-cultural study on picture books found within classrooms in Australia and the United States demonstrated a number of ways in which gender can be assessed, from the use of gendered pronouns, depictions of appearance, personality traits, occupation, and emotional presentation (Adam and Harper, 2021). From a very young age kids will search out those features to determine the gender of the character, down to assertions that a character must be a male or female based upon the colour of their clothes or even the illustrated positioning of their bodies. As children attempt to make sense of the stories they are told, it does not seem to matter if the characters are human, animal, or even a celestial body, kids will look for evidence of gender and representation to give context to the character within their own worldview (Hill and Bartow Jacobs, 2019).

2.3 Representation of Race and Ethnicity in Children's Literature

For some children, picture books may be the first exposure they have ever had to individuals different from themselves, but for many others, the real challenge comes in finding books representative of someone who looks or acts like them. Muller and Braden (2024) discuss how the odds of finding these metaphorical mirrors in children's literature decrease as the categories of minority status increase to two or more, using the example of extreme difficulty in finding suitable materials to reflect the lives of black, Jewish children. In *I See You, Do You See Me?* authors Caple and Tian (2021) investigated early childhood picture books that were either award winning or nominated by the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). Their investigation centred on the portrayal of diversity and representation within these award winners, honourees, and those shortlisted; with findings that "we do not see are characters that reflect Australian society in their full diversity of ability, sexuality and ethnicity" (p. 188). But adding diversity like a box to be check-marked has come with its own dangers, with tokenism falling into the trap of the single-story theory proposed by Adichie (2009), reinforcing stereotypes in the portrayal of minority characters, and thus increasing their marginalization (Gultekin and May, 2019). Orgad et al. (2021) gives one such example of this marginalisation in the beloved children's classic Paddington stories, which the authors profess is an implied message of xenophobia; that one should be tolerant and accepting of foreigners, but on the condition that the foreign character needs to change their own looks or behaviours first to better assimilate within the social norms of their new homeland.

2.4 Representation of Nature in Children's Picture Books

This category had the least amount of available background literature to be found. Investigations into the portrayal of the natural world were only obtained for the regions of Australia and the United

States, with similar results for both. Authors Babba, McBurniea, and Miller (2018) found that as time has progressed, depictions of nature in children's picture books has both altered and decreased in Australia. Representations of flora and fauna have become more realistic, but fewer books are set within the wilds, with cityscapes and suburbs overtaking the natural world as backdrops to the story characters. Williams Jr. et al. (2012) had similar findings across children's picture books in the United States, proposing that people had become isolated from nature in the region and thus its perceived relevancy to children's literature had also declined in a positive reinforcement cycle as the next generation is raised on the books that devalue the natural world and our place within it, and become further isolated. Based upon the baseline provided from these two regional studies, we know that depictions of nature are dropping, but to determine if that is a global trend multiple factors of nature were considered in this investigation. How much nature was present across the regions, how that nature was conveyed to the readers, what type of nature was displayed (regional or generic), these were all questions that helped to determine the global influence on the portrayal of the natural world in picture books.

2.5 Gaps in the Background Literature

While there are previous studies present in the scope of how race/ethnicity and gender diversity has been shown in children's picture books, there is a lack of research on multi-national (3+ regions/nations) cross comparison studies in the subject matter of children's picture books, with the majority of literature being focused on regional representations of diversity. There are further gaps following the increased accessibility for authors and/or illustrators to be sourced by large publishing houses from across the globe, representing regions they may have never seen and the impacts that could have on representing the unique biodiversity, demographics, and cultures of each region. This multi-regional investigation into what is being represented in children's books across the Western Anglosphere, and who is determining that representation, has the potential to fill those gaps noted above with a direct look at a large sample size of books taken from four distinct geographical and cultural regions, and the publishers, authors, and illustrators who create them.

3. Methodology

Critical discourse analysis posits that language and power are closely intertwined, that language does not just represent or reflect society's values, but also guides it along by defining "the nature and meaning of everyday processes and events. As we do so, there will be people, processes and things, represented as good or bad, desirable or undesirable. There may be things that are omitted, ignored or misrepresented" (Machin and Mayr, 2023, p. 3). This idea of the representative and guiding nature of language was originally developed to complete a purely textual analysis. But the same tenets of looking for omissions and misrepresentations promoted above by Machin and Mayr (2023) apply equally to the illustrative and numerical analysis, with the idea of looking not just at what is present, but what is missing or distorted from the reality of the region it is based upon. And with Caple and Tian (2021) finding that 83 percent of characters shown within picture book illustrations are categorized as supporting characters, pets, or background extras; the importance of analysing not just textual data but illustrations with the same keen eye is critical to accurate results.

To accomplish this analysis, a sample of children's picture books were chosen from best-selling and awarded book lists for the years between 2018-24 to best represent the current trends in children's picture book content. Awarded books were chosen to represent what experts in the field believe are the best examples of picture book literature each year in the region; while the selection of popular books was chosen to represent that reality of what children were most likely to be exposed to via popular literature. The following steps were taken to collect the data for analysis, beginning with the creation of a book selection criteria creating the qualifications and restrictions to ensure a fair comparison across the regions.

3.1 Book Selection Criteria

- All books must be illustrated.
- Must be appropriate for readers between ages 3-8 years old, with a minimum of two years of overlap within the category. E.g. No books rated between the ages of 0-3 were chosen, nor those only recommended between 8-12, but 2-5 or 7-9 were deemed acceptable ranges.
- Must have a story – no alphabet books, world record books, advent calendars, sticker/activity books, songs, or instruction manuals.
- Must be in English, or for awarded translated books, version awarded must have been in English.
- Compilation Books – Only the first story within the compilation was analysed.
- Awarded Books. Three books per region were chosen from notable awards lists each year, and for multinational regions at least one award list per nation:
 - **United States** - Theodor Seuss Geisel, Caldecott, and Boston Globe-Horn.
 - **Canada** – Marilyn Baillie Picture Book, TD Canadian Children’s Literature, and Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver.
 - **United Kingdom and Ireland** - KPMG Children’s Books Ireland, Waterstones, and Carnegie for Illustration (formerly Kate Greenaway).
 - **Australia and New Zealand** – Childrens’ Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Early Childhood Category, CBCA Picture Book Category, New Zealand Book Trust.
- Popular Books. Four books were chosen from best-sellers lists at equal points throughout the year from weeks 13, 26, 39, and 52, with a caveat for additional holiday themed books noted below. The best-sellers lists that were chosen for each region as follows:
 - **United States** – New York Times Best Sellers List – Children’s Picture Books
 - **Canada** – The Globe and Mail Bestsellers – Juvenile
 - **United Kingdom/Ireland** – The Bookseller – Children’s Picture Books
 - **Australia/New Zealand** – Readings Australia – Kids and YA

The highest selling book for the week that fit all criteria was chosen. If no list was published that week, or no suitable candidate was found that met all the qualifications, the surrounding weeks were consulted in either direction with priority for being as close to the original selection date as possible for equal representation across the year while still meeting all other criteria. If the top selling book of the month/week was directly tied to a nationally recognised holiday, it was selected alongside an alternative non-holiday themed book to better represent the average popular book, while still acknowledging the cultural implications of the holiday book.

3.2 Numerical Data Collection

3.2.1 Census Data

Census Data was used to compare each region displays of diversity to their respective real-world demographics to analyse any shortfalls, or potential global influence on representation. All census data was manually consolidated if more than one nation resided under the compared regions to get a representative overview of the region as a whole. In addition, categories of race/ethnicity were condensed to be as identical as possible for a fair multi-regional cross-comparison. The original data from each census can be provided upon request. The most recent data available was pulled per region on the following years:

- United States – 2020
- Canada – 2021
- UK and Ireland – 2021 and 2022
- Australia* and New Zealand – 2021 and 2023

*Australia has a different way of classifying their census data than any other region, including their regional partner of New Zealand. Instead of asking white, Asian, etc Australia asks for detailed ancestral origin information down to the country instead of ethnicity. The category of “Australian” was removed from the census data as a non-racial/ethnic category that highly skewed racial data results in favour of “Oceanic/Pacific Islanders” that could not be corroborated by any other means in terms of racial/ethnic composition.

3.2.2 Book Data

The following data was collected from each book selected for the purposes of this research. Each region consolidated numerical data points with excel workbooks for each region containing individual book data available upon request. Specific spreadsheet terminology: N/A* Main Character Not Applicable - there either was no main character, or the figure was an incorporeal/constantly changing figure. N/A** - Author and/or Illustrator Not Applicable – there was no author and/or illustrator credit given to a human, it was a corporation creation.

- **Book Background Information**
 - Year Originally Published
 - Location Originally Published
 - Duplicate Regions – If/where it made the selected list for more than one region.
- **Author and Illustrator Demographics**
 - Self-Professed Gender Identity
 - Current Country of Residence
- **Book Contents – Gender**
 - Male
 - Female
 - Unknown
- **Book Contents – Race/Ethnicity**
 - White, Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Aboriginal, Indigenous N. Americans, Māori, Pacific Islander, Indian, Other (specify), Unknown
- **Book Contents – Anthropomorphic Characters**
 - Species
 - Gender

3.3 Caveats and Criteria for Accurate Counting

The following criteria and caveats were formulated to help create an accurate count across all books equally, limiting personal bias and variation between who, how, and what was counted.

- The character in question must have enough of their body visible on the page to be confident in assessment of gender or race, e.g. characters who were represented entirely as a pair of legs in jeans exiting the page were not counted under any category.
- Generic animals/creatures – When unable to accurately identify distinct species shown in illustration, notate that specifically using u/k for unknown. E.g. Bird, U/K, or Tropical Fish, U/K.
- Aboriginal or Black - If there are clear textual or illustrative ties to aboriginal culture or themes count as aboriginal, if dark skin and no other cultural clues then they are counted as Black so as not to over count the representation of indigenous peoples.
- Book Series - If there are multiple books in a series, each book was considered as a standalone title without prior knowledge of the world.
- Author and Illustrator Locational Data – Final counts only included where the author/illustrator currently resided according to their own provided information, not where they were originally from or if they had lived abroad due to the large variety of information provided.

3.4 Critical Analysis Data Collection – Questionnaire

In addition to the numerical data points captured above, each book underwent an in-depth critical discourse analysis regarding theme and content in relation to the categories of gender, race/ethnicity, and biodiversity/ecosystem. Identical questions were asked for every book. The master questionnaire with compiled theme data and individual book notes available upon request.

3.4.1 Critical Analysis Components of Gender & Race/Ethnicity

- How was language used to describe traits of the character, noting specifically positive, negative, or neutral factual language in description?
- Use of pronouns or gendered titles
- Background power dynamics
- Reinforcement of stereotypes
- Challenging or subverting stereotypes

3.4.2 Biodiversity & Ecosystem

- Identifiable flora and fauna specifically found in textual content
- Identifiable flora and fauna visualized through illustration
- Specific location, as found through text or illustration
- Specific ecosystem if recognizable
- General biome and/or climate
- A lack of any of the above categories for either text or illustration was also noted.

3.5 Methodology – Other Notes

- One title awarded in New Zealand in 2024 was unable to be obtained within the United States, the title *Paku Manu Ariki Whakatakāpōkai* (Keeble, 2023). It was replaced with the next available title from the same list and year *Hatch and Match* (Paul, 2024).

4. Results

4.1 Gender

4.1.1 United States of America

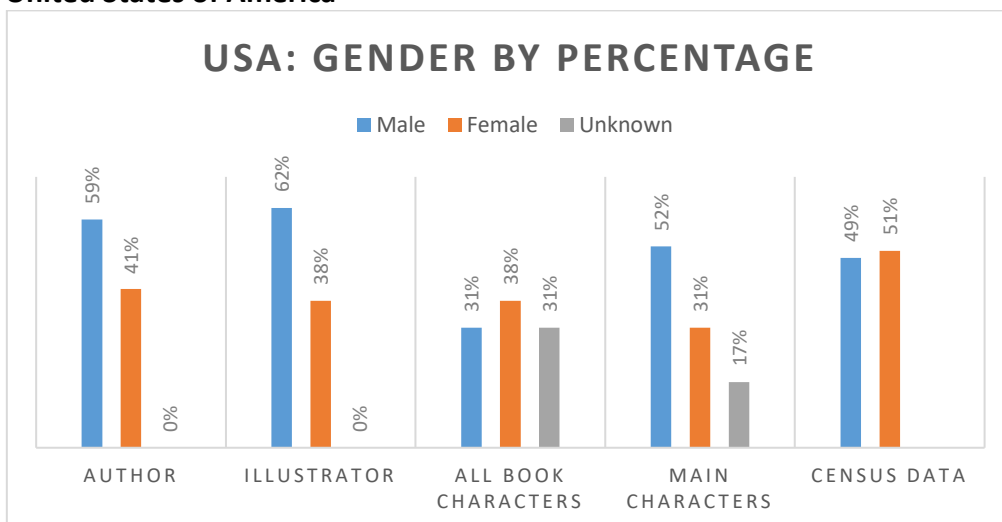


Figure 1. USA Gender by Percentage. Census Data referenced from: (Blakeslee et. al., 2023)

Table 1. USA Gender by the Numbers. Census Data referenced from: (Blakeslee et. al., 2023)

USA: Gender By the Numbers					
	Author	Illustrator	All Book Characters	Main Characters	USA Census
Male	29	29	339	22	162,685,811
Female	20	18	412	13	168,763,470
Unknown	0	0	340	7	N/A

As shown in the tables above, within the region of the United States there were more male authors and illustrators than their female counterparts by a significant percentage, with 59% of all authors being male, and 62% of all the illustrations being completed by men. This is a significant difference from gendered population statistics, which show men making up 49% of the population. This trend of more male than female characters continued in the main character statistics with a 21% increase in male main characters over female main characters. Despite there being seventy-one more identifiably female characters than males throughout the complete selection of books for the region, female characters were much more likely to be side or support characters secondary to the main protagonist. Unknown or genderless characters had the least chance of being main characters, making up only 17% of all main characters.

There were no books that had only female characters, but two titles: *Noodle and the No Bones Day* and *How to Catch the Easter Bunny* contained exclusively male casts (Wallace, 2017; Graziano, 2022). When gender was provided via text or illustration, illustration was much more likely to be the deciding factor. Ten titles contained exclusively gender-neutral language yet gendered character portrayals via their illustrations (Rubin, 2012; Martin, 2015; Wallace, 2016; Kotb, 2018; Woodson, 2018; Yang, 2019; Scott, 2020; Salati, 2022; McConaughy, 2023; Willems, 2023). While only two titles had the opposite experience: *Time for School*, *Little Blue Truck* and *The Serious Goose* wherein pronouns were used to describe characters that were drawn in an entirely gender-neutral fashion (Kimmel, 2019; Schertle, 2021). Four titles were entirely gender neutral, with three of the four coming from a series about an anthropomorphic fox; while the fourth book *I Did it!* was a standalone title about learning to ride a bike (Tabor, 2018; Tabor, 2021; Emberley, 2022; Tabor, 2023).

While the region did poorly in equal representation according to the numerical data, the critical analysis showed several examples of characters challenging gender stereotypes under a various themes. One title, *Big*, used the authors lived experience growing up as a large black woman to highlight the bias of unfair expectations and different rules of acceptable conduct for those of different races, sizes, and genders (Harrison, 2023). Others pushed against stereotypes through normalisation, by having a character go against traditional gender roles without direct acknowledgement. Two titles by quietly showcasing male characters as equal or primary caregivers to their children (Lang, 2004; Reynolds, 2022). *The Good Egg* by showing a woman with a successful career as a doctor (John, 2019). Acceptable clothing/appearance standards for males were challenged through illustration, by having a little boy unabashedly wear a tutu, while another flouted gender clothing conventions with a beloved sparkly pink unicorn t-shirt (Snyder, 2017; Wallace, 2019). Seven titles normalized equality between genders by consistently showing male and female characters in equal settings, with equal roles and responsibilities, or even with a lack thereof, with boys and girls playing in the mud or acting wild without regard to stereotypes of acceptable behaviour (Clarke, 2016; Snyder, 2017; Sotomayor, 2019; Gaines, 2020; Lindstorm, 2020; Evans et al, 2021; McConaughy, 2023). Only one book for the region had characters exclusively conform to traditional gendered stereotypes of behaviour and dress in *Hello Lighthouse*; a tale set in a bygone era with highly gendered roles and appearances, the female was portrayed as primary caregiver, housekeeper, and cook after her arrival on rocky outcropping with her lighthouse keeper husband (Blackall, 2018).

4.1.2 Canada

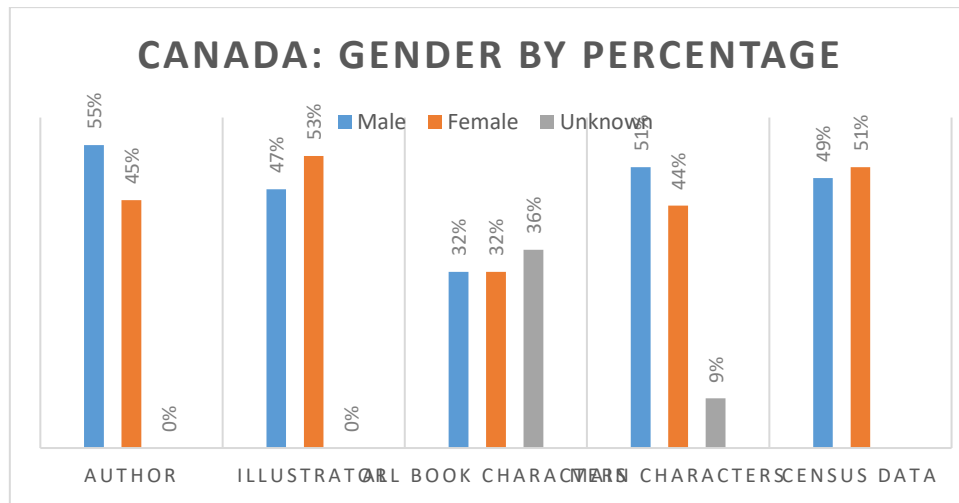


Figure 2. Canada: Gender by Percentage. Census Data referenced from (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Table 2: Canada: Gender by the Numbers. Census Data referenced from (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Canada: Gender by the Numbers					
	Author	Illustrator	All Book Characters	Main Characters	Canada Census
Male	28	24	596	23	162,685,811
Female	23	27	589	20	168,763,470
Unknown	0	0	662	4	N/A

As documented in the tables above, there were 10% more male authors than female, but female illustrators outweighed men by 6% for the region. Canada had a nearly even split in total male to female characters, with a difference of six more male characters than female. However, unknown or genderless characters outweighed both male and female characters in total for the region, with 36% of all characters falling into this category. Despite the percentage of male and female total characters being identical at 32%, male character did take a slim 7% majority in the category of main characters, with three more male main characters than female. Despite their dominant percentage of book characters overall, only four main characters presented as unknown or genderless out of the total of forty-seven main characters available for the region.

Two titles with human characters contained gender exclusivity, with *The Three Brothers* only representing or talking about male characters, and *Birdsong* containing an entirely female cast (Flett, 2019; Louise-Gay, 2020) Four books had gendered pronouns while being illustrated as entirely gender neutral: *Little Blue Truck Makes a Friend*, *Little Blue Truck's Halloween*, *Time For School Little Blue Truck* and *The Big Cheese* (Schertle, 2016; Schertle, 2021; Schertle, 2022; John, 2023). While in comparison seven titles were written in gender neutral language yet depicted gendered characters throughout the illustrations (Dr. Seuss, 2014; Smith, 2019; Tamaki, 2020; James, 2020; Gorman, 2021; Fan, 2022; Pendziwol, 2023).

Containing elements that both challenged behavioural stereotypes while simultaneously demonstrating gender bias, the book *When the Moon Comes* showcased male and female characters playing hockey together on a frozen lake, a traditionally male dominated sport; yet the author only named male characters, showing their increased value and importance to the story line over their female counterparts, despite the main character being a female based on process of elimination determining the narrator (Harbridge, 2017). Canada had significantly more titles than any other region displaying fathers as equal or primary caregivers, subverting gendered stereotypes that caregiving or

parenting is a feminine role in eight of their stories (Munsch, 2011; EOne, 2016; Smith, 2019; Ludo Studios, 2020; Munsch, 2020; Ludo Studios, 2021; Cassidy, 2022; Forsythe, 2022). *Dear Girl, Bloom* and *When You Can Swim* made direct reference to sexism and gender roles, encouraging women and girls to be themselves and find out what they want and enjoy in life regardless of societal pressure (Rosenthal, 2017; Maclear, 2018; Wong, 2023). Seven other works in the region defied gendered stereotypes silently, normalising gender equality without calling direct attention to the subject by: showing women and girls in roles of leadership, men embracing traditionally feminine hobbies or appearances, or showing there are no occupations or hobbies suitable for only one gender; highlighting diversity and equality throughout stories otherwise unrelated to the direct presentation of gender roles (Smith, C., 2019; Smith, C., 2020; Morstad, 2021; Cassidy, 2022; Forsythe, 2022; Rinker, 2023; Vegara, 2024).

Three titles did promote gendered stereotypes in the region. One, *Town is by the Sea*, was set in the past and the gender roles within were true to the gender roles of the era, with men making up the bulk of the working force and providers, while women were relegated to homemakers whose primary duties were cooking, cleaning, and childrearing duties. But it isn't a romanticised tale, rather it highlights the lack of choice both men and women faced in the past, where they knew their fate was closing in on them despite the present sunny day in carefree childhood (Schwartz, 2017). The next tale that conformed to gender stereotypes was originally written in the past, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* – written in 1957, the characters were highly gendered in role and appearance, with female characters in dresses and bows, women being the primary caregivers, and male characters making up twice as many female characters presented at fifty-nine recognizable male characters to twenty-seven female characters. The final title that promoted gender stereotypes was *The Smart Cookie* – This story failed women in both sheer number representation and in theme, with only five female characters out of a cast of forty-eight, the main character (a female) struggles academically and feels stupid, but later feels better about herself after receiving praise for being creative; falling into age old gendered stereotypes where women are seen as naturally less intelligent as men in the fields of STEM, but are allowed to be artistic and creative (John, 2021).

4.1.3 United Kingdom & Ireland

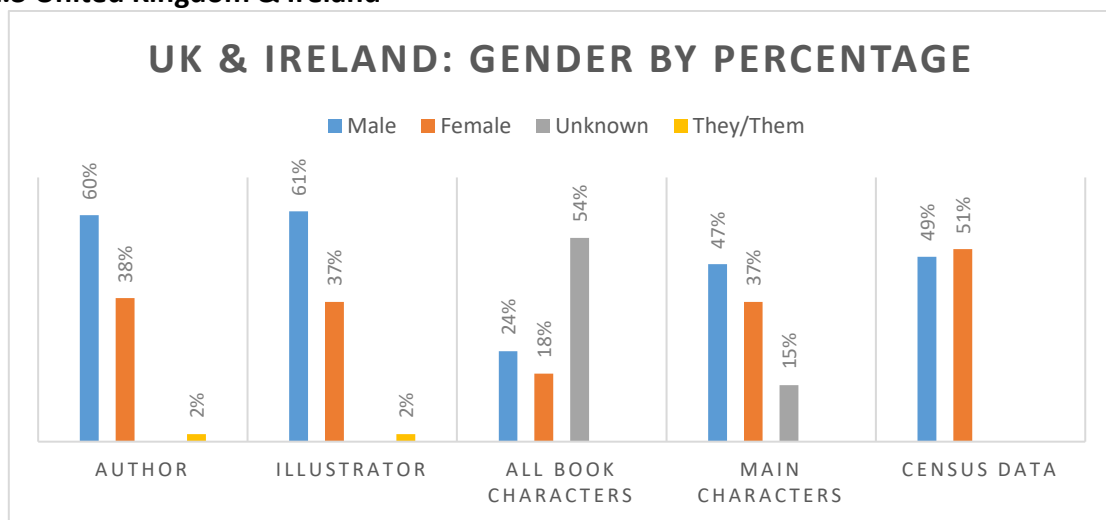


Figure 3. UK & Ireland: Gender by Percentage. Census Data Compiled from (CSO, 2022; NISRA, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Scotland's Census, 2022)

Table 3. UK & Ireland: Gender by the Numbers. Census Data Compiled from (CSO, 2022; NISRA, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Scotland's Census, 2022).

UK & Ireland: Gender by the Numbers					
	Author	Illustrator	All Book Characters	Main Characters	UK/Ireland Census
Male	32	31	449	37	35,299,821
Female	20	19	399	29	36,786,735
Unknown	0	0	990	12	N/A
They/Them	1	1	0	0	N/A

Males dominated the categories of author and illustrator for the region, comprising 60 and 61% of their respective totals. This region stood out as the only one to have an author/illustrator who did not use gendered pronouns to make the list of awarded and popular books over the period of 2018-24. When it came to the statistics of total book characters, unknown/gender neutral characters topped the charts at 54%, containing 990 unknown or gender-neutral characters. In second place for total characters were those presenting as male, comprising 24% and lastly 18% of all characters were female presenting. This trend did not carry over into main character statistics however, with male characters taking the lead at 47%, or thirty-seven out of seventy-eight total main characters. Female presenting characters made up 37% of main characters, and gender unknown or neutral characters were the least represented at 15% with twelve main characters. No category came close to matching the real-life regional census ratio of 49% male to 51% female for the region.

The only gender exclusive book was *The Wolf, The Duck, and the Mouse* containing a fully male cast (Barnett, 2017). Textual gender was more prominent than illustration in titles that had only one or the other, with five titles having gender pronouns textually being while being drawn in a gender-neutral fashion; all titles in this category had main casts who were anthropomorphic rather than human (Ahlberg, 1980; Donaldson, 2019; Hendra and Linnet, 2020; Hendra and Linnet, 2023; Hendra and Linnet, 2024). Books without textual gender yet containing gendered via illustration included the titles *We're Going on a Ghost Hunt* and *10 Little Bookworms* (Brownlow, 2019; Mumford, 2023).

Titles *Bluey: Daddy Putdown*, *The Comet* and *The Dinky Donkey* depicted fathers as either primary or equal caregivers to their children (Smith, C. 2019; Bluey, 2021; Todd-Stanton, 2022). Five titles went against gendered appearance and/or hobby taboos for male characters (Gray, 2018; Hendra and Linnet, 2020; Fletcher, 2021; Duggee, 2022; Percival, 2023). Going against emotional stereotypes, *The Hare Shaped Hole* was a touching tale of grief, loss, and vulnerability following a male protagonist that challenged stereotypes of crying as a weak or feminine trait (Dougherty, 2023). There were eight books for the region that pushed against gendered stereotypes for female characters in occupation or hobby. These titles subverted traditional gender roles by women in positions of leadership and authority and with occupations or hobbies that are traditionally viewed as masculine, such as prominent roles in the sciences (Todd-Stanton, 2017; Bryon, 2019; Hendra and Linnet, 2020; Smith, C. 2020; Woodgate, 2021; Walliams, 2022; Savage, 2023; Vegara, 2024). Three more titles showed female characters defy gendered expectations in either appearance or behaviour; whether that was dressing in traditionally masculine attire, adventuring outdoors just as much as their male counterparts, or even in the seemingly silly act of being a joyfully gassy little donkey just like her father before her (Gray, 2018; Smith, C., 2019; McCarthy, 2023).

Three titles pushed against stereotypes while reinforcing others. The first, *The Haunted Lake*, the author repeatedly based women's worth/value to society upon their looks, including pitting women against each other using looks-based insults on behalf of the antagonist to describe a female protagonist's appearance after years of hard labour outdoors as a fisherwoman; yet simultaneously that fisherwoman was portrayed as a positive character, a strong, independent woman who made her own decisions and went against traditional gender roles and expectations in a title set in an unknown era of the past (Lynch, 2020). The next two titles were by the same author, Fletcher (2018; 2020) in the series *The Dinosaur that Pooped* – both titles had the main character, a young boy, sit down and

cry openly and without shame or embarrassment when things have gone awry, striking against gender stereotypes promoting stoicism as masculine. Yet both titles also contained negative gender stereotypes surrounding female characters, one with the magical “princess girl power” (Fletcher, 2018, p.25-27) of cleaning/tiding up after the mess the protagonists created. The other title: *The Dinosaur that Pooped a Pirate* - containing the problematic scenario of three female mermaids being repeatedly portrayed as silent, sexual objects for the protagonist to strut around in a bathing suit for and later blow kisses to, with no voice or personality outside of their apparent temptress effect on the child protagonist.

Titles that conformed to gendered stereotypes included the duplicate title of *Town is by the Sea*, previously mentioned under the Canadian results as a representation of the past, and thus following the norms of the past in gender roles and appearances as well (Schwartz, 2017). Two titles: *Superworm* and *The Christmasaurus* had multiple main or prominent role characters who were male, while female characters were relegated exclusively to non-speaking or damsel in distress roles in comparison (Donaldson, 2012; Fletcher, 2021). In *The Dinosaur that Pooped Easter* all female characters were depicted in highly gendered, traditional clothing, and had roles exclusively in support of the male protagonists.

4.1.4 Australia & New Zealand

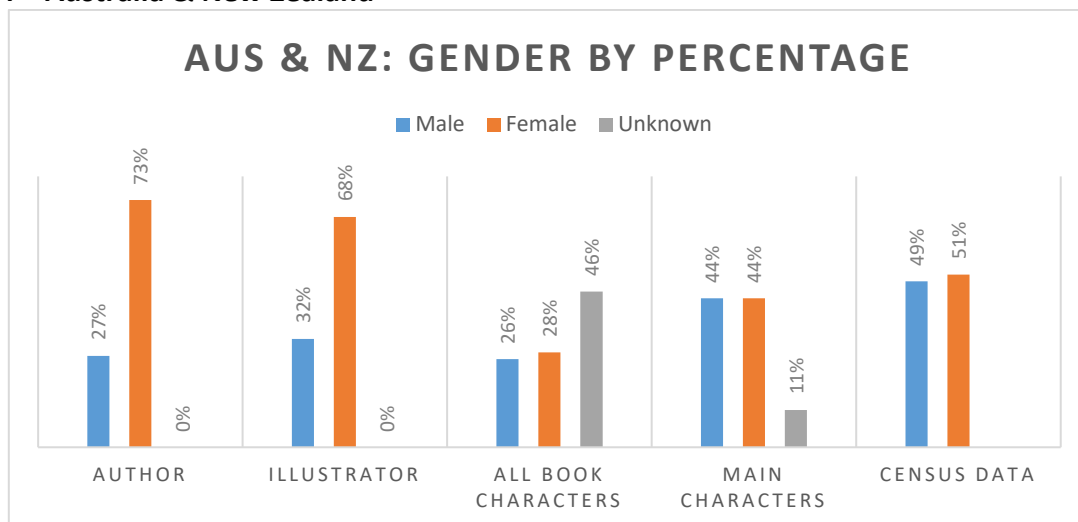


Figure 4: AUS & NZ: Gender by Percentage. Census Data compiled from (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Stats NZ, 2023)

Table 4: AUS & NZ: Gender by the Numbers. Census Data compiled from (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Stats NZ, 2023)

AUS & NZ: Gender by the Numbers					
	Author	Illustrator	All Book Characters	Main Characters	AUS/NZ Census
Male	13	14	372	20	15,167,154
Female	35	30	413	20	15,519,035
Unknown	0	0	669	5	N/A

Australia/New Zealand was the only region where the roles of author and illustrator were dominated by women. Women made up 73% of all authors, and 68% of all illustrators for the regions book selection. Under the category of all book characters, gender neutral or unknown characters took the lead with 46% of the total share of characters, with male and female characters being nearly equal at 26% and 28% respectively. But much like the other regions, that statistic did not follow into the category of main characters, with only five characters to represent those of gender neutral or

unknown gender status. With an even split of main characters representing males and females at twenty each, Australia/New Zealand was the closest region to matching real population statistics for men and women in percentage.

The region showed near equal importance in text versus illustration when it came to assigning gender. Six titles having been written without the use of pronouns or other textually gendered terms while portraying gendered characters in illustration (McKimmie, 2019; Tan, 2019; Teckentrup, 2019; Lester, 2020; Mayor, 2020; Macleod, 2024). And four titles containing the opposing scenario where the textual genders were present but ignored for purposes of illustration (Perkins, 2017; McGregor, 2019; Paul, 2022; Fox, 2024). Only one title for the region, *Iceburg*, was entirely gender neutral in text and illustration (Saxby, 2021). The region had one title that pushed against gendered stereotyping equally for both men and women. The book *All The Ways To Be Smart* showed male and female characters performing a variety of actions in life, including women excelling in science and maths, while showing male characters in emotionally caregiving roles (Bell, 2018). Two titles subverted the damsel in distress paradigm in *The Lighthouse Princess* and *I Am Jellyfish*, with the female protagonists taking on the mantle of rescuer (Paul, 2018; Wardell, 2022). And an additional four titles showed equality for women in roles of leadership, or within traditionally male occupations such as farmer (Bell, 2019; Loggia, 2023; Macleod, 2024; Vegara, 2024). For books that pushed primarily against stereotypes affecting men, there were three titles that showed the dad as a primary or equal caregiver of children (Lester, 2018; Cunningham, 2019; Bluey, 2020). Two books: *The Bomb* and *Timeless* pushed against traditional masculinity standards for emotion and appearance; the main characters finding inner peace and self-confidence as they allowed themselves to find what success looked like to them beyond the social pressure to conform (Cotter, 2018; Canby, 2023). Within the region, two books reinforced gendered stereotypes, one exclusively depicting women holding or caring for infants in both the past and a flash forward to the modern era in *Somebody's Land*; and the second title referenced boys crying as something shameful and to be hidden, having the main character hiding behind a tree due to his embarrassment at displaying such an unmasculine emotion in *Pete's Big Feet* (Goodes and Laing, 2021; Rippin, 2021).

4.2 Race

4.2.4 United States of America

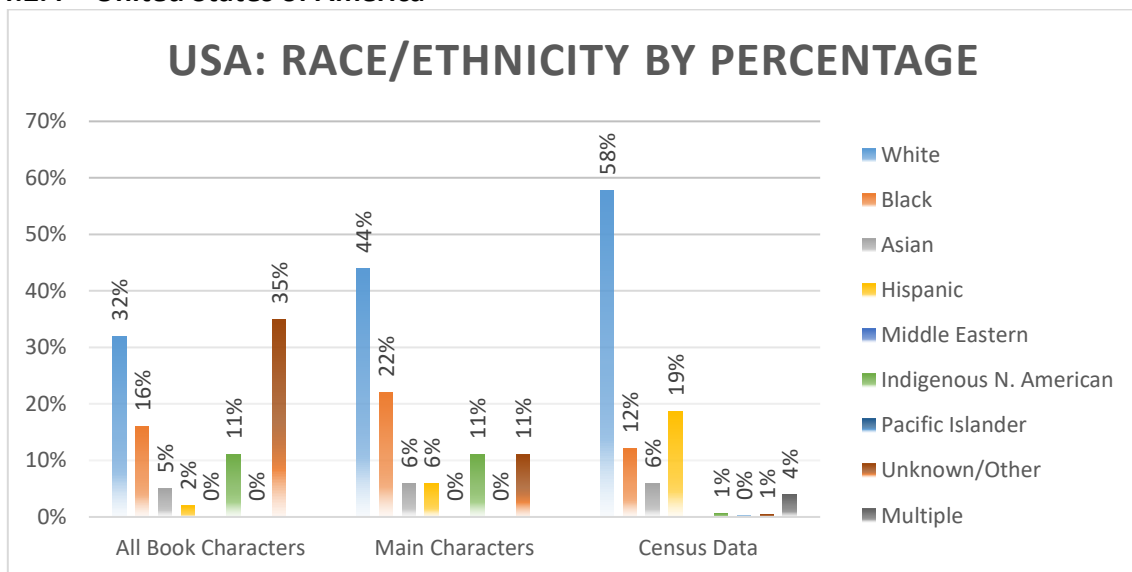


Figure 5. USA: Race/Ethnicity by Percentage. Census Data referenced from (United States Census Bureau, 2020)

Table 5. USA: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers. Census Data referenced from (United States Census Bureau, 2020)

USA: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers			
	All Book Characters	Main Characters	Census
White	229	8	191,697,647
Black	113	4	39,940,338
Asian	36	1	19,618,719
Hispanic	16	1	62,080,044
Middle Eastern	3	0	N/A
Indigenous	77	2	2,251,699
Pacific Islander	0	0	622,018
Unknown/Other	251	2	1,689,833
Mixed Race	N/A	N/A	13,548,983

The United States had the lowest white majority of any of the nations surveyed at 58% white. Unknown characters, those made up of individuals that could not be definitively identified as a specific race/ethnicity through appearance or textual analysis were the dominant percentage at 35% of total book characters. White presenting characters came in a close second at 32%, with a sharp drop off to Black presenting characters in third place with a numerical difference of one hundred and sixteen more white people represented than black individuals throughout the literature for the region. Despite people of Hispanic/Latino descent making up 19% of the population according to the latest U.S. census, as shown above in Figure 5, they were one of the least represented groups, constituting only 2% of the total sum of book characters for the region, with only one main character being of Latina heritage in the title *Just Ask!* (Sotomayor, 2019). White characters made up the bulk of the main character selection, with twice as many white characters as black. While racially/ethnically unknown characters were the dominant characterisation in total books, this group fell down to a tied third place in main character representation, alongside North American Indigenous peoples, at two main characters from each category (Tamaki, 2018; Yang, 2019; Lindstorm, 2020; Scott, 2020). Every race/ethnicity within the census had at least one character represented within the regions selection of books except for Pacific Islanders, despite having a population of over half a million individuals residing within the United States.

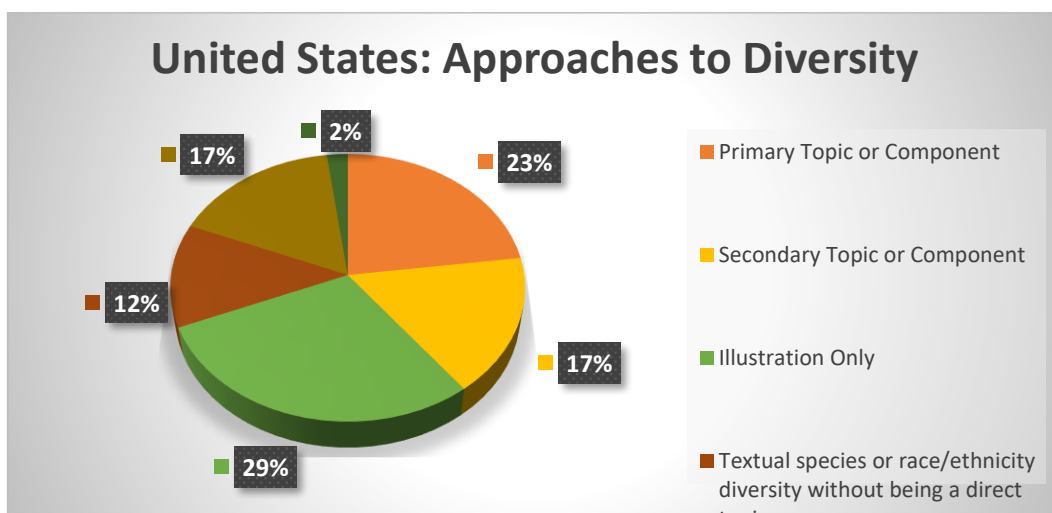


Figure 6: United States: Approaches to Diversity

As shown in Figure 6 above, 17% of the titles for the United States did not promote diversity and representation. The breakdown within that category included six titles with an exclusively white human cast in illustration (Wallace, 2016; Wallace, 2017; Blackall, 2018; Fallon, 2020; Graziano, 2022; Smith, S., 2023). And an additional two titles that had a component of tokenism in race/ethnicity (Wallace, 2016; Loggia, 2023). The singular title that was deemed not applicable to race/ethnicity or

species diversity representations was *The Serious Goose*, due to a total cast of one (Kimmel, 2019). Where race/ethnicity or species diversity was a primary topic, a common theme was lessons of self-acceptance, with characters first professing the desire to be something other than what they are as displayed in: *Fox the Tiger*, *Time for School Little Blue Truck*, and *Watercress* before finding their pride in who they are as individuals or their family origin (Tabor, 2018; Schertle, 2021; Wang, 2021). Another approach for primary topic books was to have an outside voice directly calling for diversity, acceptance, and inclusionary practices across all factors of diversity (Twiss, 2018; Woodson, 2018; Sotomayor, 2019; Gaines, 2020; Wong, 2023). Across both primary and secondary approaches, all but two titles approached the subject with a sense of joy and lightness, encouraging diversity as something beautiful and life enriching. The two titles that did not take that route directly discussed their own personal experiences being the victims of bigotry, portraying feelings of isolation and depression as a result in *BIG* and *I Talk like a River* (Scott, 2020; Harrison, 2023). Across the nineteen titles where race/ethnicity or species diversity was a primary or secondary topic to the story, six of the titles used anthropomorphic characters as substitutes for human society (Tabor, 2018; Twiss, 2018; Morris, 2019; Schertle, 2021; Tabor, 2021; Denise, 2022). 29% of the titles for the region advocated for diversity solely through illustration, normalizing diversity by not calling direct attention to it as something unusual or outside normal societal rules and behaviours. While an additional 12% had some textual acknowledgement of different species and/or races/ethnicities, but it was not a primary or secondary topic, it was factual and normalized within the story.

4.2.5 Canada

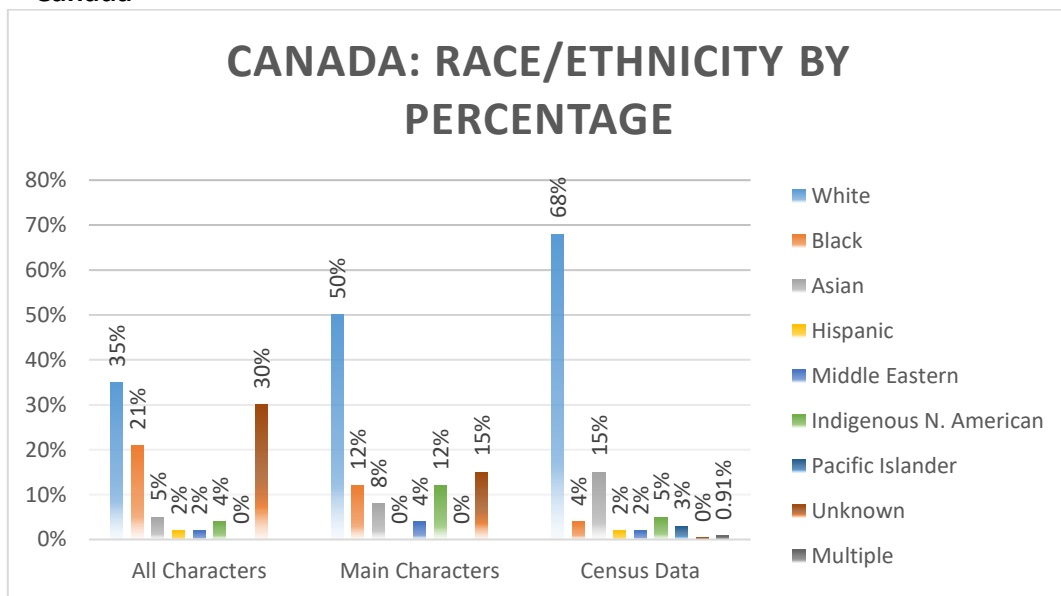


Figure 7. Canada: Race/Ethnicity by Percentage. Census data referenced from (Statistics Canada, 2022)

Table 6. Canada: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers. Census Data referenced from (Statistics Canada, 2022)

Canada: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers			
	All Book Characters	Main Characters	Census
White	393	13	24,882,025
Black	239	3	1,547,870
Asian	54	2	5,355,035
Hispanic	18	0	580,235
Middle Eastern	27	1	694,015
Indigenous	48	3	1,807,250
Pacific Islander	0	0	957,355
Unknown	337	4	172,885
Multiple	N/A	N/A	331,805

White was the racial majority in Canada across all tracked categories. Those of Asian heritage came second on the census data at 15% of the population but were underrepresented within both total and main character categories, making up only 5% of all book characters and only 8% of main book characters. Black characters represented 21% of all book characters and 12% of main book characters despite a population difference of nearly four million fewer Black individuals than Asian individuals within the census demographics, with Black individuals making up 4% of the Canadian population. Race/Ethnically Unknown individuals again presented strongly in total book characters, making up 30% of all book characters. They maintained that second place status in main character representation, with two titles containing the four characters of unknown race/ethnicity: *Skating Wild on the Inland Sea* and *The Three Brothers* (Louise-Gay, 2020; Pendziwol, 2023). Canada was the only region to have a main character of Middle Eastern heritage, in the story of *Mustafa* about a little boy and his struggles to make a friend after his family immigrates from a war-torn country to someplace that at first feels completely alien and isolating (Louise-Gay, 2018). Populations represented by the census but lacking representation as main characters for the region included Pacific Islanders and those of Hispanic ancestry, with Pacific Islanders lacking representation entirely.

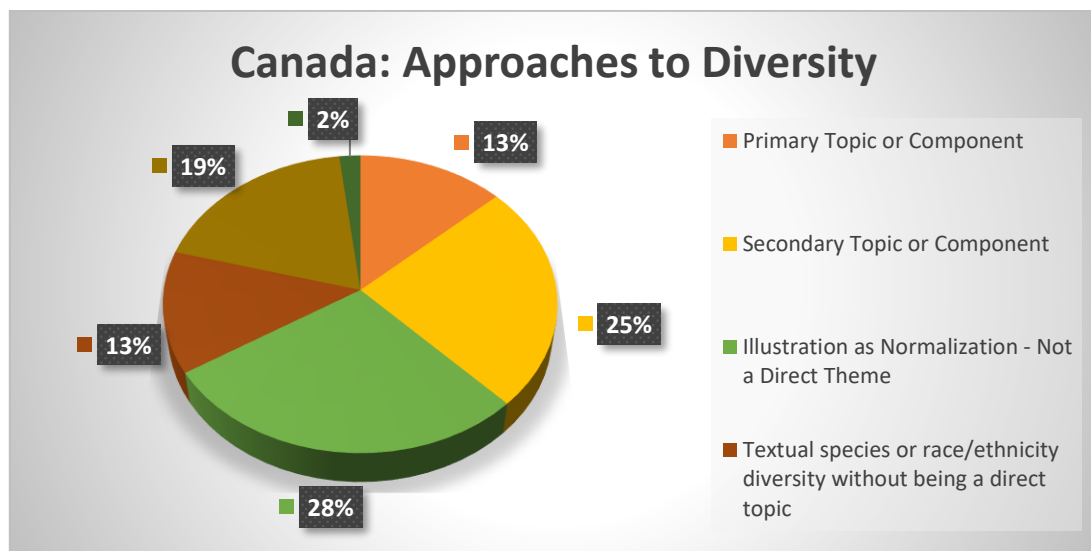


Figure 8: Canada: Approaches to Diversity.

Diversity was directly approached as the primary theme of the story 15% of the time, as the topic “two or more categories” from Figure 8 above contained two titles that both had racially exclusivity while race/ethnicity was also the primary topic in *Africville* and *On the Trampoline* (Grant, 2018; Robertson, 2021). Those two titles made up two of the three titles that directly discussed the history of Canada regarding the wrongs committed against indigenous peoples and black minorities, with the third title being *With Our Orange Hearts* (Webstad, 2022). Of the other 19% that lacked diversity or had a component of tokenism, three titles had casts that contained only one species of anthropomorphic character, two titles had all white casts, and one book each had all Japanese, all Indigenous, and all Unknown (Munsch, 2011; EOne, 2016; Flett, 2019; Smith, H., 2019; Louise-Gay, 2020; Ludo Studios, 2021; O’Leary, 2021; Fallon, 2022). The two additional titles for the category contained tokenism in race/ethnicity, with *Garbage Gulls* being an award winner for Canada while *Oh The Places You’ll Go* was a popular title for the region every year in the early summer around graduation in a Canadian tradition (Seuss, 2014; Plourde, 2024). Where race/ethnicity was a main or secondary component of a story, seven out of nineteen titles used anthropomorphic characters as allegory for humanity as they promoted diversity, acceptance of others, and self-love (Schertle, 2018; Fan et al., 2020; Schertle, 2021; Fan, 2022; Schertle, 2022; John, 2023; Rinker, 2023). Where race/ethnicity or species was

divulged only in text or illustration from of a standpoint of normalization over direct approaches, illustration again took the lead at 28% compared to text only at 13% of the literature.

4.2.3 United Kingdom & Ireland

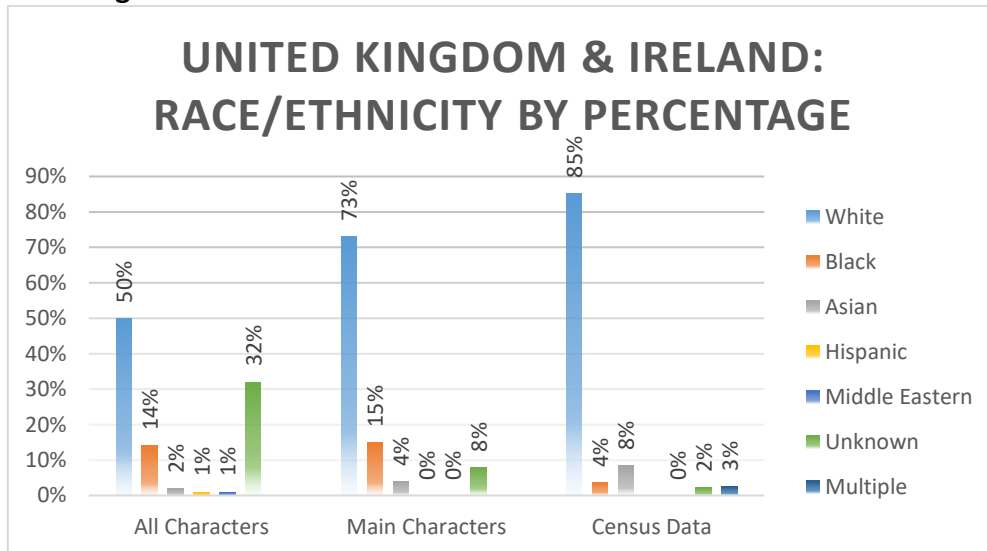


Figure 9. UK & Ireland: Race/Ethnicity by Percentage. Census Data compiled from (CSO, 2023; NISRA, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Scotland's Census, 2022).

Table 7: UK & Ireland: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers. Census Data compiled from (CSO, 2023; NISRA, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Scotland's Census, 2022).

UK & Ireland: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers			
	All Book Characters	Main Characters	Census
White	376	19	60,036,967
Black	107	4	2,561,937
Asian	13	1	5,922,748
Hispanic	6	0	N/A
Middle Eastern	7	0	23,515
Unknown	245	2	1,622,027
Multiple	N/A	N/A	1,858,267

The United Kingdom/Ireland has the least amount of diversity of all the selected comparison regions according to census data as presented above in Figure 9 and Table 7. 85% of the population identifies as white, with the second highest population being those of Asian heritage at 8%; a difference of fifty-four million more people identifying as white over Asian. The book data followed that trend, with a very high majority of white characters among all book characters at 50% and among main book characters at 73%. Much like in Canada, the Asian population was underrepresented according to census data comparisons, making up only 2% of the sum of all book characters for the region, and 4% of all main characters, with only one Asian character being a main character in *The Girls* (Ace, 2018). Race/ethnicity Unknown characters were disproportionately represented across all book characters at 32% but that was mostly in background characters as that percentage fell to 8% of main characters. All the Hispanic characters for the region came from one title, the internationally written and published *Taylor Swift: Little People, Big Dreams* (Vegara, 2024). A Middle Eastern population was registered within the census data but lacked representation as main characters for the region.

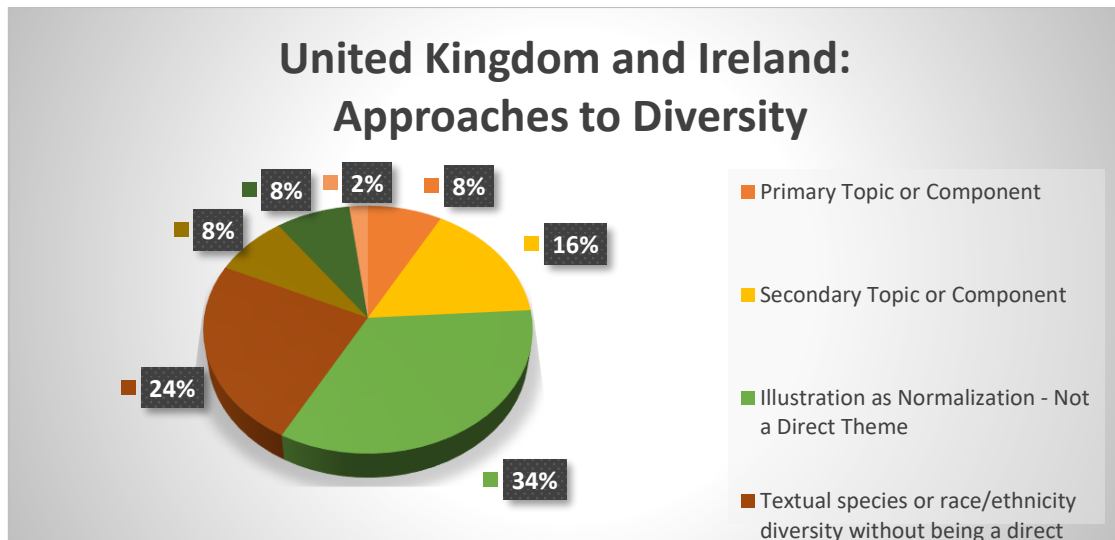


Figure 10. United Kingdom and Ireland: Approaches to Diversity

The United Kingdom and Ireland had the least number of stories that contained diversity as a primary or secondary topic out of all the regions at only 24% combined in Figure 10 above. Of those combined topics, seven of the twelve used anthropomorphic characters for their human society allegory (Donaldson 2012; Donaldson 2017; Gray, 2018; Donaldson, 2019; Dougherty, 2023; Savage, 2023; Donaldson, 2024) Four titles fell exclusively under the umbrella of lacking diversity or having tokenism, with two of those titles having entirely white casts in *Frindleswylde* and *The Haunted Lake*, one title having anthropomorphic species exclusivity in *Bluey: Daddy Putdown* while the final title *The Dinosaur that Pooped a Princess* containing elements of racial tokenism with all the important or speaking human character roles being filled with those presenting as white (Fletcher, 2018; Lynch, 2020; Bluey, 2021; O'Hara, 2021). But the "Two or More Categories" from Figure 10 needs to be noted in the lacking diversity column when it came to representing human characters, each of the titles only displaying diversity within their casts of anthropomorphic or mythological humanoid characters. *The Dinosaur that Pooped a Pirate* and *The Christmasaurus* had mermaids or elves with a range of skin tones, all portrayed equally to the other elves or mermaids; *The Dinosaur that Pooped Easter* and *The Jolly Christmas Postman* had anthropomorphic green witches, bears, wolves, and all manner of diverse creatures, yet all four titles exclusively portrayed their human characters as white, with the white characters exclusively being in charge (Ahlberg, 1986; Fletcher, 2020; Fletcher, 2021; Fletcher, 2023). At a combined 58% of all titles, showcasing diversity through text or illustration without directly addressing the topic was by far the most popular method of approach for the region, with illustration again pulling the larger percentage at 34% illustrative to 24% textual diversity. One title was listed under N/A for the region as only one human protagonist was shown on the page, with the other 3 human characters being voices off screen and having no textual context to race/ethnicity throughout the book (Rosen, 2017).

4.2.4 Australia & New Zealand

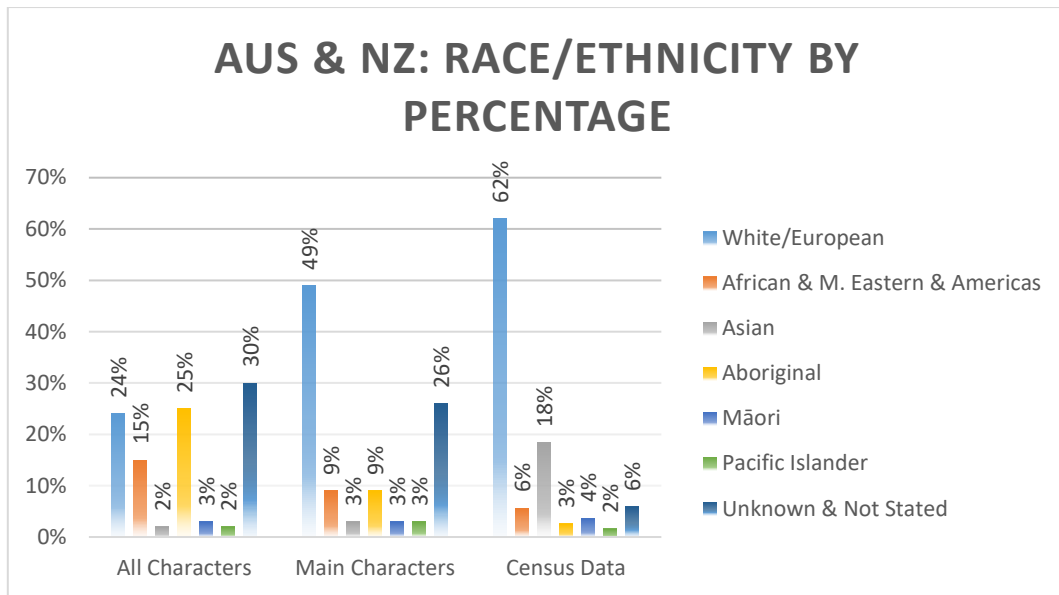


Figure 11: AUS & NZ: Race/Ethnicity by Percentage. Census Data compiled from (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Stats NZ, 2023)

Table 8: AUS & NZ: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers. Census Data compiled from (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Stats NZ, 2023).

AUS & NZ: Race/Ethnicity by the Numbers			
	All Book Characters	Main Characters	Census
White/European	229	17	17,971,474
African/Black & M. Eastern & Americas	142	3	1,626,434
Asian	17	1	5,320,100
Aboriginal	240	3	741,307
Māori	30	1	1,057,550
Oceanic/Pacific Islander	21	1	458,378
Unknown/Not Stated	295	9	1,711,405

White/European ancestry citizens made up 62% of the population for the combined region of Australia and New Zealand. The second most populous race/ethnicity were those of Asian descent at 18%. Following the same trend found in Canada and the UK/Ireland, Asians are highly underrepresented within children’s picture book literature. They represented only 2% of all characters, and 3% of main characters, with only 1 main Asian character for the regions book selection in *My Strange Shrinking Parents* (Sworder, 2022). All characters representing Māori characters came from one title, *The Bomb* (Cotter, 2018). All representations of Aboriginal culture came from three authors of Aboriginal descent, writing the titles *Somebody’s Land*, *Finding our Heart*, *Welcome to Country*, and *Birrarung Wilam* (Joy, 2016; Joy, 2019; Mayor, 2020; Goodes, 2021). In the sum of all book characters, the highest represented category was Unknown at 30% followed closely by Aboriginal and white characters making up 25% and 24% of the total category respectively. In fourth place, representing 15% of all book charters were those who presented as Black but did not have any textual or illustrative references to aboriginal culture. Despite Australia having a mixed category of African/Black & M. Eastern & Americas due to their unique way of taking census data, all the main characters in this category were black presenting in the titles *Gymnastica Fantastica*, *The Tiny Gardeners*, *Jetty Jumping*, with zero main character representation of Middle Eastern or Indigenous American individuals for the region (Rowe, 2022; Stewart, 2023; Macleod, 2024). The title *The Curiosities* provided the only

representation of Oceanic/Pacific Islanders across all the regions combined, being illustrated based off of Filipino culture and style (Fraillon, 2021).

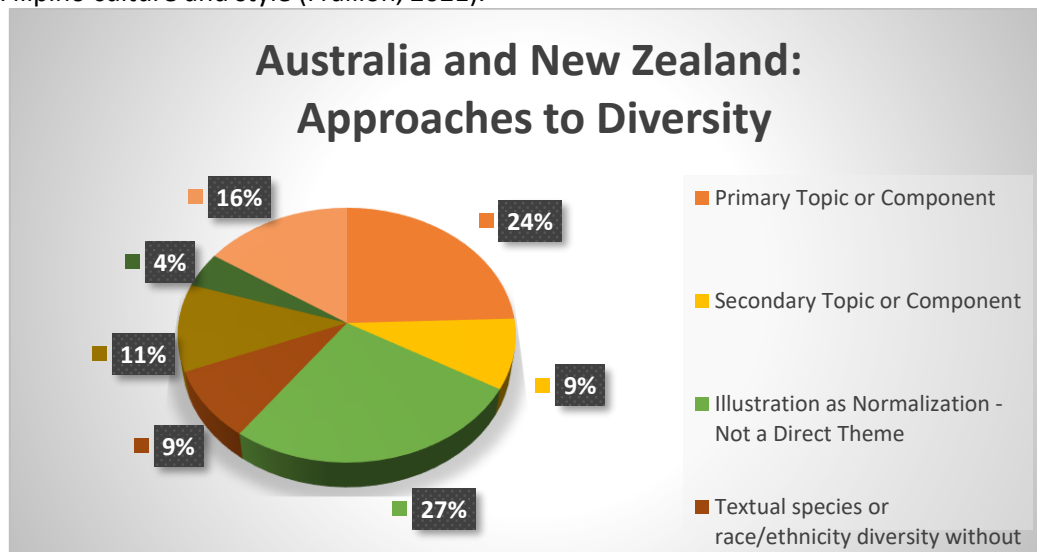


Figure 12. Australia and New Zealand: Approaches to Diversity.

Current racial tensions and anger at the historical colonization of the region by Europeans can be felt within several of the books that were awarded or popular within the region. *Cicada* and *My Strange Shrinking Parents* document a hard, isolating reality of being an immigrant (Tan, 2019; Swarder, 2022). *Kowhai and the Giants* shows massive rats swarming from a ship as allegory for the colonisers that descended upon New Zealand (Parker, 2021). The tension between Aboriginal peoples and the modern day government of Australia can be seen and felt in titles *Somebody's Land* and *Finding Our Heart*, two very political, openly angry books demonstrating the authors' pain at the colonisation of Australia. 33% of titles addressed the subject of race/ethnicity as either a primary or secondary theme of the story, with seven out of those fourteen titles using anthropomorphic characters as human allegory (Paul, 2018; McGregor, 2019; Watts, 2019; Tan, 2019; Rippin, 2021; Fox, 2024; Paul, 2024). There is less emphasis on the individual in this region, more emphasis on entire communities or ideas/concepts as a character in titles such as: *All The Ways to be Smart*, *Birrarung Wilam*, *Colouroos*, *Finding Our Heart*, *Hatch and Match*, *Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth*, *Iceburg*, *Kindness Grows*, *Off to the Market*, *Sing me the Summer*, *Somebody's Land*, and *Welcome to Country* in a strikingly different approach compared to the other surveyed regions (Joy, 2016; Jeffers, 2017; Bell, 2018; McGregor, 2019; Joy, 2019; Teckentrup, 2019; Lester, 2020; Mayor, 2020; Goodes, 2021; Saxby, 2021; Oehr, 2022; Paul, 2024). A combined 36% of titles exclusively used text or illustration to designate race/ethnicity. Four titles contained either race/ethnicity or species exclusivity, two exclusively white, one unknown, one anthropomorphic, and one additional title had an element of tokenism (Lester, 2018; Conley, 2022; Laguna, 2022; Wardell, 2022; Loggia, 2023). The region had the most titles that fell under N/A, with only one human character presented in *A Walk in the Bush*, *Gymnastica Fantastica*, *How to Make a Bird*, *I NEED a Parrot*, *Maybe*, and *Rodney Loses It!* and were thus not qualified to make any statements about diversity for the region (Bouer, 2017; Perkins, 2017; McKimmie, 2019; Yamada, 2019; McKinlay, 2020; Stewart, 2023).

4.3 Ecosystem & Biodiversity Representation

4.3.1 The United States

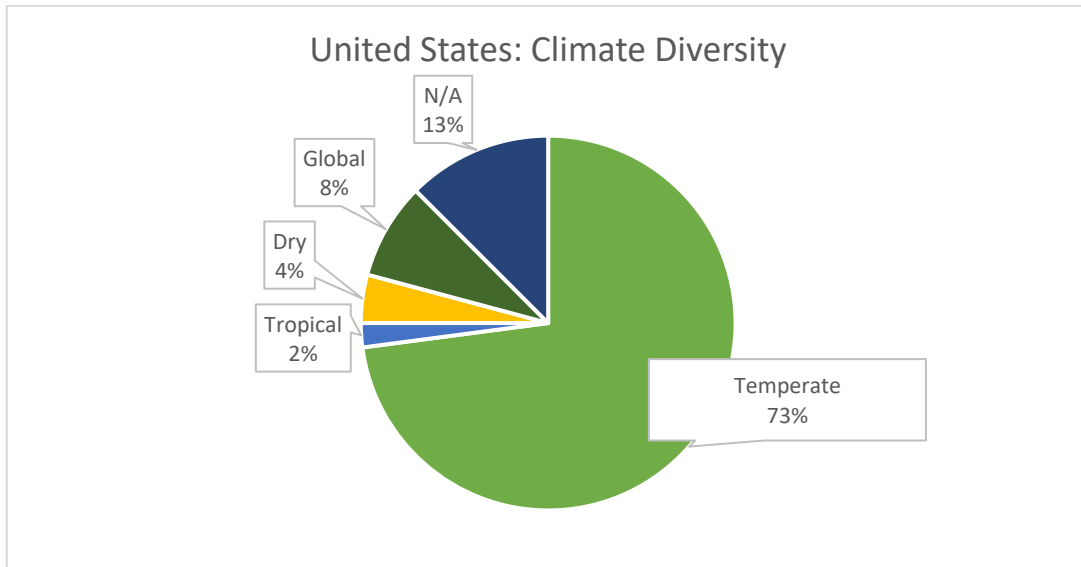


Figure 13. United States: Climate Diversity

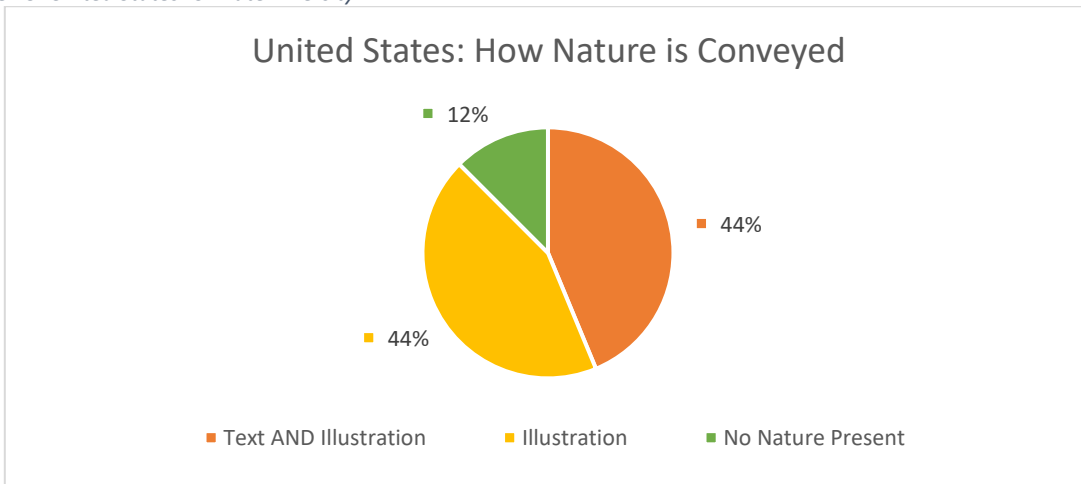


Figure 14. United States: How Nature is Conveyed

There were a variety of locals showcased within the region, with five titles definitively set within the United States: *Taylor Swift: Little Golden Book*, *Watercress*, *Hot Dog*, *Noodle and the No Bones Day*, and *Marlon Bundo* (Twiss, 2018; Wang, 2021; Graziano, 2022; Salati, 2022; Loggia, 2023) Two titles were set conclusively outside North America, *A Patchwork Bike* – set in a village bordering the Sahara Desert and *Grumpy Monkey Spring Fever* – set within a tropical jungle (Clarke, 2016; Lang, 2024). The most popular landscape used was a temperate setting, used 73% of the time. Six titles for the region: *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Sleigh*, *The Serious Goose, BIG*, *See the Cat*, *Moon Pops* and *I Did it!* were entirely bereft of biodiversity or any form of nature in both text and illustration outside their respective casts of anthropomorphic characters (Kimmel, 2019; LaRochelle, 2020; Baek, 2021; Emberley, 2022; Harrison, 2023; Willems, 2023). When it came to how climate and biodiversity were conveyed to the reader, illustrations played the strongest roles in this portrayal, with 88% of all titles for the region containing illustrations of nature. The United States had the highest percentage of titles that exclusively conveyed nature through illustrative means, at 44%. And 13% of all titles for the region contained no depictions of nature at all.

Out of the 48 titles for the region, only one book noted a threat to natural ecosystems and/or called for direct environmental action or conservation in: *We are Water Protectors* - marking the protests

against the Dakota Access Pipeline that threatened indigenous lands and water supplies (Lindstrom, 2020). The book *I Promise* had a small nod to the environment with a call to always leave an area better than you found it, depicted alongside an illustration of children picking up litter in their urban neighbourhood (James, 2020).

4.3.2 Canada

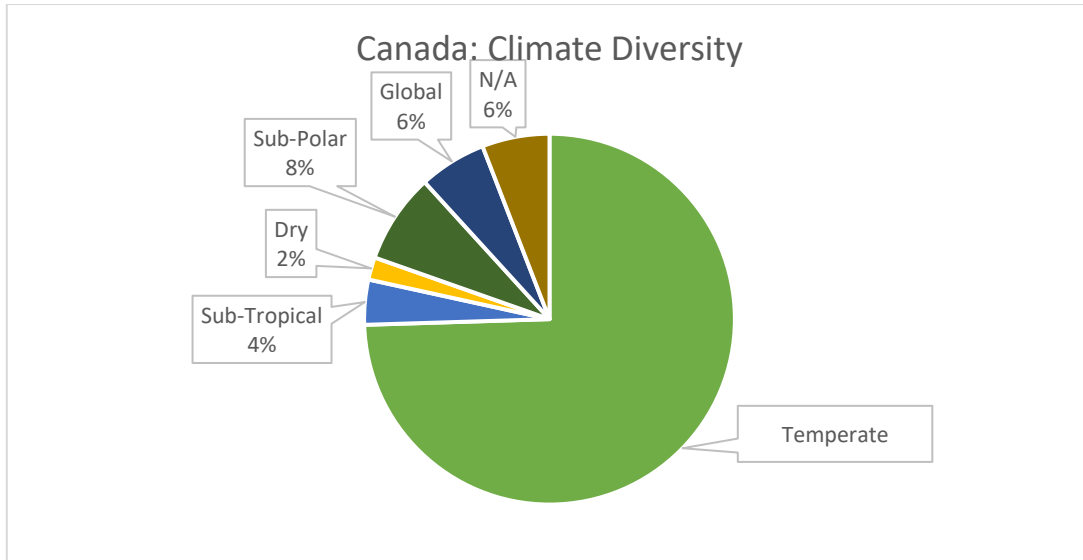


Figure 15. Canada: Climate Diversity

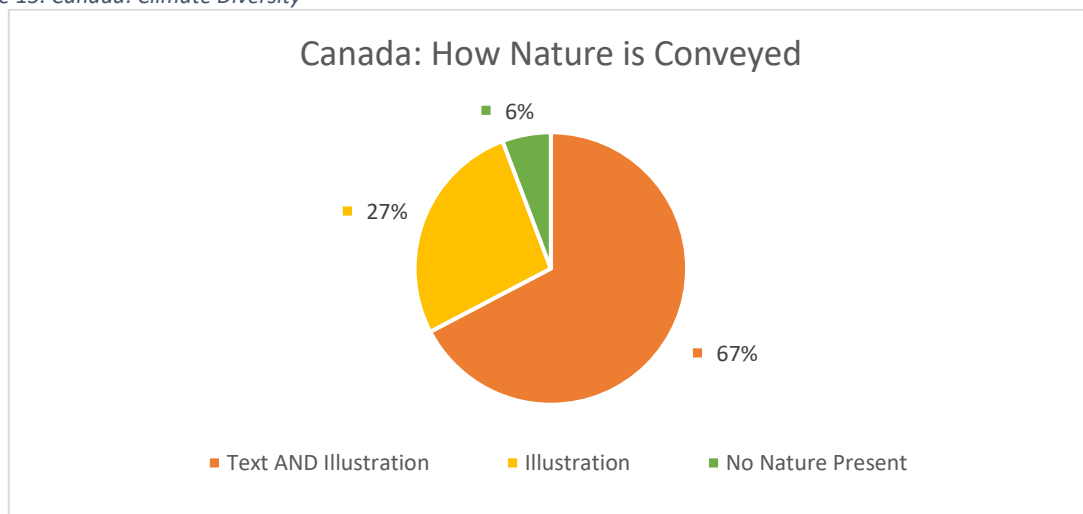


Figure 16. Canada: How Nature is Conveyed

Five titles were clear representations of Canada: *Africville*, *Birdsong*, *Town is by the Sea*, *With Our Orange Hearts*, and *On the Trapline* all of which represented Eastern Canada, from the traditional lands of Cree Nation to modern day Nova Scotia (Schwartz, 2017; Grant, 2018; Flett, 2019; Robertson, 2021; Webstad, 2022). Two more titles had the potential to be located within either the Northern USA or Canada, *Skating Wild on an Inland Sea* which is set on the frozen banks of Lake Superior along the border between the two nations, surrounded by Boreal Forest in either direction (Pendziwol, 2023). And *The Three Brothers* which was set amidst a backdrop of deciduous trees on a snowy winter's day as the brothers search for the native North American fauna their grandfather described seeing in the woods as a child (Louise-Gay, 2020). Other specified book settings included the United States, Italy, France, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Fan, 2022; Ludo Studios, 2021; Maclear, 2018; Smith, 2019; Vegara, 2024). The most used climate backdrop was temperate at 74% of the time, but secondary was sub-polar regions, where Canada wrote joyous tales of humanity amidst the snow and ice (Harbridge, 2017; Pendziwol, 2023). 94% of all titles for the region contained textual and/or illustrative references to the wild, with 27% of all books portraying flora and fauna exclusively through

illustration. Three titles had no connection to nature outside anthropomorphic characters in both text and illustration: *The Great Eggescape*, *Peppa Pig: 5 Minute Stories – The Tooth Fairy*, and *Elephant and Piggie: I Am Going*, the first two of which were placed entirely indoors, and the third with a white, blank background behind the characters of Elephant and Piggie (EOne, 2016; John, 2020; Willems, 2019).

Two books within the Canadian region made direct reference to environmentalism, conservation, and/or current threats to the ecosystem. *The Three Brothers* a direct tale noting the need for action against the threat of climate change on wild animal populations (Louise-Gay, 2020). And *Change Sings* which referenced singing for the planet itself alongside humanity in a call for equality and social justice (Gorman, 2021). While a third title had a small nod to environmentalism in the title *I Promise* – a duplicate title between Canada and the United States in popularity lists, this title called for leaving areas better than you found them while depicting children cleaning up litter in their urban neighbourhood (James, 2020).

4.3.3 United Kingdom & Ireland

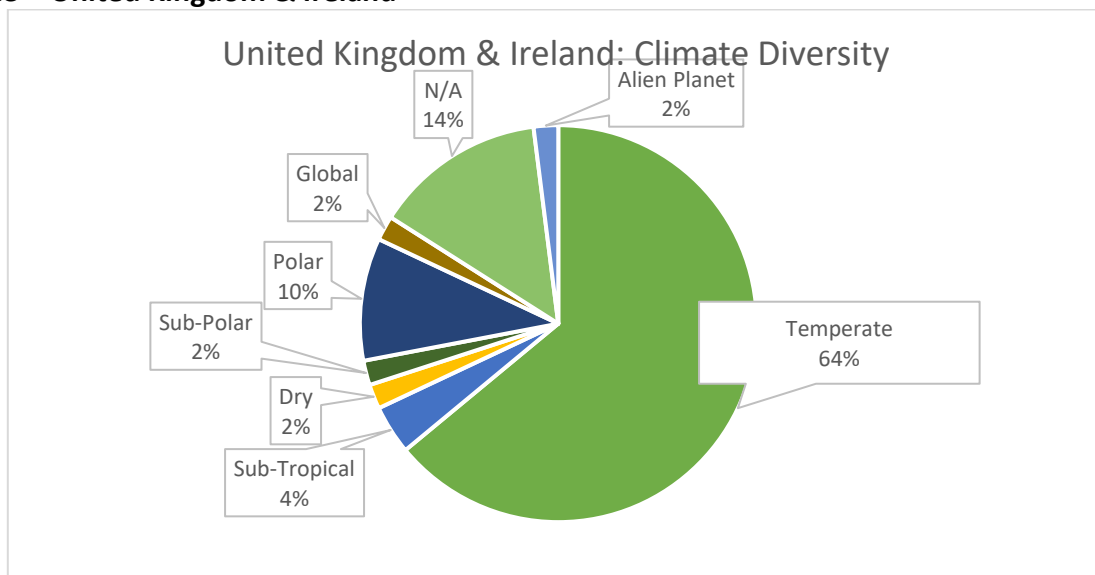


Figure 17. United Kingdom & Ireland: Climate Diversity

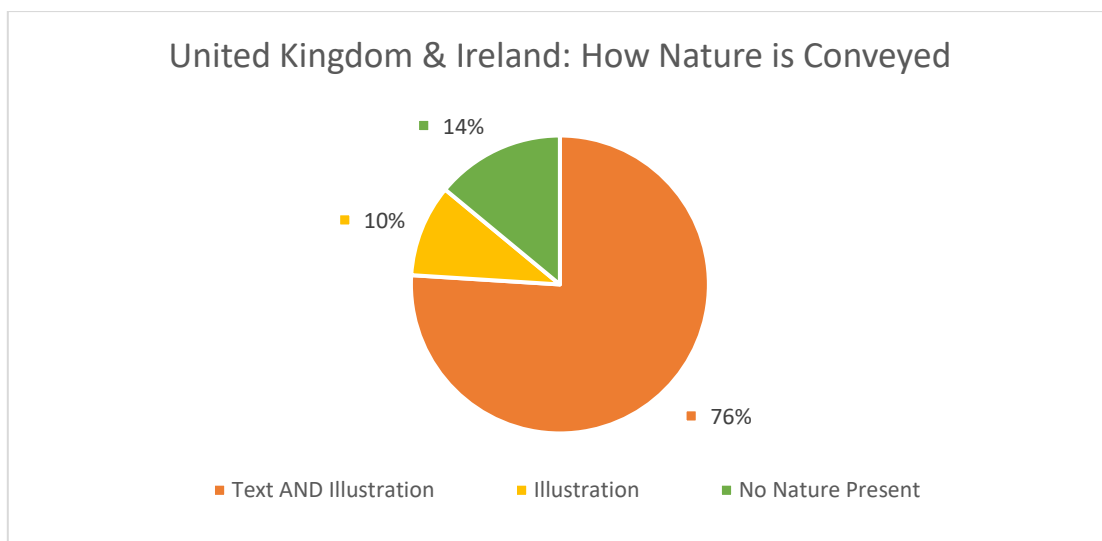


Figure 18. United Kingdom & Ireland: How Nature is Conveyed

Only one title in this region was positively identified as a representation of the UK, being set within London, England as Paddington Bear attempted to catch a glimpse of the Queen (Bond, 1986). Three titles were placed within the Arctic Circle: *Gretel the Wonder Mammoth*, *The Search for the Giant Arctic Jellyfish*, and *You're Snug With Me* which marked the Arctic as the most popular specific book place setting for the UK and Ireland (Soundar, 2018; Hillyard, 2023; Savage, 2023). Other specified locals were Australia, The United States, Canada, and the Serengeti (Donaldson, 2017; Schwartz, 2017; Bluey, 2021; Vegara, 2024). 64% of the regional titles were placed within a temperate climate. And within that temperate climate, the UK and Ireland displayed a repeated affinity for lush forests, with eight titles being set amidst the woods (Barnett, 2017; Lynch, 2020; Sterer, 2020; Stevens, 2020; Donaldson, 2022; Becker, 2023; Dougherty, 2023; McCarthy, 2023). Seven titles, making up 14% of the total selections, contained no reference to nature in either text or illustration, the highest of any region (Gray, 2018; Hendra and Linnet, 2020; Fletcher, 2021; Fletcher, 2021; Duggee, 2022; Hendra and Linnet, 2023; Hendra and Linnet, 2024). For the region as a whole, 86% of books contained some acknowledgement of the natural world through illustration, or a combination of text and illustration, with 10% of all titles containing only illustrated references to nature.

Two books had themes of environmental conservation and/or a direct depiction of a threat to an ecosystem. One conveyed this message only through illustration, showcasing human trash washed up upon the shores of the arctic while meeting a variety of endangered animals around the world on his quest to find his ancestral home in the tale of *Jonty Gentoo* (Donaldson, 2024). The other title being *You're Snug With Me* – which was a depiction of the fragility of the Arctic and all the animals who rely on the sea ice to coexist and thrive, as the mother bear teaches her young to only take what they need despite being the alpha predator of the land (Soundar, 2018).

4.3.4 Australia and New Zealand

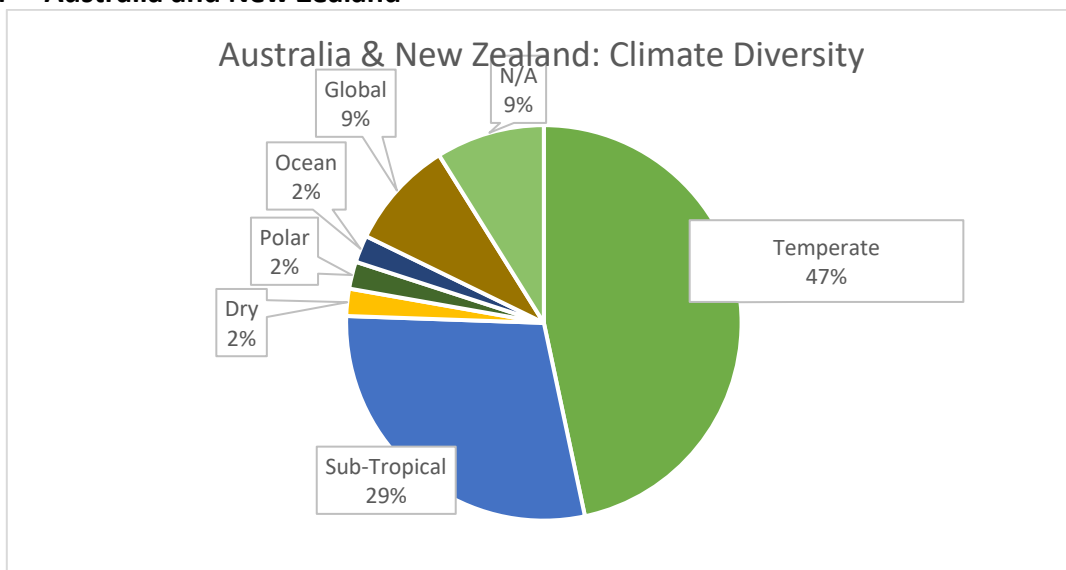


Figure 19. Australia & New Zealand: Climate Diversity

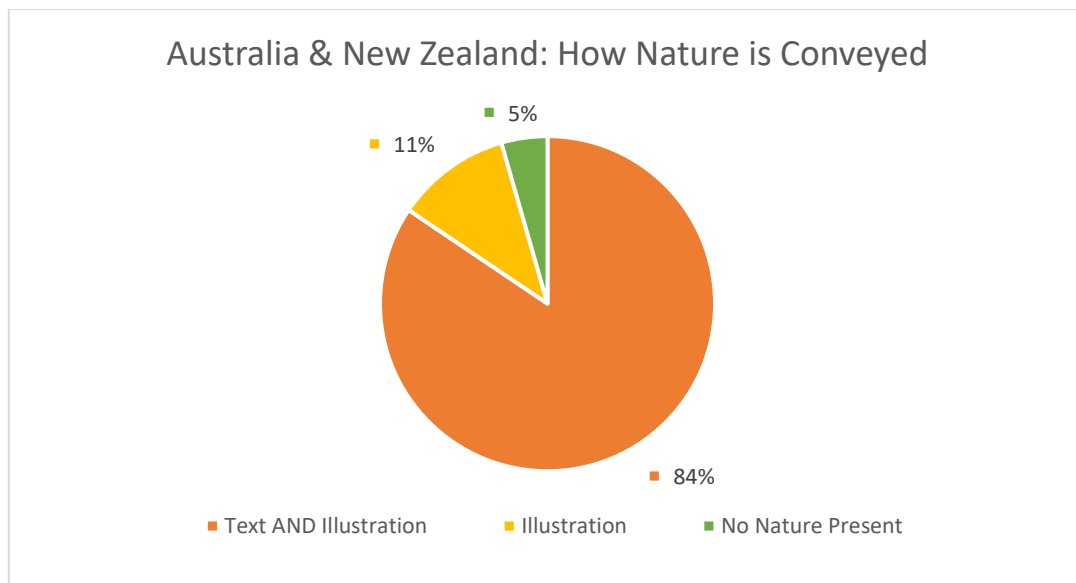


Figure 20. Australia & New Zealand: How Nature is Conveyed.

There was a combined total of thirteen titles that represented the geographical region of Australia and New Zealand, the most definitive self-representation of any of the analysed regions (Joy, 2016; Perkins, 2017; Cotter, 2018; Joy, 2019; McGregor, 2019; Bluey, 2020; Mayor, 2020; Lester, 2020; Goodes, 2021; Parker, 2021; Conley, 2022; Lester, 2022; Oehr, 2022). Other specified locals included the United States, the Savannahs of Africa, the Philippines, and Antarctica (Fraillon, 2021; Saxby, 2021; Fox, 2024; Vegara, 2024). The region had the least representation of temperate landscapes, at 47% of all titles being set in a temperate climate. It was the only region to have any titles set entirely within the ocean, with *I am Jellyfish* plunging through the different depths of the sea (Paul, 2018). While two titles for the region were set entirely indoors, devoid of any reference to nature outside the anthropomorphic characters themselves in the books *Rodney Loses It!* and *Pig the Grub* (Bauer, 2017; Blabey, 2018). At a combined 95% of titles, Australia and New Zealand had the highest rate of referencing nature within their stories, with illustrative exclusivity only shown in 11% of works.

Two titles contained direct themes of environmental conservation and the protection of endangered species and/or climates. *Kowhai and the Giants* tells the story of colonists who striped the land for resources with no regard to the environmental damage they left in their wake, ending with a call for reforestation efforts to bring back the giant trees that once covered the land (Parker, 2021). The second title being *Iceburg*, which detailed the delicate balance of Antarctica with an illustrated look at all the unique species that rely on it for survival that are now under threat of global climate change (Saxby, 2021).

4.4 Publishing, Author, and Illustrator Origins

4.4.1 United States

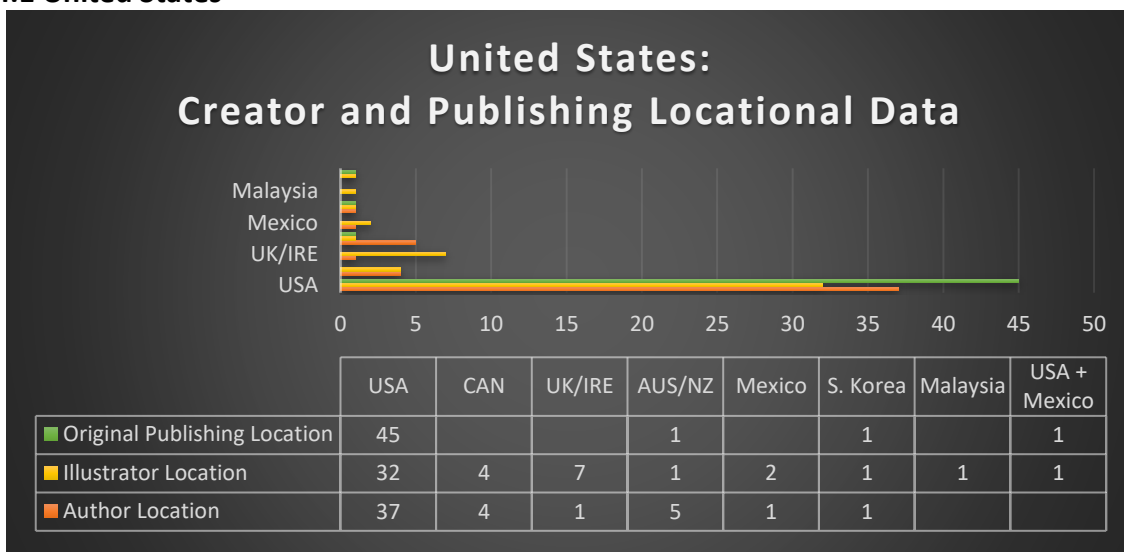


Figure 21. United States: Creator and Publishing Locational Data

The United States had the most varied illustrator locations, with the least varied original publishing locations. Most titles that made the awarded/popular lists were created in and for the United States, with only one title being an exclusively foreign published title, *Moon Pops*, first created and gaining popularity in South Korea before being translated and published in the US (Baek, 2021). Titles shared across the regions included: *Taylor Swift: A Little Golden Book Biography*, *When You Can Swim*, *Time for School Little Blue Truck*, and *I Promise* with three of those titles being shared in popularity with Canada, and the T. Swift biography leading the sales charts in Australia alongside the United States (James, 2020; Schertle, 2021; Loggia, 2023, Wong, 2023).

4.4.2 Canada

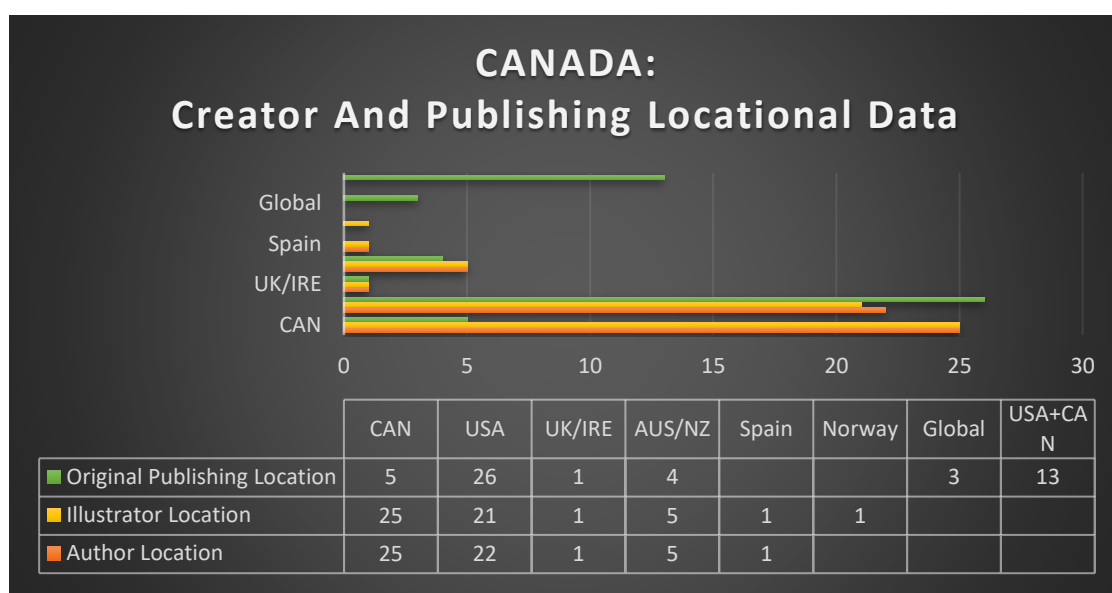


Figure 22. Canada: Creator and Publishing Locational Data

Canada had the least number of books published originally and exclusively at home of any of the selected regions at only five exclusively Canadian published titles, and thirteen simultaneous publications with the United States. Residents of Canada only narrowly held the lead in the categories

of author and illustrator as well. In fact, if you combine all foreign authors and illustrators, it becomes clear that Canadian children’s picture books are primarily created by those outside of Canada at a ratio of 25:29 for both authors and illustrators. The region also contained the most amount of duplicated titles across the regions, with nine of their most popular titles also being popular within the United States, UK/Ireland, and Australia/New Zealand over the years of this investigation (Smith C., 2009; Schwartz, 2017; Smith C. 2019; Smith S., 2019; James, 2020; Smith C., 2020; Schertle, 2021; Wong, 2023; Vegara, 2024).

4.4.3 United Kingdom & Ireland

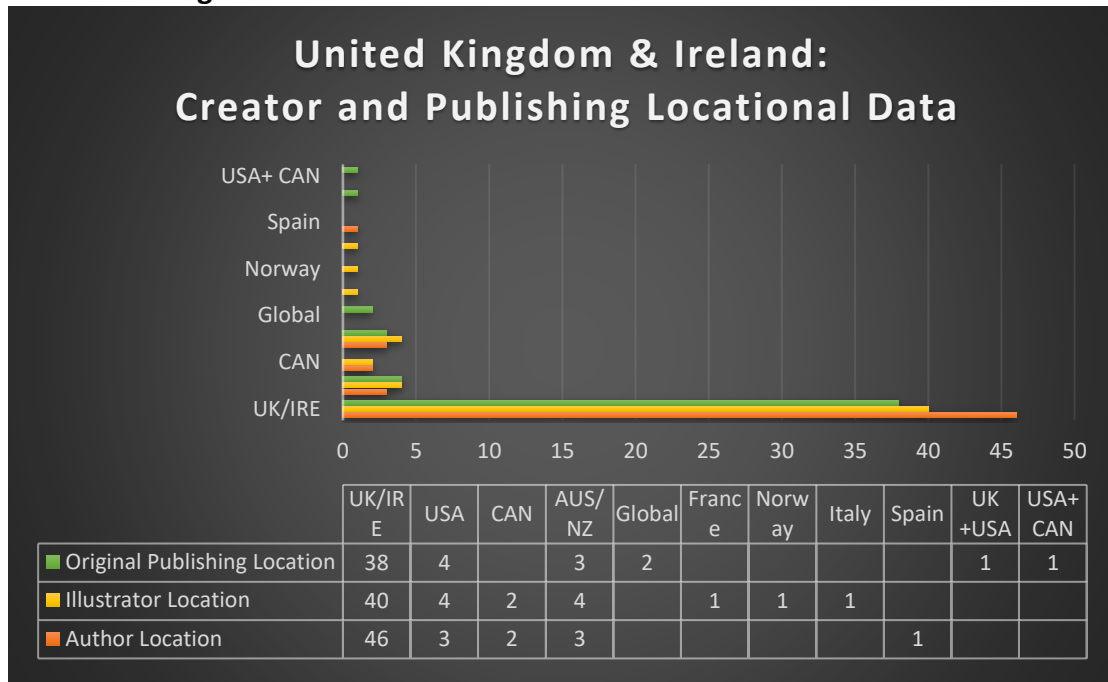


Figure 23. United Kingdom & Ireland: Creator and Publishing Locational Data

The United Kingdom and Ireland’s most popular and awarded books came primarily from themselves, with original publisher, illustrator, and author data all firmly led by individuals and corporations based out of the UK. They shared seven popular titles with other regions, primarily with Canada who shared six of those titles. They had no titles in common with the United States. (Smith C., 2009; Schwartz, 2017; Smith C. 2019; Smith S., 2019; Smith C., 2020; Donaldson, 2022; Vegara, 2024).

4.4.4 Australia & New Zealand

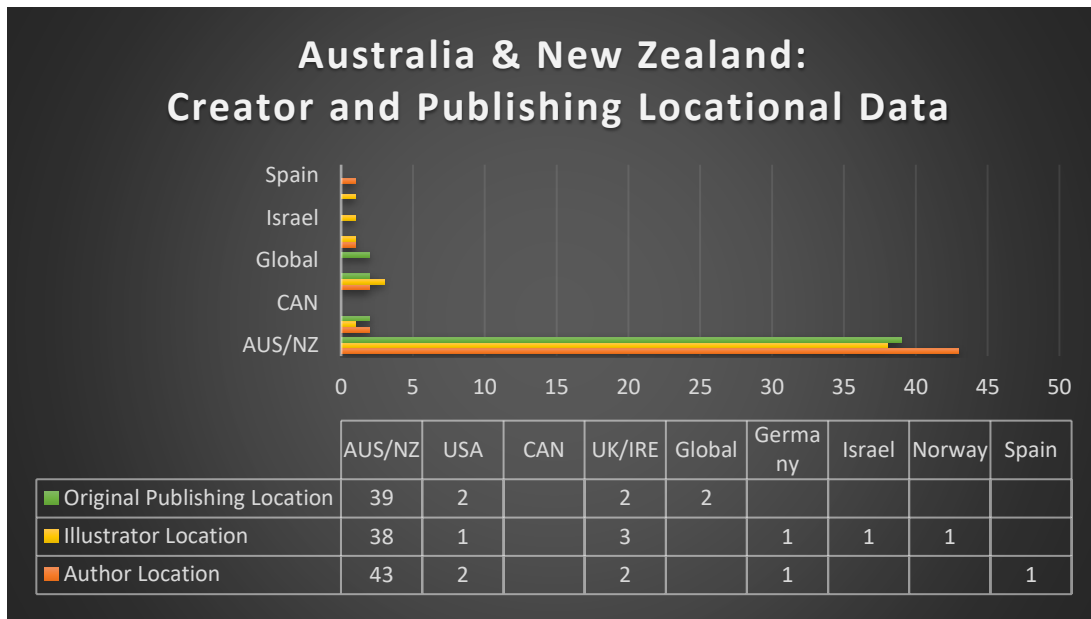


Figure 24. Australia & New Zealand: Creator and Publishing Locational Data

The titles most popular and/or awarded for this region were primarily created and published by fellow Australian and New Zealanders. It was the only region to not have any input in author, illustrator, or original publisher from Canada. The region had the least amount of shared titles across regions, sharing a total of three popular titles: *Taylor Swift: A Little Golden Book Biography*, *Taylor Swift: Little People, Big Dreams*, and *The Baddies* with the United States, Canada, and the UK/Ireland (Donaldson, 2022; Loggia, 2023; Vegara; 2024).

5. Discussion

5.1 Gender

Across all four regions the census data was identical for the percentage of the population who identified at birth as male or female, with a consistent 49% of the population as male, and 51% of the population identifying as female. As such, one might expect there to be a lot of overlap in the portrayal of gender for each region, with similar representation and themes directed at a near equal split of the population. And there were certain themes that were universal such as showcasing fathers as loving, involved parents in equal or primary caregiving roles. Having male characters who defy gendered clothing norms for items that are pink, sparkly, or otherwise traditionally deemed feminine and unacceptable for men. Books where women were represented as equally wild, crazy, stinky, dirty, or adventurous as their male counterparts, pushing against behavioural stereotypes. And on the flip side of that coin, every region had at least one title that contained gendered stereotypes or bias. But that representation was not equal, with some regions doing a significantly better job at equality in representation than others. Australia had the most equality in representation of women as main characters, while the United States had by far the least, at a shocking disparity showcasing a 21% difference in representation of women as main characters in comparison to men. Children's book author and illustrator appears to be a highly gendered occupation in three of the four regions represented; being a male dominated industry in the United States and the UK/Ireland, while women took an over 20% lead for both author and illustrator in Australia. Canada alone contained 10% or less difference in male and female representation in author, illustrator, total book characters, and main book characters. Across all regions, characters of unknown gender were usually anthropomorphic. For the status of main character, that rate rose to near exclusivity, there being only two human main characters who were not given a distinctive gender as male or female; both from the regional

selections of Australia/New Zealand, and both formless narrators off the page as they directly talked to the reader as you saw the world presented through their eyes (Jeffers, 2017; Oehr, 2022)

5.2 Race/Ethnicity Diversity

Every region except for the United States is significantly underrepresenting their Asian populations within the medium of children's picture books according to census data. And that theme of feeling emotionally isolated from the community surrounding you is present in heart wrenching tales of the immigrant experience in the titles *Watercress*, *Mustafa*, *My Strange Shrinking Parents*, and *Cicada* (Louise-Gay, 2018; Tan, 2019; Wang, 2021; Sworder, 2022). The UK/Ireland was the only region to not contain a tale of the hardship and feelings of isolation experienced by immigrants. How each region addressed race/ethnicity and historical injustices varied considerably, much more so than representations of gender. The UK/Ireland mostly avoided the subject, especially when it came to human representations of race with only six titles that had primary or secondary themes of race/ethnicity in human characters (Ace, 2018; Bryon, 2019; Woodgate, 2021; Percival, 2023; Savage, 2023; Vegara, 2024). In fact, the UK/Ireland had the least representation of race as a primary or secondary topic of any region, and no acknowledgement of colonisation or stories of direct racism. The USA did not touch upon the past in any way when it came to themes of race/ethnicity, rather choosing to focus on the present, promoting concepts of diversity for the most part as an enriching facet of life, but also discussing the pain of bias in a first-person perspective (Harrison, 2023). Canada focused on themes of peaceful reconciliation and acknowledgement of the past in tales *On the Trapline*, *Africville*, and *With Our Orange Hearts* (Grant, 2018; Robertson, 2021; Webstad, 2022). Australia and New Zealand displayed open anger at the history of colonisation and the generational effects still being felt today in *Somebody's Land*, *Finding Our Heart*, and *Kowhai and the Giants* (Mayor, 2020; Goodes, 2021; Parker, 2021). Yet despite that feeling of very present anger from a concentrated sub-section of the population, Australia and New Zealand as a region came in third for how often their books directly addressed the topic of race/ethnicity as either the primary or secondary theme of a story; further showcasing the chasm in their society around the topic and its importance today. In order of least to most direct representation of the subject of diversity, came UK/Ireland with 24% of books directly approaching the topic, followed by Australia/New Zealand at 33%, Canada at 38% of the time, and the United States directly representing race/ethnicity as a primary or secondary topic within 40% of all titles. These percentages show just how varied each region is on the importance and best approach to tackling such a divisive, often-times painful subject.

5.3 Representations of Nature

There were no books that contained textual references to nature that were not transformed into illustrations, but all regions had books that only referenced nature through illustration. In the United States, 44% of all titles had this illustration exclusivity; by far the highest percentage found throughout the surveyed regions. This lack of storyline acknowledgement created the impression that nature was an after-thought for the region, something to fill in the background, but with no real impact on the story or the characters' lives. Australia/New Zealand contained the opposite impression, with only 11% of their books having illustration as the only reference to nature, and a full 95% of the regions books having some component of the natural world. The most awarded and popular books of this region shine with a love of nature that regularly and deeply impacted the story line, with entire titles devoted to just getting outside and seeing the natural beauty of the world, as presented in *A Walk in the Bush* and *Where the Lyrebird Lives* (Perkins, 2017; Conley, 2022). Australia/New Zealand had the strongest representation of its own unique flora and fauna of any of the regions, however the United Kingdom and Ireland had the largest variety of climates represented, containing stories in: temperate, sub-tropical, dry, sub-polar, polar, and a global tale that stretched from pole to pole in the tale of *Jonty Gentoo* (Donaldson, 2024). All regions shared calls for ecological conservation or pointed out environmental threats.

5.4 Globalism Across the Western Anglosphere

While all regions appear to have shared themes of humanity in relation to gender, race, and biodiversity, globalism does not appear to be strongly influencing most of the represented regions of this survey, with Canada being the one possible exception. Canada has the most foreign authors and illustrators. Canada has the highest portrayal of other nations represented in its literature. And Canada had the highest concentration of generic landscapes that could have been anywhere in the temperate climate band of the world. However, all regions had factors celebrating what made them unique cultures as well. The United States had strong messages promoting individuality over conformity and was the only region to celebrate St. Patrick's Day or Dios De Los Muertos through picture books (Wallace, 2016; Dean, 2019; Drago, 2020). Canada wrote love stories to the ice and snow and celebrates achievement every year by gifting *Oh the Places You'll Go* to recent graduates of all ages, lifting this picture book first published 35 years ago to the top of the sales charts each year (Dr Seuss, 2014, Harbridge, 2017; Louise-Gay, 2020; Pendziwol, 2023). The UK/Ireland contained 41% of the total anthropomorphic characters across all regions, with their books containing 1084 anthropomorphic characters, 353 more than Canada, the second leading users of anthropomorphic characters in picture books. It was the only region to travel into space in *The Smeds and the Smoos*, an alien tale of star-crossed lovers overcoming familial bigotry and showcasing the regions love of creativity, childhood wonder, and imagination (Donaldson, 2019). The UK/Ireland was also the only region to approach the topics of death, loss, and grief, with *The Haunted Lake* and *The Hare Shaped Hole* (Lynch, 2020; Dougherty, 2023). Australia/New Zealand had the best regional biodiversity portrayal, strongly focused on their own indigenous flora and fauna with the least number of generic landscapes. They had the largest collection of books featuring concepts or ideas over individuals as characters, and were the only region to not celebrate the holidays with children's picture books, with only one book set on Halloween in *Pig the Monster*, and it was a stretch to classify that as a holiday book due to its popularity spiking in July when it was released, nowhere near the actual holiday at the end of October (Blabey, 2021).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Every region had unique strengths and weakness. Australia and New Zealand prioritized gender equality, showcasing equality in numerical representation between male and female characters across all books and main character status. Meanwhile the subject has been deprioritized within the United States, where female characters out-numbered males yet their status was noticeably less important than their male counterparts as they were relegated to supporting roles. The recognition of historical wrongs against indigenous and/or minority peoples was of significant importance to Australia/New Zealand and Canada, although they approached the subject very differently; yet the United States led with the most books directly addressing diversity as a generalized topic, without focusing on any one group or any historical events. The UK and Ireland have the largest white majority of the regions with 85% of their population identifying as white; that was reflected in their shortfall of racially/ethnically diverse characters or diversity as a main topic within the regions book selection as a non-or-lesser priority. What and how biodiversity was displayed also varied by region, although all regions called for environmental conservation/restoration. Showcasing geographical proximity preferences, the UK/Ireland mostly highlighted the Arctic, while Australia/New Zealand concerned themselves only with Antarctica. Canada was the only region to write about the snow and ice as a human pleasure, showing children playing and bonding in cold wintery landscapes. And nature was a second thought for the United States as a whole, having the fewest stories where the impact of nature was felt on the characters' lives. Canada appears to be the most affected by globalism, while Australia/New Zealand had the most self-representation of all the surveyed regions. All but Canada were primarily represented by their own residents' authors, illustrators, and publishing houses, showing little sign of one cultural region dominating the market across the spectrum. As for whether the increased globalism has hindered or supported the concept of windows and mirrors? That is a mixed and complicated answer, while local representation was diminished in Canada in comparison to the other

regions, shrinking their available pool of mirrors, they did have the most representation of outside nations and cultures, increasing their windows to the outside world.

6.1 Recommendations for further research

The variables in quantity and sheer variety of anthropomorphic characters was an unexpected component going into this investigation. They were the preferred character medium of the United Kingdom and Ireland, outnumbering humans by three hundred and thirty individuals. The UK/Ireland was the only region to have more anthropomorphic characters than human characters, signalling just important they are within the medium of children's picture books. While the UK/Ireland had the least diverse human cast of characters, they had over seventy more unique, individual species of anthropomorphic character represented than the next closest region of Canada. But this begets multiple questions: Are the use of anthropomorphic characters being used to skip over hard topics of race and/or gender, potentially further normalizing discrimination by not addressing it or directly showing it? Or are they being used cleverly to subvert existing bias on those topics by showing non-human characters with very human problems, leaving minds open to see parallels to human society while avoiding immediate unconscious judgements? How are they viewed in titles that contain both human and anthropomorphic characters, are they equals or subordinates? These questions and more require further research and evaluation on their impact to representation and diversity.

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