

Caitlin E. Wilson. Only Time Will Tell: A Content Analysis of Juvenile and Young Adult Literature on Characters with Disabilities and Whether Character Portrayals Have Improved Over Time. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. July 2012. 64 pages. Advisor: Rebecca Vargha

This research examines fourteen examples of juvenile and young adult fiction novels that include characters with disabilities. The study aims to analyze seven works of literature written between the years 1980-1990, and seven works of literature written between the years 2000-2010 in order to determine if the portrayals of characters with disabilities have seen improvement. Improvement in this sense would mean that the characters with disabilities were portrayed in a positive light, with a realistic depiction, and including a great sense of character development throughout the novel in which they are featured. Through this study, it is evident that there is marked improvement in the portrayals of characters with disabilities, yet further representation in the amount of novels that are available for young audiences is still a work in progress.

Headings:

People with Disabilities—Fiction

People with Disabilities—Juvenile Fiction

Young Adult Literature—History and Criticism

ONLY TIME WILL TELL: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF JUVENILE AND YOUNG ADULT
LITERATURE ON CHARACTERS WITH DISABILITIES AND WHETHER CHARACTER
PORTRAYALS HAVE IMPROVED OVER TIME

by
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Introduction

Who are young people and why is literature important?

Young people make up a large percentage of the population in the United States. According to the National Census of 2011, young people make up approximately 24% of the people living in this country (Howden, 2). As adolescents, they stand at the transitional stage to adulthood, ages ranging between 0-18. These individuals are those who will become future members of society. In this sense, it is necessary that they be exposed to beneficial forms of information.

Literature and stories are one of the most effective methods of communication of information. Children are responsive to the lessons that are offered through forms of media like literature. Literature allows people to reflect their ideas and thoughts. Stories are an important vehicle reflecting on feelings and expressions of the human condition. In this way literature can shape people's views of others as well as themselves. Through literature, readers can learn about new experiences and live vicariously through characters that are vastly different from themselves, as well as reflect themselves with characters in which they may find similarities (Guber, 1). Because stories help to make people understand worlds that are different than their own, what can be said about the danger of stereotypical portrayals of characters with disabilities?

This study describes a content analysis of current juvenile picture books and young adult fiction literature that includes characters with disabilities in terms of whether the quality of the characters' portrayal and perspective has improved, and whether the content is more constructive than in past decades (the years 2000-2010 in contrast to the years 1980-1990).

Who is a person with disabilities?

A person with disabilities is one who exhibits physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, and/or developmental impairments. Throughout history the concept of disabilities has been controversial. Though it seems as though it is a more modern phenomenon, this could be the result of the public's original viewpoints. In the past, having a disability was often looked at as a disease, or some type of mental illness. In many cases, people with disabilities were sent to insane asylums and institutions. Today approximately 5% of children in the United States are classified as a person with disabilities (Brault, 1). Because of this percentage, there have been movements to the support and understanding of those with disabilities. This understanding of disabilities can be expressed through literature. However, there are issues with children's literature on disabilities. Despite the percentage of children with disabilities, the literature on disabilities available to young readers is not only low in quantity, but also lacks in quality of content. Over time, the treatment of people with disabilities has improved, yet in contrast; the literature that is currently available needs significant improvements.

Literature with characters with disabilities

It is important now to go back to the question that was posited earlier: what can be said about the danger of stereotypical portrayals of characters with disabilities? In the past, people with disabilities have been predominantly looked down upon. With this real world status, their fictional portrayals have ultimately followed suit. In the media, people with disabilities have suffered “misrepresentation, defamation, and lack of representation” (Minty, 1). Most portrayals of characters with disabilities appeared to play a secondary role, and were often viewed as the unfortunate character in the storyline. During the most recent decades, after the passing of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, the literature went through a small, positive shift. Characters with disabilities were given more important roles in stories and had some more weight in regards to the plot of the storyline. After 1990, and the American Disabilities Act, changes in literature were even more distinct. Characters with disabilities now played protagonist roles, and were portrayed as catalysts within the story. Nonetheless, more and more steps need to be taken to improve the depiction of people with disabilities in terms of textual representation in literature.

Operational Definitions

In this study there are a series of operational definitions that need to be clarified in order to fully understand this examination of the fiction literature in question. Current refers to literature that has been created and produced in the last decade, which specifically includes the years 2000-2010. The genre of literature

being studied is juvenile picture books and young adult fiction literature, which is literature that has been written, published, and marketed to juveniles and adolescents between the ages of 0 and 18. Characters with disabilities are defined, as the characters portrayed in the literature are impaired in a physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, or developmental manner. The disabilities that will be examined in this study of the literature that is presented will include those of a physical and mental manner.

Quality of content in this study refers to the portrayal and perspective of the character in question. The terms improved and constructive indicate that the portrayal and perspective are discussed in a positive manner. Past decades stand in contrast to the term current and refer to years before the American Disabilities Act passed in 1990.

Literature Review:

History of Juvenile/Adolescent Literature on Disabilities

Literature written for juveniles and adolescents often reflects the values and attitudes that society holds. Research studies prove that literature on a certain subject can help readers to understand different personalities that are reflected in society. In this light, it is important to note that the history of this type of literature written on disabilities correlates with the perception of people with disabilities from a sociological point of view (Irwin, 13).

Juvenile and adolescent literature publishing began to rise in popularity around the mid-1900s in America; specifically during the 1950s-1960s, when adult

fiction stories like *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Outsiders*, and *The Pigman* became popular pieces of literature to adolescent audiences (Owen, 11). Though this form of literature often focused on hardships that adolescents face throughout their lives, literature written on disabilities was seldom seen.

Adolescent literature on disabilities did not see a rise until the late 1970s (Prater, 168). The subject of disabilities was often seen as a taboo subject, and in many cases people felt uncomfortable discussing it. Literature on disabilities often did not treat characters in a respectful sense. Many research studies illustrate this exact correlation. These studies discuss that many of the books surveyed and examined offer a stereotypical viewpoint of characters with disabilities (Andrews, 423). The stereotypes were a product of societal viewpoints. Over time, the portrayals of persons with disabilities have undergone changes in a mostly improved sense.

As literature about disabilities was published more frequently, the types of disabilities did not vary. In the beginning of publication, most of the disabilities written about were physical, like blindness and orthopedic disabilities. After the 1970s, emotional and mental disabilities were focused on. After the 1990s more stories were written about characters with learning disabilities, like autism and attention deficit disorder (ADD). In these later years, stepping away from the “pale, puny, or deformed” stereotype offered by literature in the past, stories now try to offer readers more realistic insight to life with a disability (Wopperer, 28).

Statement of Purpose

This literature review stands as a survey of the literature related to the improvements made on the production figures and the portrayal and perspective of children with disabilities in young adult fiction reflects a mostly positive growth and improvement in awareness of the disabilities presented. The literature that is presented in this review is of recent publication, discussing studies that were performed in the past decade or so. These resources are used to provide a deeper understanding of not only novels from past decades but also including and discussing novels from more recent times. Older articles would not present as relevant information because the studies would not have included much of the information that is discussed in regards to present literature.

Increase in Production

Though production of literature on disabilities has undergone an increase, this subject area needs more high quality selections in terms of available titles. An increase in publishing will help to create positive outlets for children who want to learn and understand more about their own disability, as well as provide healthy awareness for their peers without disabilities. In the beginning of children's literature production, which dates most likely back to the 17th century when fairy tales were first being published, literature on disabilities was non-existent. When adolescent literature first became a genre, around the mid 1900s, literature on disabilities was still rare. Later though, with the passing of Public law 94-142, more books on disabilities began to become published and produced (Prater 168-176).

The numbers of books continue to increase, but many authors agree that it is not nearly enough. In two studies by Emiliano Ayala and Maeleah Carlisle, the researchers noted improvements in the amount of books produced with characters with disabilities.

In the article written by Ayala in 1999, the author discussed the study performed on a collection of 59 books geared toward an adolescent audience that included characters with disabilities. The purpose of the study was to determine the increase of books produced, the quality of the literature, and if the portrayal of the characters discussed reflected the experiences of actual adolescents with disabilities. The study discovered a gradual increase in the amount of books about children with disabilities being published each year (Ayala, 108). Ayala postulated that this rise in production had to do with two factors. The first factor was that current adolescent literature is a mechanism in which adolescents can “understand and cope with difficult decisions they must face in an increasingly complex society”. The second factor that Ayala discussed was that education in today’s world pushes for information literacy and educators feel that they can do this more effectively with the use of literature that deals with and demonstrates real life situations (Ayala, 103). These factors are some of the reasons for the push of increased production on books with children with disabilities.

In the study conducted by Carlisle, the author analyzed adolescent literature on disabilities published between 1940 and 1980. Though this is not the time period that will be researched within this content analysis of literature, it is useful to determine if the trends noted in her study seem to continue in present times; the

time periods being studied will be 1980-1990 and 2000-2010. Carlisle determined that adolescent fiction literature on disabilities has seen an increase between the years of 1940 to 1980. In her analysis, the author discussed her own beliefs as well as two other authors' beliefs on this increase which they state that: "1) society was ready to address the issue of disabilities, and 2) advocates [on disabilities] were beginning to be more vocal" (Carlisle, 3). Carlisle's assumption is similar to that of Ayala's in the sense that the increase in production of books has to do with the viewpoints that society holds and diversity awareness that has become a focus in modern education.

Improvement in Quality of Portrayal/Constructive Content

One of the ways that one can become aware of subjects that are not understood is with the help of literature on that subject. Literature is one of the ways that cultural and social beliefs and values are reflected. It can create experiences for the reader where they can understand better and live vicariously through the characters that are portrayed in the stories. In this sense, literature perpetuates culture and experience for the reader. There are many people in the world that are affected by a certain type of disability, either personally or because of their interaction with another individual. For example, in the United States about 20% of the population has a disability, whether it is of a general or severe sense (DHDD, 1). Because there is such a large population of people that are affected by disabilities it is important that literature that reflects the struggles they faced on a daily basis. This literature is also significant for the population that is not directly

affected by a disability. It is important to create a healthy awareness surrounding the subject of disabilities.

There are many studies on the portrayal and perspective of characters in literature on disabilities and over time representation of these characters and quality of the literary content seems to have improved. From the beginning of the 1970s to the current years, authors have aimed to create stories that reflect a more realistic sense to the lives of characters with disabilities. There were many studies performed after Public Law 94-142 was established in 1975, and much like the increase in production of these books, the more positive portrayals have happened since legislation was enacted. The literature reviewed in this study was written after 1995. This allowed for an examination of significant changes to studies done post 1975 and post 1990, when the American Disabilities Act was established. Most of the studies and literature examined the theory that character portrayal has been better depicted since the passing of these two legislations seems to hold true. Most authors agree that though literature has undergone great improvement and that it is great that these improvements have happened, there is still room for more improvement.

In Andrews' study, the hypothesis that books on children with disabilities has made even more progress, with the discussion of how this literature helps to promote constructive attitudes towards adolescents with disabilities. The author suggests that in order to fully grant adolescents with disabilities social acceptance, it is not nearly enough to practice inclusion in classes. Students with disabilities still may be victim to isolation in school. It is important to educate others about

disabilities and this can be done through the use of literature. Andrews points out that “literature has the potential to affect reader’s attitudes and feelings and can increase one’s awareness of and sensitivity to diversity” (Andrews, 420). In this sense, using literature that includes characters with disabilities can help to promote healthy “awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with disabilities and can assist in creating positive attitudes toward disabilities” (Andrews, 420). Andrews discusses how literature on disabilities should reflect real life situations where the characters presented deal with and overcome the same situations as their peers.

Ayala points out that though there has definitely been an increase in the books being produced and published on the experiences of children with disabilities, the portrayal of these characters calls for much improvement. In many of the stories that have been published, the characters included are often from similar backgrounds. Ayala states that apart from producing and publishing more and more literature on characters with disabilities, authors of these novels should think about incorporating a diverse set of characters. This means that characters should come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. In most literature that has been produced the characters come from white, English speaking, middle to upper class backgrounds. Literature should reflect the communities that exist meaning that books that should incorporate adolescent characters that do not speak English as a first language, who come from culturally diverse backgrounds which include characters with disabilities.

Ayala also states that more books should include a primary character as the

adolescent with the disability. If educators are going to use relevant literature to promote information literacy for their students, including characters with disabilities will help those students who can relate to the characters, as well as students who need to become more aware of their peers can support this purpose. It is also important that the characters that are portrayed are reflected in an appropriate manner. This means that the characters should not be treated in a special manner, but should have strengths and weaknesses just as any other individual. In order for readers to learn and understand the characters, their stories cannot be manufactured, but be realistic. It is imperative to step away from the portrayal of characters with disabilities as the “poor little thing or brave little soul” and need to make our way to treating these characters in not entirely a positive light, but a normal light (Ayala 111).

The portrayal of characters is a factor to examine from a content point of view. Authors agree that people with disabilities are looked at as either heroes or helpless. Carlisle points out that there exist a lot of examples that are similar to the Helen Keller or Beethoven story where the character overcomes many boundaries and still succeeds; teaching kids a kind of “look at the wonderful things they were able to do” idea (Carlisle, 6). In this sense, authors tend to believe that this might hinder the process of creating a healthy awareness of disabilities because it victimizes people with disabilities instead of showing how they are similar to their peers and go through many of the same issues that their peers go through.

In the article, “Characterization of Mental Retardation and Autism in Children’s Books,” Dyches and Prater set up guidelines to determine the literary

quality of books on disabilities. They state that books following these guidelines are appropriate to understand the reality of life with disability. There are six criteria that they propose which are as follows: “a) envision high expectations for the character with disabilities, b) enhance positive contributions, c) build on strengths, d) show the person acting on choices, e) depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others, and f) ensure the character with disabilities is afforded the same citizenship rights as others” (Dyches, 231). The authors also think that characters, in any type of story should be realistic, intelligible, developing and with many dimensions.

In their study, the researchers discovered that in the twelve books, most of the depictions were realistic and accurate portrayals of the disability in question. The characters were also set up in a positive manner in regards to the criteria that Dyches and Prater set up. However, in terms of characterization, they were often seen as victims. These portrayals of the characters show the growth of positive representations of people with disabilities, but it also shows the work that must be done to keep ourselves from still looking at them as victims.

Mary Prater analyzed the world of literature on disabilities. Through a span of four years, Prater conducted over four studies on information regarding disabilities. In earlier research in her article “Characterization of Mental Retardation in Children’s and Adolescent Literature,” Prater explored how characters were portrayed in a collection of 68 books that included characters with mental retardation. In this study, as a contrast to the study performed with Dyches, Prater states that the portrayal of characters with mental retardation is weak. In the books

that were studied, only half of them included a main character with mental retardation and those characters did not follow the criteria set up by Dyches and Prater, meaning that the stories were not of great literary quality.

In her secondary study, Prater revised the previous hypothesis and discussed how the portrayal of children with disabilities has changed. In the article *Learning Disabilities in Children's and Adolescent Literature*, the author discusses what the results of her research determined. The study that the author implemented dealt with a grouping of literature on disabilities that included the main character as the one with the disability. The results of the study determined that the characters with disabilities were of better content quality than in the author's older research. In this sense, the characters were described as "dynamic, meaning they changed or grew through the course of the storyline" (Prater, 47). Many of the stories that Prater studied focused on a character that told the story of their life from their own point of view, which is a step up from the past where characters with disabilities were often secondary or background characters. The disability also became an important part of the plotline, which is an issue of discontent among many authors. Some state that having the disability be a part of the plotline is important to show the impact of the disability on the characters' lives. Others argue that the character with the disability should see the disability as part of their identity, but not something that identifies them as a whole. Prater leans towards the former idea where using the disability as the point of focus can help adolescents learn about what life is like for their peers that have disabilities.

The article *Characters with Visual Impairment in Young Adult Literature: Are They Effective Role Models for Our Teens* though specific provides important information in regards to the portrayals of characters with disabilities and how accuracy of characterization is important for readers' understanding. Authors Rosenblum and Carroll discuss the value of realistic portrayals of people with disabilities. They state that realistic characterizations are important so that young people can relate to the characters that they are reading about. If characters are not believable, it will be hard for readers to understand and be aware of how people with disabilities function in society and how society understands people with disabilities. In their study, the authors analyze works of literature dealing with young adults with impairments and much like Dyches and Prater, create a rubric for evaluating the quality of each work. Like other critics, Rosenblum and Carroll state that because literature is the gateway for young audiences' exposure to the world of disabilities, literature must be reflective of reality.

In the article *Inclusive Literature in the Library and the Classroom*, Wopperer discusses the importance of literature on disabilities for young children. She states that it is crucial to include literature on disabilities in the library and the classroom so that young children will be able to see themselves in a different light; a more positive light (Wopperer, 28). The main focus is to make sure that the literature that is included in the library and the classroom is of good content quality, meaning that the portrayals of the characters with disabilities are accurate and realistic, while at the same time being generally positive. Like other authors, Wopperer agrees that the quality of characters has improved, most specifically after 1975 when the Public

Law 94-142 was passed. Wopperer explores the inclusion of literature on disabilities in a deeper sense by including a list of selection criteria for librarians and educators to implement when performing collection development. The selection criteria help to better the awareness of disabilities while also making sure the literary quality is up to standard.

Conclusion

What can be gleaned from these studies is that it is important that literature on disabilities be readily available to the adolescent audience. Furthermore, numbers of the sources available to this audience should be of great number. Literature on disabilities promotes positive perceptions and suppresses negative stereotypes of people with disabilities.

Still, though there have been more books published about children with disabilities since its beginnings in the 1970s, and the characters portrayed stand in a more positive light than in the past, all authors of these studies state that there are not enough books that include characters with disabilities. Furthermore, portrayals of the characters should continue to fight the stereotypes and should emphasize the similarities between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. It is important that readers are aware that people with disabilities undergo many of the same problems and issues as everyone else.

With that idea in mind, there is also the concern that there should be larger sense of cultural diversity on books with children with disabilities. Literature aims to reflect the world around it, which means that literature should include all different types of

characters, with all different backgrounds and lifestyles. Though there are many books published about children with disabilities, more books need to be published with an increase in diversity and greater improvement in portrayal of the character among those stories.

Methodology:

This study seeks to determine the difference between the portrayal of characters with disabilities in post 1980 books on youths with disabilities (after Public Law 94-142 1975) and post 2000 books on youths with disabilities (after the American Disabilities Act 1990) in both content quality and literary quality. The fourteen books that were examined were from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science Library. Seven of the books are intended for a juvenile audience, ages ranging from 0 to 12. The other seven books that were used are best suited for an adolescent audience meaning that the age range for these materials rests between the years of 12 and 18.

Because of the limited sample of texts that were used in this study, it is outside the scope of this paper to be an all-inclusive examination of juvenile and adolescent literature on people with disabilities. The intent is to present the significant differences between the portrayals of characters with disabilities between two different selected time periods and show how these portrayals have evolved through time.

The novels that were used in this study were chosen by the study of several standard booklists. After looking through the booklists, the selective process was

narrowed by the selection of novels based on the publishing date, the degree of the character with disability, and the disability that was discussed. This process proved to be most difficult. One of the challenges was trying to access relevant material. Even in a university library, it was difficult to obtain many of the titles that dealt specifically with youths and disabilities. One factor to consider is to determine better ways to present materials on youths with disabilities, as well as more research in this specific area. For this study, it was imperative to find these materials, so it can only be imagined that it would prove more difficult for readers who were not necessarily searching for them to gain access.

Once all materials were found, it was important to look at different topics that were discussed in the novels. In this sense, the novels were organized by publication date and type of disability. While searching for the materials it was important to use different subject headings. What was interesting was that for the years 1980-1990, subject headings like “mental illness” and “physical impairment” were used for mental and physical disabilities, respectively. However, for titles created in later decades more specific subject headings like “cerebral palsy” and “Down syndrome” were used instead of the more general headings used for the other novels.

Using criteria that were implemented by Dyches and Prater in their study on characters with mental disabilities in children’s books, this study intends to use the same criteria to examine books on children with disabilities between the years 1980-1990 and 2000-2010. Seven books are chosen for each set time period. The criteria used are as follows:

Evaluation Criteria
Level of character
Personal characteristics
Realistic depiction
Positive portrayal
Character development
Point of view of the story
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities
Enhance positive contributions
Build on strengths
Show person acting on choices
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others

In terms of content quality, the literature should not include stereotypical portrayals of characters. In contrast, characters should not be classified as a) pitiable and pathetic, b) an object of violence, c) sinister or evil, d) an enhancement to the books "atmosphere" e) the "super cripp", f) laughable, g) their own worst enemy, h) a burden, i) non-sexual, j) incapable of participating in every day life (Andrews, 423). Characters should reflect characteristics of what would be considered "normal" children or young adults, and that the characters are afforded the same citizenship rights as other characters; in short, their disability is not their sole defining characteristic (Dyches, 233).

In terms of literary quality, the story should not revolve solely around the disability, but instead the character should live a normal life, with the disability being intertwined into that life. What people should be aware of is the fact that people with disabilities deal with more things that are similar to people without disabilities than with factors that deal with their disability alone. In this sense,

adolescents with disabilities deal with all of the woes that their peers deal with such as friends, relationships, school, family, etc.

This paper is the result of an examination of specific works of juvenile and adolescent fiction that includes characters with disabilities. Though these fictional representations are the main focus of this study, other areas, which are also addressed, are the literary and critical works dealing with the subject of literature involving characters with disabilities. Both the examination in this study, as well as the examinations provided by those critical works are studied and evaluated. The goal of this study is to determine whether the content and literary quality of the works studied is better than that of preceding decades.

Content Analysis:

Literature written on disabilities is bewildering. Even though there has been a great increase in the amount of novels produced with the subject of young people with disabilities; about a 40% increase since the year 1975, numbers still remain low in terms of literature for young people overall (Carlisle, 3). It is evident that young adults with disabilities are underrepresented in the literature that is available to them. Even in the University of North Carolina's library that is home to almost 100,000 titles, with a large portion of that being books geared towards children and young adults, during this study it was difficult to find material that was suitable.

Using booklists created by outside institutions, appropriate subject headings, and specific time periods, fourteen books were chosen for the study. For the years

1980-1990 four books for an adolescent audience were used. The titles were as follows (in chronological order by publication date): *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*; *My Life as a Body*; *M.E. and Morton*; and *Probably Still Nick Swansen*. In terms of books for a juvenile audience, three books were chosen (in chronological order by publication date): *Howie Helps Himself*; *Darlene*; and *Sarah's Surprise*. For the more current years, 2000-2010, there were a total of seven books as well. The four books used for adolescent audiences were (in chronological order by publication date): *Petey*; *So B. It*; *Accidents of Nature*; and *Out of My Mind*. The three books used for juvenile audiences were (in chronological order by publishing date): *Be Quiet, Marina!*; *My Friend Isabelle*; and *Babu's Song*.

As discussed in the methodology section, the process of choosing books for this study proved difficult. When the final list was compiled, of the eight books that were intended for the adolescent audience, four of them dealt with disabilities on a cognitive level, whether the subject heading be *Mental Illness* or *Learning Disability*. The other four dealt with disabilities on a physical level with the subject headings as either *Paralysis* or *Cerebral Palsy*. The books aimed at juvenile audiences dealt with an array of different topics in terms of disability such as Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and muteness. What was intended for this study was to not only study literature on disabilities, but to get a sample of literature dealing with similar disabilities to see the contrast of how characters were treated based purely on a spectrum of time, rather than their distinctive disability.

To best understand this analysis of content on literature on disabilities for young people, the evaluation criteria that was set up through examination of current

literature review was grouped into four different areas. Under the focus of characters and identity, the criteria level of character, personal characteristics, character development, and point of view of the story were placed. This focus is important because here one can see the shift in characterization through time and whether or not characters are given more voice in literature, thus exposing young audiences to parts of the world they may not fully understand. For the focus of quality of the literature in both the content and literary sense, the criteria used were realistic depiction, positive portrayal, expectations, contributions, and character choices.

Much like the focus on characterization, the focus on quality was important to show how things have changed from the 1980s to current times. Two smaller categories were set up for other criteria. Personal relationships were an important focus to show how friends and family dealt with the character with disabilities. Families and friends were often shaped by the views of society, which is dealt with in the last focus group. The societal view focus dealt with the rights and sense of citizenship that the character was exposed through. This last focus is very important because here one can see how society is reflected through literature, and in many ways can help people understand how their beliefs and opinions are shaped and how it affects the people that they come into contact with.

1980-1990:

Izzy, Willy-Nilly

Cynthia Voight's novel, *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* is the story about a regular non-disabled teen that through an accident suddenly learns what life is like as a disabled amputee. Through the story, Isobel (or Izzy) learns how to deal with this new impairment and changes in how society, and even her friends view her.

In terms of character and identity, the story of *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* is told through the viewpoint of the main character Izzy Lingard. At the start of the story, the reader learns that Izzy is a relatively well-rounded, smart, and popular high school freshman. She comes from an affluent background with well to do parents, and she surrounds herself with a group of somewhat popular friends. Because of her standing in school popularity, Izzy is asked to a party with a senior named Marco. Like most teenagers, Izzy is very concerned with fitting in, and though she does not entirely want to escort Marco to the party, she decides to go to save face, and head down the road to becoming more popular. From the start, most of Izzy's concerns have to do with fitting in, and though this theme continues through most of the novel, Izzy's character does go through some deep development. Izzy learns a few lessons about herself, her family, and her "friends".

Izzy transforms from an innocent and lively cheerleader into a sensible and realistic young woman. The reader meets Izzy's family right at the beginning of the novel, and it is easy to see that her family cares deeply for her. Still though, it seems that her family has an idea of what life should be like. Through Izzy's interactions with her family, mostly her mother, she grows up with the idea that appearances are

what matters. Izzy's mother often makes comments on what is proper, and what "good" people would do in certain situations. Izzy's friends, Suzy, Lauren, and Lisa are all relatively close with her, that is, until Izzy ends up in the hospital with one leg. Izzy soon learns that her friends are not who they seem to be. At first she believes that they would be lifelong friends and that they would be there for her through anything, but soon she figures out that they are merely concerned with her prior concern of fitting in and being popular.

On the other hand, a new person comes into Izzy's life. Rosamunde, a fellow classmate, helps Izzy with her recovery in a very emotional way. Rosamunde, with her candid personality, guides Izzy towards personal independence. With the help of her newfound friend, Izzy learns that there is far more to learn about life, and one of them is to learn that as hard as life gets, she is proud of the person that she is.

The novel *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* is strong in terms of quality of content. The story follows a realistic timeline of events. While Izzy is in the hospital after her accident, the procedures that she goes through are similar to what someone in real life would have to endure. This has much to do with the author's study on physical therapy while writing her novel; Voight includes a dedication to a doctor for his insight to the medical world. Also, Izzy's reaction to her accident is normal. At first, Izzy cannot completely understand the gravity of her accident. With time, she does end up realizing how different her life will now be. Similarly, her family and friends go through different stages of coping with the accident. Instead of each character giving off the same emotion, they each exhibit different understanding, or lack there of, in regards to Izzy's condition.

Izzy's characterization is positive. She stands as a strong character for adolescents to look up to. She overcomes many barriers that are set in front of her by herself, her family, her friends, and society. Izzy learns to cope with the devastating turn of events that caused her to lose a leg. Through this incident Izzy also becomes more self aware, and learns that sometimes when life gets hard, it is important to roll with the punches. Izzy clearly acts on her own choices as she makes the decisions of which friends to keep, and which friends she should probably leave behind. The fact that Izzy is able to move on from her old life, and redefine herself to start anew, shows the strength of character that she has.

Though it is not evident, because of the negative views posed by Izzy's former friends, it seems as though readers are to understand the strength of character that Izzy has, as well as her ability to fully function after her accident. Her recovery and physical therapy take a long time, but when Izzy decides she wants to return to school she embodies an empowered character. On the first day back, though out of guilt and sympathy by the leaders of the school newspaper, Izzy reluctantly joins the staff. She is shaky at the beginning, thinking that this will call some unwanted attention to her, but soon she is filled with encouragement and through her involvement creates a new life for herself.

Evaluation Criteria	Izzy Willy Nilly
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Teenage girl with amputated leg
Realistic depiction	Partially realistic
Positive portrayal	Neutral
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Isobel
Envision high expectations for the	When Izzy goes back to school she

character with disabilities	decides she wants to be a part of the school newspaper (231)
Enhance positive contributions	Izzy plays a big role in her family's life and much of the time though she gets frustrated by them, she lets them do small things for her to help with their emotional well being
Build on strengths	Izzy knows her abilities and the things that she wants in life Izzy is able to go through the struggle of losing her leg, and continuing on with physical therapy, and returning to school to face her peers after the devastating accident Izzy is proud of herself and who she is: "I didn't know what to think, but I wanted to stand there, for another minute or five, just being myself" (258)
Show person acting on choices	Though it ends up as an accident, Izzy makes the decision to go to the party with Marco (17) Izzy decides that it may not be the best idea to remain friends with her old friends because they have stopped coming to see her in the hospital and they have treated her differently due to the accident
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Izzy decides to step out of her comfort zone and become friends with Rosamunde even though she's different than the friends Izzy expected she'd be close to (121)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Through her courage and determination as well as her intelligence and charisma, Izzy is able to get back into the swing of things at school, and even takes part in her school newspaper (235) Being a part of the social scene at school helps Izzy's full recovery

My Life as a Body

The story *My Life as a Body* by author Norma Klein involves a character that also gets into an accident leaving him paralyzed. In this story, the main character, an eighteen-year-old girl named Augie, gradually befriends her classmate who has become disabled. Through the story she becomes more open to a deep relationship with someone who is physically handicapped.

My Life as a Body follows the story of the relationship between Augie Lloyd and her disabled classmate named Sam Feldman. This story is not told from Sam's viewpoint but instead, it is told by Augie. Augie is portrayed as a typical teenager, worrying about her first relationship and trying to fit in. Sam is portrayed as the new boy, who is first seen as aloof and a bit strange. Sam is confined to a wheelchair after a car accident that leaves him in a paralytic state. Their relationship starts when Augie reluctantly agrees to tutor Sam in their school studies. The counselor that discusses her new arrangement claims that their partnership is not only for Sam's academic benefit, but also for Augie's, since as a character is "supercilious" due to her actual shy personality. As the story progresses, the reader becomes aware that this story is more about the development and transformation of Augie's character rather than Sam's disability, which can be seen in both positive and negative ways.

As far as quality of content, the story could be seen as a realistic view of a growing relationship between two characters. It is a bit cliché, where one character is able to emotionally overcome the obstacles that are thrust upon them and step above the harsh stereotypes of society, but the story in itself has endearing qualities.

One of the problems that was faced when reading the story was understanding Sam's emotions to a full extent. Since the story is not told from his perspective, it is not entirely clear how Sam is affected by his disability. Occasionally, the reader is able to see some emotional and physical complications with being mentally disabled and being confined to a wheelchair through the events that Augie and Sam go through. Mostly though, the reader is aware of how Augie feels about herself in terms of her relationship with Sam, and how she feels about Sam's disability, but the reader cannot see into Sam's brain. The only times that the reader really becomes aware of how Sam is affected physically by his disability is when he and Augie attempt a sexual relationship and it overtires his muscles, or when she has to carry out some of the tasks that he needs done, but cannot physically do them. The overall feeling behind the story is very different than that of *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* where the reader is stuck in Izzy's mind and can understand on a primary level how the character is affected by their disability.

However, what is enlightening is seeing how both characters act on their own accord, which pushes content into a positive light. Augie and Sam work hard to keep a relationship together. What is interesting is their relationship together. Augie seems to lean on Sam for emotional support, and in one point of the book states that it would be easier if he were a girl because of the way that they get along so well. Physically, their relationship is complicated. It is hard for Sam to follow through on their physical activities, and often gets tired out. Sam claims that Augie has helped him through dark points in his life, but through much of the story his attitude seems nonchalant in regards to their relationship. Both characters get through school and

eventually go off to college on separate terms after attempting to hold onto a stable relationship, yet it seems that this story is more about the emotional, physical and sexual growth of Augie and not Sam.

Evaluation Criteria	My Life as a Body
Level of character	Supporting
Personal characteristics	Teenage boy with paralysis after an accident
Realistic depiction	Partially realistic
Positive portrayal	Neutral
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Augie
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Though character is smart, the counselor still thinks that he needs a tutor because of damage to his brain from the accident (45) Sam is worried that he will never recover from the accident: "What do you think? Do you think I'll totally be cured eventually?" (128)
Enhance positive contributions	Sam helps Augie to learn to love her body and become more confident in herself
Build on strengths	Sam decides to take classes at Columbia in Physics
Show person acting on choices	Sam stays in New York instead of going with Augie to Rhode Island while she attends school (175) He voices his own opinions to his parents and tells them that he will be able to live on his own
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Relationship with Augie grows to be a deep one, but it seems to be strained much of the time (158)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Sam is not placed in a special class for people with disabilities

M.E. and Morton

M.E. and Morton, a 1987 young adult novel written by Sylvia Cassedy. This story is seen from the viewpoint of the main character Mary Ella. The character with disabilities is her older brother Morton who the reader learns is learning disabled.

Much like *My Life as a Body* this story is told from the viewpoint of the character that does not have a disability. Mary Ella is the narrator of the story, and she begins with a feeling of disdain and resentment towards her brother Morton. Mary Ella longs for a friend that will admire who she is. She does receive this admiration from her brother Morton, but this is not the friend that Mary Ella is looking for. Soon, a new girl, Polly, comes to live in town. Polly is exactly what Mary Ella has been looking for. Polly is bright and shining, and full of energy and life. Through Polly, Mary Ella, as well as her brother, are changed, and though Morton's growth seems to happen on his own accord, Mary Ella's growth only seems to happen because of her yearning for acceptance and companionship.

This book involves a lot of growth from the main character, yet much like *My Life as a Body*, the reader sympathizes with that character rather than the character with the disability, which makes it difficult to see the growth of that character; in this case Morton. In the beginning of the story, Mary Ella is ashamed of her older brother because of what one can guess is a learning disability. Morton is regarded as being a slow learner and retarded, yet as one may know, this is stereotypical language. In this sense, Morton is not necessarily seen in a positive light. Morton is constantly picked on and ridiculed not only by his peers but also by his family, including his parents. Mary Ella also harbors a sense of disapproval towards her

brother. Because of Mary Ella's negative views towards her brother, and the understanding of her character by the reader, Morton is seen as the helpless and pitiful character. As the story continues, and with the help of Polly and her admiration for Morton, Mary Ella soon learns to understand her brother, and she grows to love him. Mary Ella wants her family to love Morton and she tries to get them to understand the way that he lives his life.

The reality of this story is questionable. Though many times there may be that one person that swoops into town and changes the entire face of the world that has existed, change mostly comes from within a person rather than from an outside force. It is hard to imagine that within such a short period of time Mary Ella's frustrations with her brother would have so abruptly changed. Though the change is a positive one, it seems as though Mary Ella only changes because someone else sees the light in her brother; it is not found under circumstances she has created for herself. What is left to question is that if Polly had never come to Mary Ella and Morton's neighborhood, would Mary Ella ever have given her brother the chance that he deserved?

Evaluation Criteria	M.E. and Morton
Level of character	Supporting
Personal characteristics	Teenage boy with learning disability
Realistic depiction	Partially realistic
Positive portrayal	Negative
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Mary Ella
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Mary Ella just thinks her brother is dumb instead of other qualities like being brave or obedient/disobedient Morton's mother calls Morton names behind his back
Enhance positive contributions	The narrator and Polly seem to have high

	faith in Morton as a character, while his family does not
Build on strengths	Morton knows his own strengths and weaknesses as a character (147) Morton makes sure that he is always prepared for whatever might happen during the day; he wears his sneakers in case he has to run or climb things while at school
Show person acting on choices	Morton makes the decisions to do things, even if he doesn't remember at first; he tries to give his mother a Mother's Day present even after he forgets (54)
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	In the beginning of the story Mary Ella considers her own brother, Morton, "the dumbest kid on the block, and also the ugliest" (28), but she grows to respect him because of the things that Polly sees in him Mary Ella starts understanding Polly and why she likes Morton and wants attention herself from Polly Mary Ella wants to act like Polly and Morton (155) Mary Ella starts to understand her brother and why he acts the way that he does. She learns to love him and wants her family to care about him as much as she has grown to (291)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Morton is only treated fairly by Polly, everyone else makes fun of him because they think he is "dumb" People play tricks on Morton and Mary Ella doesn't do anything (95) The family sends Morton away because they feel like he is a bad influence (243)

Probably Still Nick Swansen

Virginia Euwer Wolff's novel, *Probably Still Nick Swansen* is the story about a high school boy named Nick who is learning disabled. Nick suffers the harshness of society, and is placed in a classroom with other students that have disabilities. Nick

must grapple with his placement in society as well as overcome the issues that most teens face.

Nick's story is told in the first person and the story is seen from his point of view. Nick is a relatively strong character, and though he suffers from the general teen dilemmas, he seems to know who he is and what he wants from the world around him. Though Nick is stated as being learning disabled, or in his own words "minimally brain dysfunctioned", he is a very apt student and is aware of his own limitations. Though he has trouble with problem solving, he is very intelligent in regards to his knowledge with facts, especially on North American frog species. However, because Nick is mostly sure of himself and his limitations, there does not seem to be much development or change to his character as the story progresses. By the end of the story, Nick's feelings about himself as well as the people around him have stayed generally the same.

Sadly, this story is realistic yet at the same time very stereotypical. One of the most shocking things in this story was the use of language. When Nick and his classmates would talk about one another, there were a lot of terms that would not be considered politically correct. This was something that was interesting in terms of novels involving characters with disabilities. Many times, characters who were physically disabled would call themselves "cripple", a term that Izzy used often, in regards to her condition. In *Probably Still Nick Swansen*, the students with Down syndrome were called "Downs", students with learning disabilities were just referred to as "special", and all of the students in Room 19 were "different".

The classroom that Nick is a part of is set up as a resource room where students with all types of disabilities are put together whether their disabilities be physical, emotional, or mental. The students are segregated from the “normal” students, and rarely come into contact with them. A lot of stereotypical language is used when other characters are talking about Nick and his Room 19 classmates.

One of the most important characters is his classmate Shana who “graduates” from Room 19 to “go up” and be a student in the regular classrooms. Most of Nick’s story revolves around his relationship with Shana, where he decides to become the first person from Room 19 to go to the prom. In this light, it becomes evident that according to society, students with disabilities do not take part in normal social activities like the rest of the students in the school. This takes away from the idea that Nick is afforded the same rights as the rest of his peers. This is even more evident when Shana, his prom date, ditches Nick and he is forced to stand out in the cold because he is uncomfortable with going into the social affair on his own.

There is not a large sense of expectation from Nick’s character. It seemed as though readers were supposed to be thrilled that Nick was able to get through the day at school. Nick is strong of mind, yet at the same time his character did not act based on his own choices, and instead his hand was mostly forced by either his parents, his teachers, or his peers. The societal views in regards to Nick were highly negative. He wasn’t given much respect, and though he wanted to fit in, when he felt ostracized by his peers, he stayed on the periphery.

The other interesting thing was that Nick often pointed out that people did not know how to classify him, and that he was just different, which points out to the

idea that society was often confused on how to deal with people with disabilities. Though confusion on disabilities still exists due to the variety of cases, the misunderstandings and misconceptions that were evident in *Probably Still Nick Swansen* were distressing. With the last study of this young adult book on disabilities, published in 1988, it only leaves hope that the stereotypes and portrayals of the characters involved will change with time.

Evaluation Criteria	Probably Still Nick Swanson
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Teenage boy with learning disability
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Neutral
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Nick
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Nick receives much praise from his parents (128) and teachers, but his peers do not give him a great sense of expectation; he is expected to subsist in Room 19 until he graduates The prom is one of the biggest things that Nick had planned for himself, but he was stood up
Enhance positive contributions	Throughout the book it seems as though Nick copes with his life and his situations, but in the end of the story he is able to have a growing relationship with his friend Shana
Build on strengths	Nick has a great interest in amphibians, and he is able to build on this interest for his final project; his teacher are very supportive of the things that he finds interest in
Show person acting on choices	Nick decides that he wants to go to the prom and so he asks his classmate Shana even though students from Room 19 don't ever go (18) Nick decides that he is going to get a job in order to get enough money to do all of the things he wants to do with Shana at the prom (44)

Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Nick has a loving relationship with his parents, but he does not have many relationships that grow outside of that. He is friends with a girl Shana from his class, but they go through many different struggles as she “Goes Up” from Room 19.
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Nick does not gain much respect from his peers that are not a part of Room 19. Room 19 is classified as “the droolers” and there is no expectation of getting out of the classroom because of the types of disabilities that Nick and his classmates exhibit. The policemen do not treat Nick with any respect because they simply cannot understand him; they just assume that he is a dumb kid (87).

Howie Helps Himself

This picture book by Joan Fassler talks about a young boy named Howie who is physically handicapped due to cerebral palsy. The author includes a preface to the story discussing the issues that children with disabilities face and how she hopes that with picture books, such as *Howie Helps Himself* will help young people to become more understanding of their peers with disabilities and create more positive attitudes.

The story is told in the third person, explaining Howie’s life. In this case, Howie is the main character and the reader is able to see the ways Howie functions on a day-to-day basis. As a character, Howie grows. Though mostly positive, Howie grows from being impatient, frustrated, and incapable of moving his wheelchair, to brighter and self-reliant when at the end he is able to wheel his way to his father standing across the classroom.

The setting of the story is similar to that of *Probably Still Nick Swansen*, where the students with disabilities are all placed together. In his classroom there are students that are also physically handicapped, as well as other students who have some mental disabilities. One unnerving aspect of the book was in the illustrations where it seemed as though the author wanted to include an incredible amount of diversity. Though diversity is usually a good thing, the amount of diversity in this case, seemed forced, with its inclusion of characters of all different races. The depictions of these characters were overtly stereotypical, where the Black student had an Afro, and the American Indian student was wearing a feathered headband.

Overall, this story ended on a positive note, providing Howie with the capacity to act on his own choices, that being the strength to move his wheelchair on his own with much support from his family and peers. Yet, there were a few issues that were found in this text that should not be overlooked and should consider some change.

Evaluation Criteria	Howie Helps Himself
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Young boy with cerebral palsy
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Neutral
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Howie
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Even when discussing the things that Howie cannot do there is no sense of disappointment for the reader
Enhance positive contributions	Through his determination Howie shows his class and his family that you can do anything (24)
Build on strengths	The story talks about everything that

	Howie likes and likes to do
Show person acting on choices	Howie decides that he is going to move his wheelchair on his own (20)
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Howie's family is very supportive of him, and he does many different activities with each member of his family, even going to the park with his grandmother (8)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Though Howie goes to a special school for children with disabilities he is shown great respect by his teachers and peers (12)

Darlene

Darlene is the story written by Eloise Greenfield about a young girl who is physically handicapped and in a wheelchair. In this story Darlene goes to stay with her uncle and cousin and though her cousin tries to get her to have fun, all Darlene wants to do is to go home and be with her mother.

The story is told in the third person, like *Howie Helps Himself*, but while Howie seems to have some character growth, Darlene only seems to grow in a small way. There is not a great amount of character development in this story. It is the simply story of a child who wants to go home until she realizes that she can have fun in the place that she has to stay for a couple of hours.

In terms of realism, the story could happen in any form and this does not need to be told from the viewpoint of a character with disabilities. There is not much expectation from the character, except that from the plotline of the simple story, the reader is almost forced to guess that Darlene will end up wanting to stay with her uncle and cousin. Darlene does show a sense of stating her own wishes and desires,

but as stated before there is not much character growth seen in the story on the whole.

Evaluation Criteria	Darlene
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Young girl disabled in wheelchair
Realistic depiction	Partially realistic
Positive portrayal	Neutral
Character development	Static
Point of view of the story	Darlene
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	N/A
Enhance positive contributions	Darlene eventually gets along with her family after she gets over the fact that she wants to go home (21)
Build on strengths	Darlene is able to participate in the games and activities that her cousin wants to do with her
Show person acting on choices	Darlene decides that she does not want to go home (21)
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Darlene and her family seem to care about and love each other (19)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Darlene's family does not treat her any different because of her disability

Sarah's Surprise

This surprise of a story was of the best quality of the three juvenile picture books. Nan Holcomb's story *Sarah's Surprise* is about a young girl named Sarah who is mute.

Sarah is seen as a generally upbeat and happy child, but soon the reader discovers that she is very frustrated. Sarah is frustrated because she cannot communicate the things that she wants to say. During her grandfather's birthday she is unable to sing Happy Birthday to him, while the rest of her family does.

Though her family is very supportive of her and tries to help her in the best way possible, they cannot grasp Sarah's emotions on such a happy day.

However, after going to her speech therapist and expressing what Sarah would like to do, she is given a talking board that will enable her to express herself through it. Sarah shows growth and enthusiasm as a character through the way that she got through her frustrations and expressed what she needed, even with such a difficult disability. At the end of the story, through her Delta talker, she is able to sing Happy Birthday to her mother.

Evaluation Criteria	Sarah's Surprise
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Young girl that is mute
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Sarah
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Sarah's family is supportive of her and try to find ways to effectively communicate with her even though she cannot speak (13) Sarah's teacher is able to understand the things that Sarah wants by being patient and pushing to understand what Sarah wants (20)
Enhance positive contributions	Sarah wants to become a bigger part of her family by helping them to celebrate happy times together (13)
Build on strengths	Sarah's ability to think quickly on her feet help her to explain the things that she would like to do
Show person acting on choices	Sarah decides that she wants to be able to sing Happy Birthday like the rest of the family so she does what she can in order to fulfill this desire
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Sarah gets support from her family and teacher despite her disability
Ensure the character with disabilities	Everyone treats Sarah with respect, even

afforded the same citizenship rights as others	her brother Jay, who jokes around with Sarah when he cannot understand her (14)
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2000-2010:

Petey

This novel written by Ben Mikaelson in 2000 chronicles the story of a man named Petey born with cerebral palsy in the year 1922. This story stands vastly different than any of the other stories in this study because it spans over a sixty-year period and the reader sees Petey grow from early childhood to late adulthood.

The story is seen through the eyes of Petey himself, and is told through his viewpoint of the world that he grows up in. Petey's character development is practically immeasurable, as readers see him grow from a small, shriveled child unable to express himself, to a charismatic grown adult of almost 70 years of age.

The book is so realistic that the reader can almost palpably feel the struggles and emotions that Petey exhibits throughout the novel. The story starts in 1922, when Petey is first born and because of his inability to move and maneuver correctly on his own is sent to an insane asylum as a mental illness patient. Though Petey endures excruciating pains and frustrations, his outlook on life is positive as he sees the joys in the small wonders of life. Readers can learn a lot from Petey's outlook, by not taking the life that they lead for granted and to relish in the things that one might often overlook.

Petey is definitely a strong character, as he struggles to learn to communicate with the people around him, and ultimately is successful. Though he is only able to

make a couple of friendships, the people that he makes those connections with are lifelong friends. One thing that is often misunderstood in terms of cerebral palsy is that often brain functions are completely normal, where physical functions do not work at all. Thus, Petey was able to understand the world around him, yet was unable to communicate the things that he needed. The reader is able to see though, that the author fills Petey with high expectations of life, as he climbs each obstacle that is placed in front of him, and all in a humbling manner.

Though society does not provide Petey with the same citizenship rights as others, through time Petey is able to grant access to many of the things he deserves through perseverance. Because of the time period that the story spans, the terminology used in regards to people with disabilities varies, and it is easy to see how the harshness or reality is reflected. Petey, as a person with disabilities, is placed in an insane asylum with other people who have disabilities, along with criminals, and mental illness patients. This is a statement about what society was once like. As things change in the story, and Petey is sent to an elderly home once he reaches the age of a senior, Petey is treated in a generally humane manner.

While at the senior home, Petey is befriended by a local high school teenager. Though the majority of the story discusses Petey's strife in the insane asylum, the focus of the entire book deals with his friendship with Trevor Ladd. Initially Trevor saves Petey from a group of bullies from his school, but later on after learning the complexities of Petey's emotions, becomes great friends with Petey.

Both characters learn from each other, and we can see the development of both of them through their relationship. Petey learns how to better communicate

with the world around him, and learns how to navigate himself in unfamiliar and frustrating situations. Trevor learns to look beyond what your eyes see, and learns the importance of cooperation, patience, and understanding of something different than what one knows.

On the whole, this novel seemed to be the most realistic and beneficial of all of the novels studied. Readers learn a lot about the realities of a disease like cerebral palsy. It also forces readers to look inside themselves and question judgments they may have made in the past, and how even the smallest changes can mean a lot to another person.

Evaluation Criteria	Petey
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Older man with cerebral palsy
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Petey
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Petey is not met with many high expectations from the people around him, until they get to know him
Enhance positive contributions	Petey sees the beauty in the world around him, even in the small things, like feeding the rats at the insane asylum (38) Petey becomes Trevor's "grandfather" before he passes away because of the relationship that the two men shared with each other (278)
Build on strengths	Petey is aware of his limitations; he is very smart but has a hard time communicating Petey is good at reading people's emotions and because of this is very capable of understanding everyone's feelings
Show person acting on choices	Petey decides that he wants to feed the

	<p>mice to keep them as friends, so he concocts a plan by leaving food for them to eat at night (38)</p> <p>Petey communicates to Trevor that he wants to see his old friend Calvin, and with lots of time and effort the pair are able to find him (210)</p>
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	<p>Any person that comes into contact with Petey and gives him the time of day end up falling in love with him; a few of the main people are Joe, Calvin, and Trevor</p> <p>When Trevor first sees Petey, he thinks of him as a crippled old man, but after he gets to know Petey, he understands how important Petey is (278)</p>
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	<p>Petey is not afforded many citizenship rights; when he is a child the doctors force him away from his loving family and into an insane asylum because they think there is something mentally wrong with him when, in fact, its cerebral palsy (6)</p> <p>Bullies throw snowballs at Petey because he is old and crippled (146)</p>

So B. It

So B. It by Sarah Weeks was a very interesting story. In contrast to Petey and many of the other stories discussed, *So B. It* is told from the perspective of a young girl taking care of her mentally disabled mother.

Heidi is the main character of this story and her tale chronicles her adventures of searching for her mother's past. Heidi desperately wants to understand her mother better and learn what the word "Soof" means when her mother utters it to her on a daily basis.

Though her mother does not undergo character development and eventually passes on, Heidi learns a lot about society, her mother's past and disability, and

most importantly herself. Heidi is portrayed as a strong character, and though characterization in this study has to deal with the character with disabilities, the reader feels a deep connection between Heidi and her mother. As Heidi figures out her mother's past, she also figures out her own, and it gives a connection into the growth (or decline) of her mother as a character.

Heidi's mother, through society, is not afforded a sense of citizenship. She is regarded, even to the reader, as somewhat of an outcast, and it is hard to understand how she manages in life. Heidi and her mother are able to get by with the help of their neighbor, Bernadette. Without Bernadette and her aid to Heidi and her mother, it is questionable if there would have even been a story otherwise.

Society continues to fail as Heidi goes on the search to learn about her mother's past. Though Heidi meets some pleasant people on the way, when she gets to her destination, the institution from which her mother came, she is met with hostility. Heidi's strength and perseverance seem to change the people that she meets there, and the attitudes towards those with disabilities seem to change.

What happens in this story, which is an aspect that many literature reviews discussed, is that the author seems to inadvertently make you pity the character with disabilities whilst creating awareness about them.

Evaluation Criteria	So B. It
Level of character	Supporting
Personal characteristics	Mother with mental disability
Realistic depiction	Partially Realistic
Positive portrayal	Neutral
Character development	Static
Point of view of the story	Heidi
Envision high expectations for the	Heidi's mother is unable to do many

character with disabilities	things on her own; the only thing that she is very good at is making tea for Heidi when Heidi is upset: “my mother loved me in her own special way” (5) There is not much expectation out of her character
Enhance positive contributions	Though Heidi’s mother is incapable of doing many things, Heidi has a deep love for her mother and her mother is Heidi’s motivation for taking on the adventure of finding out her past
Build on strengths	N/A
Show person acting on choices	Heidi’s mother does not have much capacity of making decisions; she lets either Heidi or Bernadette take care of the issues that she needs whether is be cleaning, feeding, or tying her shoe Bernadette was the one who raised Heidi
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Heidi’s mother is deeply loved by both Heidi and Bernadette Heidi’s mother in the past had a deep loving relationship with Elliot, who became depressed when Heidi’s mother was forced to move away (218)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	N/A

Accidents of Nature

Much like *Petey*, this story discusses the subject of disabilities in a different time period from when it was written. The story *Accidents of Nature* by Harriet McBryde Johnson is about a young girl Jean who has cerebral palsy and who attends a camp for kids with disabilities.

Jean’s story is told in the first person, where the reader follows the ten days that Jean spends at her camp participating in daily camp activities. Unlike many of the other campers, Jean goes to a regular high school, while the other campers go to schools for their disabilities, or are put in classes like Nick and Howie were put in. At

first Jean has trouble fitting in, since she is a new camper, but as she befriends one of the most social girls in the camp, she learns who everyone is rather quickly.

Jean undergoes much character development as she learns to accept the struggles that she faces because of her cerebral palsy. She gains more confidences in herself as she stands up for herself in things she believes in and learns how to understand things, which she is unfamiliar with. She becomes aware that one should not be afraid of things that are different than they are used to and that maybe being “normal” is not what she had originally thought it was. Jean learns that maybe being normal means having a disability. She also grows in the way that she teaches other campers, like her friend Sara, to not accept some of the struggles she faces because of her disability.

Through Jean the reader is also able to learn many of the differences between different types of disabilities. Jean has cerebral palsy, Sara is paralyzed and in a wheelchair, Dolly who also has cerebral palsy, and Willie, a boy who is physically deformed. Through the ten-day chronicle the reader becomes aware of the different methods of care for each different disability, as well as the similarities between the disabilities, and similarities between everyone in the world.

What is interesting is the background that Jean comes from. Though the novel is set in the past, Jean’s family is very supportive of her and her disability. This is in contrast to the relationship that Izzy had with her overprotective parents, and Mary Ella had with her brother. Though they drop her off at camp while they go on their own vacation, it is clear that her parents care about her, and she even states

that the most important thing for them would be her happiness rather than her simply striving to get through life.

Again what was surprising was that language that was used for people with disabilities, but what was different in this case, was that those with disabilities used it. At times, this could make the reader feel uncomfortable. This is especially when one strives to be politically correct, but then is faced with a person with disabilities referring to themselves as a “crip” for a physically disabled person, “spazzo” for a person with cerebral palsy, or an “aussie” for a person with autism. This bears into question of how people with disabilities might want to be treated, and it makes for walking a thin line.

This book was full of many lessons that the reader could learn about the world of disabilities. Both understanding those who have disabilities and their joys and frustrations, as well as people who are affected by those with disabilities and their joys and frustrations are lessons that one can learn by seeing the world through Jean, Sara, Dolly, and Willie’s eyes.

Evaluation Criteria	Accidents of Nature
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Teenage girl with cerebral palsy
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Jean
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Jean is portrayed as a very smart and involved individual (6) Jean talks about her college plans with Sara, and that she wants to go to Chapel Hill to get a job working with computers (141)
Enhance positive contributions	Jean goes to camp because she feels that

	<p>she owes her parents; they really care about her and want her to be happy, so she tries to do things that will make life a bit easier for them (6, 223)</p> <p>Jean is accepting of most of her peers, and tries to understand where everyone comes from</p> <p>Jean teaches Sara that there is more to life and that she should have high expectations for herself (143)</p>
Build on strengths	<p>Jean is proud of who she is: “my long legs don’t work right, but I’m proud to have them, proud in fact of all my body parts” (35)</p> <p>Jean thinks highly of herself: “I don’t want to pretend. I want to achieve, really achieve” (137)</p>
Show person acting on choices	<p>Jean is proud that she goes to a “normal” school, but through time she realizes that being normal might not mean what she has thought her whole life, and that the way she is, is what normal is</p> <p>Jean decides to participate in camp activities even when her best friend at camp decides not to; she wants to take part in the whole camp experience (81, 121)</p> <p>When playing baseball Jean wants to do things on her own without help from the counselors (114)</p>
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	<p>Though at first timid, Jean befriends Sara, one of the popular camp members (11)</p> <p>Jean is unsure if she wants to be friends with Willie, but through time she realizes that he may not be as bad as she originally thinks (48)</p> <p>She seems to get along well with the rest of the camp members</p> <p>Jean feels sympathy for her counselors when they are put into awkward situations (71)</p>
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	<p>The setting of the story is at a camp for individuals with disabilities, so all campers are treated the same more or</p>

	less Jean attends a “normal” school (17)
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Out of My Mind

This most recent novel, published in 2010 by Sharon M. Draper tells the story of a young girl named Melody who is incapable of talking and walking. Yet, Melody can remember everything that her eyes have seen, her ears have heard, and her body has come into contact with. The one thing that Melody dreams of, is to communicate all of this information that she has stored in her head.

Melody, like many of the other characters in these stories, spends her school time in a special program designated for children with disabilities. She is put into a room with children with Down syndrome, autism, ADD, and paralysis. Though one may think this would be beneficial to students on a whole in terms of learning, this kind of teaching does not allow for the full potential of both students with disabilities or without disabilities.

Melody’s character exhibits many positive characteristics. Melody is sure of who she is and what she can contribute to the world. She comes from a caring and supportive family atmosphere. Though she is scared on occasion, no one can argue that any young child growing up is not afraid of fitting in to his or her social sphere.

This story was highly realistic. As discussed, Melody begins her schooling in a special program. During her time at Spaulding Street Elementary School, the administration decides to start inclusion, meaning placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms. In the beginning Melody is delighted, but soon she learns that not everyone is ready to accept her or her program classmates into their learning

atmosphere. Sadder still, is some of the educators' reluctance to include Melody in classroom activities, though her brain functioning is equal or better to that of her peers. However, because of Melody's charismatic nature, she makes a couple of friends. They seem to understand her, but there is still a small sense of trepidation coming from each of them.

Still, each step of the way Melody has something to look forward to. After inclusion classes start, Melody is gifted with a talking board, like the one that Sarah uses. This enables Melody to communicate the things that she wants to say to her family and her peers. Soon everyone learns just how smart Melody is. She even places in her school Whiz Kids competition. As Melody becomes more confident with herself both she and her peers realize that she can compete with her classmates, she makes it to the final group for the national competition.

Reality is seen again when Melody is left behind by her "normal" classmates who are travelling to Washington for the national competition. They explain to her that it was not their intention, but Melody is not convinced. Yet, as the strong character she is, instead of getting outwardly angry and taking it out on them, she expresses how she feels, and moves on. Through her courage and strength she gains a great deal of respect from her peers.

One of the many things that can be learned from this novel is the understanding of the depth to different disabilities. Much like the lessons that were learned in *Accidents of Nature* the reader can become aware of the profound brain functions of someone who may not be able to easily communicate themselves through the spoken word.

Evaluation Criteria	Out of My Mind
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Young girl with cerebral palsy
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Melody
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	The people that help Melody believe that she can do great things, and she does; Melody makes it into the Whiz Kids competition, as well as the national competition for her apt at quiz questions
Enhance positive contributions	Melody plays a central role in her family, and even when a new child (Penny) joins the family, Melody receives her with open arms (75)
Build on strengths	Melody knows how smart she is, and all she needs is a way to communicate her thoughts to the people around her; when she discovers that this is possible, she jumps on the opportunity (130) Melody is very understanding of her circumstances and does not consider herself special: "fifth grade is probably pretty rocky for lots of kids" (293)
Show person acting on choices	Melody is capable of making her own decisions and though before she got her talking board had a hard time communicating what she wanted, once she gets it, she is able to communicate clearly what she wants to do When Melody gets upset one day in her inclusion class, she decides she wants to go back to the comfort of her resource room class (146) Melody knows her own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to her education; she is not good at Math, but she excels in Geography and History
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Melody makes friends with many of the students in her resource room classroom Melody tries to make friends with the students in her inclusion classroom, but this proves more difficult; at the end she

	has gained some respect from a couple of her peers (291)
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	Though Melody should be treated just as everyone else is, her peers in her inclusion class still treat her differently, even to the end of the novel When she excels in school everyone is surprised; what is important to note is the disease of cerebral palsy, which may not affect brain functions, just physical functions, as it is in Melody's case

Be Quiet, Marina!

Be Quiet, Marina! is the story of two young girls, one named Marina and the other named Moira. Marina has cerebral palsy and Moira has Down syndrome. The story is about how Marina and Moira, who at first because they are different have a hard time getting along, learn how to cope with each other and become great friends.

This story is also told in the third person, showing how both characters relate to each other and the world that surrounds them. First, their similarities are discussed, and then their differences.

Both characters grow in the sense that they both have to change in order to get along with each other. Marina, who is always screaming and being boisterous, learns to calm down by Moira, and Moira learns to share her feelings with Marina. Both characters follow through with their feelings and act on what they believe in.

The story is realistic in that it is the true story of two young classmates. The author includes a postscript talking about the lives of the two girls. Other than by seeing the photographs of the two girls throughout the book, the story could be

about two children without disabilities. This is important to think about because often people don't realize that there are more similarities than differences between people with and without disabilities.

Evaluation Criteria	Be Quiet Marina
Level of character	Main
Personal characteristics	Young girl with cerebral palsy, young girl with Down syndrome
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Marina, Moira
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Marina and Moira do many different activities while they are at school
Enhance positive contributions	Moira helps Marina to be more quiet, while Marina helps Moira have more confidence Marina and Moira have great communication skills
Build on strengths	Moira shows her strength of character by helping Marina without scolding her
Show person acting on choices	Moira is able to tell Marina that she does not want her to be so loud
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Marina and Moira build a strong and caring relationship with each other
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	N/A

My Friend Isabelle

Eliza Woloson's story *My Friend Isabelle* is a touching story told in the point of view of a young boy named Charlie who befriends a young girl named Isabel. Like *Be Quiet, Marina!* this story first talks about the similarities and differences between the two characters. Charlie does not have a disability, and Isabelle has Down syndrome. Though Charlie knows that Isabelle is different than him, the only

differences that he points out is about their size, how they act, and the things that they like.

This story is quite realistic because it is based on two real children and it offers a positive portrayal of both the character with a disability and the character without a disability. Both characters are strong characters that act on their own accord. There is not much development of each character because of their acceptance of each other from the start. Through their friendship, they can and have created growth for the people around them.

Through this story one can see that there is a lot to learn from children and their acceptance of people who may not be exactly the same as them. Society should offer the same acceptance and citizenship that Charlie has shown in his friendship with Isabelle.

Evaluation Criteria	My Friend Isabelle
Level of character	Supporting
Personal characteristics	Young girl with Down syndrome
Realistic depiction	Realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Charlie
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	Isabelle teaches Charlie how to dance (16)
Enhance positive contributions	Though her interests are different sometimes from Charlie, they are able to teach each other what the other one knows
Build on strengths	Isabelle is good at dancing, sharing, and going down the slides
Show person acting on choices	Isabelle decides what she wants to do and what she doesn't want to do
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Charlie and Isabelle have a deep friendship (26)
Ensure the character with disabilities	Isabelle participates in all of the same

afforded the same citizenship rights as others	activities as Charlie Charlie does not treat Isabelle any different because of her disability, but in fact is glad they are different so that they can share their experiences
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Babu's Song

Babu's Song by Stephanie Stuve-Boden is the story of Bernardi and his mute grandfather. This story is more a tale of respecting your elders and finding joy in the little things than it is about disability.

There exists character development in terms of Bernardi's character, where he learns to enjoy the small gifts that have been given to him by his grandfather rather than the expensive ones that all of his friends have. In terms of Babu, the character with the disability, there is not much growth, as he is the one that teaches Bernardi the lesson of the story.

Though this story had a similar disability to that of *Sarah's Surprise*, the focus was on Bernardi's development as a child and learning responsibility than Babu's communication skills. Bernardi did not have any problem understanding what his grandfather wanted to tell him or teach him, and Bernardi in the end, learned the lesson that Babu offered.

Evaluation Criteria	Babu's Song
Level of character	Supporting
Personal characteristics	Older man that is mute
Realistic depiction	Partially realistic
Positive portrayal	Positive
Character development	Dynamic
Point of view of the story	Bernardi
Envision high expectations for the character with disabilities	N/A

Enhance positive contributions	Babu teaches a lesson to his young grandson about being thoughtful and appreciating the small things in life (14, 26)
Build on strengths	Babu makes creative objects out of the things that is found in his house to create a living for him and Bernardi (6)
Show person acting on choices	Babu pays for Bernardi's schooling with the money that they have made from selling things in the village (23)
Depict expanding reciprocal relationships with others	Babu and Bernardi have a caring and loving relationship
Ensure the character with disabilities afforded the same citizenship rights as others	N/A

Results:

Through this study, it is clear that the portrayal of characters with disabilities have undergone many changes from past decades to current times. These changes can be seen in the shift from level of character, characteristics and characterization, portrayal in a positive light, development, and societal views.

Upon close examination, the level of the characters seems to be varied. In contrast to some literary studies, which state that in the past characters with disabilities took a step on the back burner, the books that were examined have characters that stand as main and secondary characters. The significant difference between books published in the past and currently, is how those characters are represented in relation to the other characters found in the stories.

The portrayals of characters with disabilities and their characteristics have changed over time in the works that were examined. In stories from past decades, characters seem to conform to the situations in which they are placed by society.

Characters do not believe in movement between groups, but instead characters bear their placement in society. Many of the characters in earlier stories (from the 1980s-1990s) believe that their disability is a hindrance because it is what society also believes. The language in regards to their disabilities was also vastly different. In earlier stories, a couple of the characters became disabled because of serious accidents, and were still outcasts by societal norms. In later novels, the characters seem to be proud of what their disability teaches them, and it is not seen as a hindrance, but a part of their personality, and the characters are not ashamed of what difficulties their disability has caused. In this sense, they were not ultimately affected by where society decided to place them.

Portrayals of characters follow closely to their characterization in the novels. Characters in earlier novels are often seen in a stereotypical manner. Characters in more recent novels are more realistic, and are seen in a more positive light. Character development is an important factor in the changes from past decades to current times. Development of characters seems to have improved much like character portrayals and characterization.

This study reflects many of the arguments set forth by scholarly research. Using Dyches and Prater's criteria on books about youths with disabilities, it is clear to see that this study proves their thoughts about how books have improved in terms of quality of content and literary value. For the future, there is the hope that, books on disabilities will be ethically and socially responsible to the people that they represent in their stories, and that there will be a drastic shift from stereotypical viewpoints to full inclusion and acceptance.

Conclusion:

As previously stated, literature is an important way for society to reflect their views of the world and share it with the readers who read it. Through literature people can understand themselves and others and be able to learn about things that they are unfamiliar with. With this in mind, it is important that literature truthfully reflect the nature of society and characteristics of the people involved.

Literature is especially important to young people because they are at an age where the information that they encounter can shape the people that they will become in the future. Through the information that they gain from reading literature, they can create their own ideas and thoughts and share them with the world around them.

Literature on disabilities is a way for young people to understand a world that may be very similar or very different than that of their own. People with disabilities are a diverse and important group in society. Through the study of literary works, it is evident how important realistic and accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities are, especially for younger audiences. Through these specific works of literature, young people can learn about how people with disabilities function within the world, and that they may not be as different as people think them to be.

Though literature on disabilities remains imperfect, through this study it can be seen that portrayals of characters with disabilities has improved, and if things continue in this fashion, it can only be hoped that over time, portrayals of characters with disabilities will ultimately be as realistic as possible. With continued research

on the literature of disabilities, there is hope for more learning and a real understanding of people with disabilities and society as a whole. The knowledge that is gained from studies such as this one will help to create a greater understanding of disabilities and more acceptance of societal diversity.

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