

# People Like Me in Places Like Mine

## Authentic Representation in Rural Picturebooks

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Librarians serve children in specific locations. As they seek to fulfill the Association for Library Service to Children's (ALSC) promise to help "children make cross-cultural connections and develop skills necessary to function in a culturally pluralistic society,"<sup>1</sup> they must consider a book's authenticity and specific geography.<sup>2</sup>

Young readers in rural places experience different challenges from those in urban and suburban settings as do rural librarians experience different collection development demands than do those in urban and suburban settings, especially when rural stereotypes dominate in children's books. Because rural identities are tied to each child's place, daily rural life may feel different on the coast than on the prairie, or in mountains, woods, wetlands, and deserts.<sup>3</sup> Only 9 percent of the rural US workforce is in agriculture,<sup>4</sup> with 91 percent having livelihoods in service, tourism, government, education, manufacturing, mining, health care, and energy. Yet much children's literature continues to present settings where family farming dominates the rural economy, neglecting the diversity of rural work.<sup>5</sup>

A rural child with a diverse cultural background, socioeconomic status, color, gender, language, ethnicity, ability, or religion is likely to experience compounded alienation when picturebooks not only exclude them visually, but also repeat stereotypes that compose a rural version of the "single story."<sup>6</sup> The single story in rural media, including picturebooks, is a two-sided coin. On one side, the remoteness of rural areas is often presented as backward and dangerous in movies and television. On the other side, isolation creates perfect situations for the idyllic and leisurely retreat. This latter side we found most often in our evaluation of children's picturebooks. Both sides of the coin are *urbanormative*, where conventions for representing rural life emerge from outsider points of view.<sup>7</sup>

The urban and suburban schema for rurality appears to set expectations for children's literature representations. Although authors and illustrators of rural picturebooks may have various experiences with rural life, when people write for children they tend to turn to the familiar, conventional, and traditional. Authentic mirrors for rural readers would mean books where today's diverse young rural readers could pick up



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a book and see people who look like them, in places like their own homes. Or, because there is no single rural identity, they, along with suburban and urban children, may find authentic windows into other types of rural communities.

Even picturebooks with potential to act as mirrors and windows and books that make specific moves to break stereotypes may still play up rural nostalgia and isolation and contribute to a single story. We found only a few books, including *Flood, On a Magical Do-Nothing Day*, and *The Old Truck*, that presented specific material imagery that would help readers identify the book in today's world. Yet despite the lack of overt visual images of modernity, realistic rural books may act as mirrors for rural children in other ways, such as through characters' agency, realistic conflicts with the rural setting, exploration of the rural space, and breaking up isolation through connectedness.

## How Authentic Representation Might Look

Our critical content analysis began when our research team searched widely for picturebooks with variations of rural settings.<sup>8</sup> Starting with over two hundred books, we narrowed to thirty-eight, first identifying recent titles between 2010 and 2020, with contemporary realistic fiction as the focal genre for representation of diverse identities.<sup>9</sup> We eliminated books with anthropomorphized animal characters (even when they clearly symbolized human children), those without story arcs (many rural picturebooks are odes to nature), and those where rural settings were not integral to the story. With the set of titles reduced, we had in hand a set of books with enough rurality and realism to potentially represent rural life authentically.<sup>10</sup> When analyzing the prevalence of stereotypes, out of the thirty-eight books, sixteen titles rose to the top for efforts to rewrite the single story by departing from *some* stereotypes.

The thirty-eight titles in the bibliography represent a good starting place for recognizing recent realistic rural picturebooks. The critical principles we used to further narrow to sixteen titles featured (starred in the bibliography) may help librarians evaluate rural picturebooks for acquisition to determine which books might be added to the collection as potential mirrors for children in rural communities and authentic windows for urban and suburban children. Further, librarians who showcase rural living in displays may gain a better sense for how to select and foreground titles that work against a single story of rurality. Finally, in readers' advisory situations, these ideas may help librarians point out which *aspects* of books already in the collection provide authentic representations of people who live in rural places.

## Principles for Evaluating Authenticity

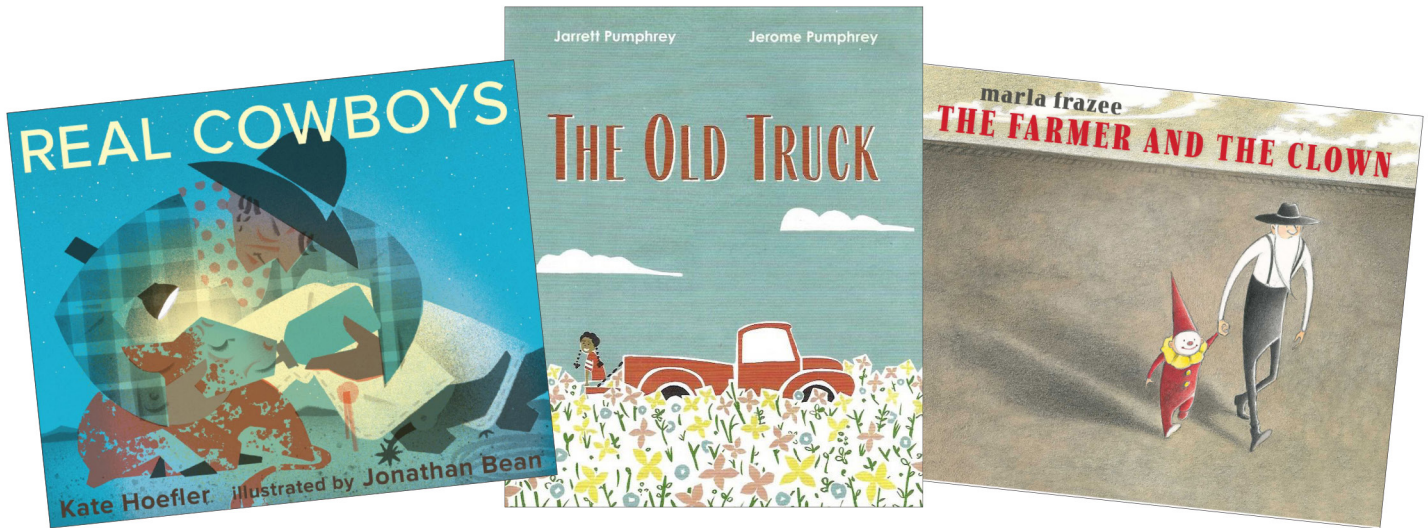
We do not reject existing rural representations as false.<sup>11</sup> Instead we recognize the too-frequent repetition of idyllic rural stereotypes eats away at an inclusive realism.<sup>12</sup> Echoing

calls for representation from diverse readers who want to see "people like me" in the books they read, rural children are more likely to feel seen when books have settings *in places like mine*. Rural settings, stories, and characters need to be presented realistically for rural children to feel invited into the world of literature. And when looking at rural spaces from outside windows, children should see through glass that brings realistic dimension and depth to rural life.

No single book can encompass all possibilities for authentic representations. People and places are too diverse and individual for any one author or illustrator to capture an all-encompassing rural narrative. Yet adult readers can help children become critical readers and realize authentic rural depictions as they read and view across a themed yet multifaceted selection of books from within a larger collection of rural picturebooks. Librarians also have an important opportunity to "chaperone" young readers by both leading them to these books, and pointing out to them the mirrors and windows, the visual and verbal signs of authenticity and stereotype. Consider the following principles as guidelines for evaluating rural picturebooks.

- Rural settings should relate closely to events and problems in the story, including characters who identify with the setting, which in turn enables and constrains character agency.<sup>13</sup>
- Stereotypes of isolated, nostalgic, idyllic rural life can be helpfully disrupted when authors and illustrators depict the following:
  - connectedness through roads, maps, communication, and inclusively wide panoramas, rather than isolation<sup>14</sup>
  - modern living, rather than the nostalgic rural pasts of adult memory<sup>15</sup>
  - complex work, interests, and problems, rather than the simple tranquility of a generic rural idyll<sup>16</sup>
  - specific rural settings rather than the repeated trope of the small family farm
  - authentic work and activity rather than the leisurely day trip to the country.
- Person-centered representations should inhabit a rural setting, where diverse main characters have agency to make decisions and confront problems, including people of color, diversely-gendered or ungendered people, and differently-abled people—with diverse home lives. They would avoid stereotypical roles for women, token ensemble characters, and victimized minorities.<sup>17</sup>

Although we would not expect any single book to reach all ideals for authentic rural representation, few rural children can see themselves mirrored in the stereotypical image of the male farmer with straw-hat and bib-overalls, farming



a generic crop, while keeping an ark of farm animals in an old red barn. Publishers, editors, authors, and illustrators should consider rural realism when making decisions about book projects that can reach a more diverse rural readership. Librarians can be part of a call for rural authenticity to a publishing industry which has made great strides in recent decades responding to other niche markets for diverse books. Because we analyzed each picturebook for its potential to disrupt the single story, we celebrate and elaborate on four titles that make steps forward as potential mirrors and windows, even when they have missed other opportunities.

## Picturebooks Foregrounding Authentic Representations

*Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de la Peña was a touchstone text in our study.<sup>18</sup> This recent story is set in a small rural town, with a narrative conflict and complicated life for Carmela and her family. In a migrant strawberry farming town in coastal California, Carmela is now old enough to accompany her brother into town. As they venture away from home, moving through a variety of rural town settings, Carmela finds a dandelion. She considers what wishes to make when blowing away the fluff. Each wish is set apart visually in the Mexican *papel picado* tradition of folded and cut paper. Her wishes emphasize a complex life: for her mother to be able to sleep in a comfortable hotel like the one she works in, to be reunited with the father she is separated from by his immigration status.

*Carmela's* rural setting is not stereotypically isolated, but rather well-connected, crisscrossed with town roads, dirt paths, and sidewalks in words and pictures. Paths connect the home to diverse town streets and buildings and to working fields and open spaces outside town. Yet there is an antique feel to Christian Robinson's illustration style, with the material culture in the images and words offering few clues that this family lives in the twenty-first century.

The work life and economy represented are diverse, including agriculture but not focused on it alone. The setting gives

a sense of everydayness, dwelling first on the necessity of today's work despite the troubling equity issues Carmela's wishes convey. She makes known what she sees missing in life, showing agency she hopes to exercise. However, when Carmela loses the dandelion and her wishes, agency and power are downplayed. Her brother solves the problem, leading her to a tranquil seaside dandelion field "full of wishes." Despite the lost opportunity for a strong female character solving problems, this book represents Carmela's emerging sense of identity in a complex, connected, and diverse rural space.

*Real Cowboys* by Kate Hoefler offers a slice-of-life look at the difficult work of a cattle drive across a wide Western landscape, with days spent riding horses, directing dogs, tending cattle, and setting up camp.<sup>19</sup> Although we struggled to categorize this book as realistic fiction (with no central main character, and a very simple story arc) its progress from beginning to end of a cattle drive provided enough of a narrative for us to separate it from books that were solely celebrations of natural space or purely informational text. Further, it was one of the only books which considered agricultural work beyond the stereotypical family farm—ranching, with its diverse workers, is rarely represented in rural children's books. Despite this book being on the borders of our genre categories, the realism it offers made it important to consider.

The journey in this book is realistically integrated with the setting, where the team is challenged with severe weather, grueling work, loneliness, and loss. Yet words and images express fulfillment in hard work as they overcome challenges and then share stories and camaraderie around the campfire. Conflict is central to this narrative, and even though no specific characters are foregrounded, each page illustrates roles specific cowboys fulfill with agency and identity. *Real Cowboys* also highlights relationships among the workers, their harmonious lives, and their deep connection to the natural world. The cover depicts a nurturing cowboy caring for a calf in the night with a flashlight.

Rural children who work with livestock might be mirrored in characters who care about horses, cattle, dogs, and fellow ranchers. The work is inclusive of women and children and people of color whose daily life is shaped by the rural setting. A single image shows a family car with modern looking lines, locating the book in a current time and breaking up the stereotype of isolation. At the end of the book, power lines and a few lone light bulbs suggest a wilderness connected at its edges to a larger society.

We emphasize that signs of modernity in all the books we considered were always located in subtle details, such as the ear tags on the cattle in this book, but not in an overarching illustration style or in widely present visual and verbal signs. We focused on subtle details readers might miss in casual browsing and reading. But these details were noteworthy by comparison to other rural books examined, where there were *no words or visuals* to help readers locate the setting in the current decade.

Small signs of modern everyday life became important as we examined images, because their erasure was often so complete as to make a 2010s book with a rural setting indistinguishable from historical fiction from the 1910s. Although we wished there were more rural picturebooks that looked and felt unmistakably like “today,” we had to hunt for peripheral details in images and words for signs of the current century.

For a book that de-romanticizes rurality by its constant emphasis on the hard labor and conflicts in moving animals across the land, *Real Cowboys* also plays to the romantic image of a naturalistic pastoral life. It presents a generalized image with no strong main character to exercise agency in solving complicated story problems. Although it features elements that break up the single story, the book brings in other stereotypical elements that build it back up. Again, because many rural stereotypes are based in truth and are often valued by members of the rural community, we did not hope to find books free from *all* idyllic and romanticized settings but rather to see writers and illustrators like Kate Hoefler and Jonathan Bean contribute elements of authentic representation beyond the stereotypical or conventional.

*Sonya's Chickens* by Phoebe Wahl is an emotional journey. When her father leaves three chickens in her care, young Sonya maternally declares, “I’ll be your mama.”<sup>20</sup> The biracial family makes improvements to the chicken coop on their picturesque family farm. Sonya cares deeply for her three chickens as they grow, thanking them for sharing back when egg laying begins. Late one evening, Sonya hears a loud noise and discovers one of her children/chickens is missing. Stark reality hits when Sonya realizes the hen’s fate was a hungry fox. Her father reframes the event so she can empathize with a wild animal which must also feed its family.

After making a grave for the lost chicken, she returns to caring for the others and a new chick is born. Although Wahl represents realities of both the realistic work and heartbreaks

of farm life, she still portrays the isolated family farm as the principal form of rural life, with no visual or verbal connections to the outside world or to a diverse local community.

Our examination of words and pictures for evidence of modern life involved an implicit hope that modern material culture would signify not only life in current times, but also break up the stereotype of isolation with images of connectiveness such as modern roads, vehicles, or mobile phones. Illustrations in this book include one road and an iconic old red farm truck. As in *Carmela*, we saw the emerging agency of a girl character sublimated by a father who tells her how to think and feel about the story’s central problem.<sup>21</sup> Still, this book works against idyllic rural stereotypes by providing a character who knows hard work, and who faces a difficult story problem involving wild predators and livestock. Rural space in *Sonya's Chickens* is not tranquil, simple, or leisurely and thus helps break up the single story.

*Flood*, a wordless picturebook by Alvaro Villa, quickly pulls readers in with vibrant illustrations of a riverside farmhouse.<sup>22</sup> As clouds roll in, we see a nuclear family, with father boarding windows, son and daughter lounging on the floor playing video games, and mother reading a magazine. Clouds darken, intensity builds, and the family now looks with trepidation at the weather on their flat screen television. After stacking a perimeter of sandbags, the family packs their belongings and heads to a city hotel for refuge. The storm tears through and when they return home, the water has ebbed to reveal destruction. With help from friends they rebuild, even making improvements. In the final pages, the parents sit on a hill, while the son and daughter play, and the sun sets on their new home.

This is one of the few books with a contemporary vehicle and modern technology (a television with a game console), clearly placing rural people in modern times. The car trip, the night in the city, and the television each represent connectedness between rural and urban spaces rather than isolation and separation. Although Villa provides a realistic vision of nature’s force in a rural area, the ease and speed of rebuilding the home diminishes the complicated choices people face when devastating natural disasters ruin homes and neighborhoods (such as Rodman Philbrick’s *Zane and the Hurricane*, 2014).

Although no book perfectly dismantles the single story, realistic fiction titles like those we have emphasized above represent positive strides in creating authentic rural mirrors and windows. For example, few of the sixteen featured books play up the stereotype of the rural retreat, where life is tranquil, simple, and easy. The characters are not mere visitors, but rather people who live daily life in a rural place. Many of the books emphasize hard work showing characters exercising agency in the face of difficult problems. And in many of these titles the natural world is not merely an idyllic outdoor playground but rather integral to story conflict and character decisions.

Although these books may not be likely candidates for a fast-paced preschool storytime, it is easy to imagine a parent or

caregiver choosing *Flood* or *Real Cowboys* from a display, appreciating the arresting artwork, for sharing with a child at home; or to imagine a caregiver sitting with a child in front of picturebook shelves studying illustrations of *Sonya's Chickens* because of a child's interest in raising chickens.

When searching for books to act as potential mirrors and windows, we found few child characters in current books involved in truly contemporary living, with the material culture of the settings being largely antique and nostalgic. Lack of mobile phone use, texting, internet interactions was noticeably absent from almost all books. Few images showed modern work equipment, recent-model trucks and cars, ATVs, or other recreational or work vehicles. (*My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero and *The Old Truck* by Jerome and Jarrett Pumphrey were refreshing exceptions.) Because these signs of modern life are subtle, they require a critical eye.

Carrying this critical reading further, *none of the more than two hundred books* we reviewed represented diverse gender identities or differently-abled people. Each book in its own way, despite beautiful aesthetic presentation and specific efforts to break stereotypes, contributed partly to a rural single story, whether through isolation, nostalgia, or lack of inclusive characters.

## Implications for Libraries and Librarians

What application does a critical analysis have in the library? Chaperoning a child's approach to a curated set of books is different in a library than in a classroom or home. Guiding readers in a library is more likely going to be about collections decisions, shelving and display, and being prepared for readers' advisory situations involving rural books. In examining rural books for collections decisions, it is vital to seek integral rural settings that are neither isolated and disconnected, nor quiet, leisurely, and free from problems, nor overly nostalgic, lacking imagery of contemporary life. Likewise, librarians who know how to recognize and point to specific authentic details can offer readers authentic windows and mirrors that help them read against the single rural story.

When children's librarians identify a need for more coverage of a topic, such as rural life, they typically start by assessing current resources, inventorying collections to discover what current books are available, creating user-friendly lists for teachers and parents searching for topical titles, and inserting useful links on webpages to help patrons navigate the collection. They correct deficiencies by scrounging for more books through reviews and well-vetted lists and incorporating topics like rural life into new culturally responsive programming.

This kind of work can be harder in a rural library where collections may be more limited by space and funds. Yet the need to correct the paucity of authentic books on rural life is even greater for rural libraries, with an immediate community need for authentic rural mirrors. Rural librarians in

collections work and in readers' advisory should be on the lookout for authentic rural mirrors for local children, helping them see representations of more than stock settings and characters. Our experience in searching for rural settings was that for each publication year, there were no more than a dozen new notable books with rural settings. Where possible, rural librarians should collect as many well-reviewed books with rural settings as possible each year, and then evaluate these acquisitions for authenticity in rural representation.

Critical reviews of stereotypes that help rural librarians find mirrors are equally vital for urban and suburban librarians who look to provide authentic *windows* onto diversity. Those who review children's books must consider rural stereotypes and the danger of a single rural story as they consider each year's new rural books. This may be the most difficult call we make, since so many of the stereotypes we found in rural picturebooks were surrounded by such attractive writing, illustration, and graphic design. Without critical principles, the art of many of these books would make it easy for reviewers to look past the single story.

Urban and suburban libraries are already likely to have single-story rural books in the collection. These should be identified, not for the purpose of culling, but rather to provide balance to upcoming collections decisions. Displays in urban and suburban libraries should emphasize authentic titles in curated displays of rural books. Libraries in recent years have helped patrons this way by providing lists and displays featuring a variety of diversity issues, such as race and gender. The same can be done with diverse rural literature.

To provide sufficient books with authentic insights into rural life, the library's service area must be researched:

- What demographic data best describes rural experiences of your library's users?
- How does it differ from the national realities of rural life?
- Although informational books in the collection may represent a more authentic modern rural space, how well do contemporary fiction picturebooks in the collection parallel this realism?

Addressing concerns about authentic representations of rural life includes training library staff to understand the importance of moving past the single story in books that unfairly stereotype rural life or, at best, represent only a slice of the diversity in a community, providing mirrors where few young readers might see themselves. As staff provide readers' advisory to parents wanting books for their children about rural communities, they are ideally positioned to point out the role of the visual narrative—the details in settings that can show so much more than stereotypical understandings of rural life.

Locating authentic books within your collection is also an issue of accessibility. Consider adding convenient subject



## Children's Literature Bibliography

Our selected thirty-eight contemporary realistic fiction titles with integral rural settings; those faring best in critical analysis are marked with an asterisk.

- \*Acheson, Allison. *A Little House in a Big Place*. Illus. by Valeriane LeBlond. Kids Can Press, 2019. 32p.
- \*Alemagna, Beatrice. *On a Magical Do-Nothing Day*. Illus. by the author. Trans. by Jill Davis. HarperCollins, 2017. 48p.
- Bean, Jonathan. *Building Our House*. Illus. by the author. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2013. 48p.
- Clements, Andrew. *Because Your Mommy Loves You*. Illus. by R.W. Alley. Clarion, 2015. 32p.
- Cowley, Joy. *Song of the River*. Illus. by Kimberly Andrews. Gecko Press, 2019. 32p.
- Croza, Laurel. *From There to Here*. Illus. by Matt James. Greenwood, 2014. 36p.
- \*Croza, Laurel. *I Know Here*. Illus. by Matt James. Greenwood, 2013. 40p.
- Davidson, Leslie. *In the Red Canoe*. Illus. by Laura Bifano. Orca, 2020. 32p.
- \*de la Peña, Matt. *Carmela Full of Wishes*. Illus. by Christian Robinson. G. P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2018. 36p.
- Dowd, Dineo. *Adventure Day*. Illus. by Cecil Gocotano. Self-published, paper, 2017. 26p.
- Doyle, Eugenie. *Sleep Tight Farm*. Illus. by Becca Stadlander. Chronicle, 2016. 36p.
- \*Farrell, Alison. *The Hike*. Illus. by the author. Chronicle, 2019. 56p.
- \*Fogliano, Julie. *A House That Once Was*. Illus. by Lane Smith. Two Hoots, 2018. 40p.
- Formento, Alison. *These Bees Count!* Illus. by Sarah Snow. Albert Whitman, 2012. 32p.
- Fraze, Marla. *The Farmer and the Circus*. Illus. by the author. Beach Lane, 2021. 32p.
- \*Fraze, Marla. *The Farmer and the Clown*. Illus. by the author. Beach Lane, 2014. 32p.
- French, Vivian. *Hello, Horse*. Illus. by Catherine Rayner. Candlewick, 2018. 40p.
- \*Geisert, Arthur. *Thunderstorm*. Illus. by the author. Enchanted Lion, 2014. 32p.
- Harbridge, Paul. *When the Moon Comes*. Illus. by Matt James. Tundra Books, 2017. 40p.
- Havill, Juanita. *Call the Horse Lucky*. Illus. by Nancy Lane. Gryphon Press, 2010. 24p.
- \*Hoefler, Kate. *Real Cowboys*. Illus. by Jonathan Bean. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. 32p.
- Kloepper, Madeline. *The Not-So Great Outdoors*. Illus. by the author. Tundra Books, 2019. 40p.
- Ko, Hannah. *Billy's Camping Trip*. Illus. by Chiara Fiorentino. Rourke Educational Media, 2017. 24p.
- \*Kooser, Ted. *House Held Up by Trees*. Illus. by Jon Klassen. Candlewick, 2012. 32p.
- Lee, Anne. *When You Are Camping*. Illus. by the author. CreateSpace, 2012. 32p.
- Lindstrom, Carole. *We Are Water Protectors*. Illus. by Michaela Goade. Roaring Brook, 2020. 40p.
- MacLachlan, Patricia. *The Hundred Year Barn*. Illus. by Kenard Pak. Katherine Tegen Books, 2019. 48p.
- Messner, Kate. *Over and Under the Snow*. Illus. by Christopher Silas Neal. Chronicle, 2014. 44p.
- \*Pavón, Mar. *A Very, Very Noisy Tractor*. Illus. by Nívola Uyá. Trans. by Jon Brokenbrow. Madrid, SP: Cuento de Luz, 2013. 28p.
- \*Pumphrey, Jerome. *The Old Truck*. Illus. by Jarrett Pumphrey. Norton, 2020. 48p.
- \*Quintero, Isabel. *My Papi Has a Motorcycle*. Illus. by Zeke Peña. Penguin Random House, 2019. 40p.
- Rockwell, Anne. *Hiking Day*. Illus. by Lizzy Rockwell. Aladdin, 2018. 32p.
- \*Schwartz, Joanne. *Pinny in Fall*. Illus. by Isabelle Malenfant. Greenwood, 2018. 32p.
- Stead, Phillip C. *Lenny and Lucy*. Illus. by Erin Stead. Roaring Brook, 2015. 40p.
- Taylor, Sean, Alex Morss. *Winter Sleep: A Hibernation Story*. Illus. by Cinyee Chiu. Quarto, paper, 2019. 32p.
- \*Villa, Alvaro F. *Flood*. Illus. by the author. Capstone, 2014. 32p.
- \*Wahl, Phoebe. *Sonya's Chickens*. Illus. by the author. Tundra Books, 2015. 32p.
- Woodward, Caroline. *Singing Away the Dark*. Illus. by Julie Morstad. Simply Read Books, 2017. 44p.

or community tags to item records in the Integrated Library System (ILS) to increase likelihood of their discovery.

We expect many readers of this article will quickly think of titles that are exceptions to what we have outlined above. This is exactly the point. If a category of diverse representation is to become realized, the people most familiar with books should be at the forefront of curating the collection, displaying and promoting strong titles, and featuring books in programming that can help children critically read and view settings in picture books. Again, the book reviewers among us are essential to increasing awareness of authentic rural picture books, while those who purchase books have a responsibility to press publishers for more titles that do better with rural life. Our current situation emphasizes that we as book people seem to be behind in making rural representation a thing, and that books already doing well at challenging cultural and historical norms need to be noticed and gathered. For example, rural librarians might approach resources like the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, asking them to include rurality as a category of diverse children's literature.

As a final step to ensure authentic representation of rural life in future picturebooks, children's librarians can collaborate with other professionals to create an award celebrating

authentic mirrors and windows in the rural titles published each year. Awards such as the American Indian Youth Literature Award, Rainbow Award for LGBTQ literature,<sup>23</sup> and Schneider Family Book Award for portrayal of disability experiences serve as persuasive messages to publishers to pay attention to diverse representation and provide a vetted source for quality books.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Whippoorwill Award provides a strong celebration of rural young adult literature, currently it does not review picturebooks or middle-grade novels. Could this existing awards group develop a committee to include books for younger readers? Perhaps the Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) or the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services could serve as likely sponsoring groups for a rural picturebooks award.

As the editor of this journal stated when celebrating increased diversity in recent book awards, "Diversity is much more than honoring those doing the work. It's about fostering the work in itself."<sup>25</sup> An award focused on authentic rural picturebooks would be a welcome stimulation of diversity in children's literature, providing a nuanced window to the child who rarely leaves the neighborhood sidewalks or a mirror to the child who wonders how their wide-open spaces fit in among the bus stops on Market Street or escalators at the department store. &

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