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**PEACE AND JUSTICE THEMES AS PRESENTED WITHIN SELECT WORKS OF
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

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A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of
Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management degree at SIT Graduate Institute in
Brattleboro, Vermont, U.S.A.

August 7, 2024

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature serves as a powerful tool for imparting moral lessons, generating dialog, and fostering critical consciousness. Given its role in promoting social values, this research study investigates how peace and justice themes are reflected in the narrative elements and symbolic representations of the American Library Association's (ALA) Notable Children's Books for younger readers for the years 1994, 2009, and 2024. Rooted in constructivist theory, this study draws from critical theories, critical pedagogy, and peacebuilding theory, exploring how these themes and concepts are woven into children's literature. Through a comprehensive content analysis of 46 texts, this study finds a predominance of individualistic narratives focused on personal transformation and psychological peace, with minimal depictions of collective action or systemic change. Common conflict resolution tools, such as dialog, negotiation, and mediation, are notably absent. These findings emphasize the need for more diverse and holistic representations of peace and justice themes in children's literature, as well as a deeper cross-disciplinary appreciation for how children's literature can serve as a meaningful vehicle for developing young readers' values and behaviors towards conflict resolution and social justice.

Introduction

Children's literature holds a longstanding tradition as a medium for imparting moral lessons, igniting discussions, and preserving oral histories across diverse cultures and languages. Its potential to impact individuals of all ages, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, underscores its significance as a teaching tool. Reading picture books with young children not only stimulates cognitive development but also nurtures emotional bonds between child and caregiver (AAP, 2021). Works of children's literature often hold special meaning within families, classrooms, and communities, serving as catalysts for conversation and conveyors of values through the lessons they impart. These stories convey experiences of pain, compassion, inclusion, conflict, and forgiveness, shaping our understanding of the complexities of the human condition.

Given the pivotal role that children's literature can play in promoting social values and awareness, this study aims to examine the depiction of peace and justice themes within a selected sample of children's literature. Specifically, the research question guiding this study is: How are peace and justice themes reflected in the narrative elements and symbolic representations from American Library Association's (ALA) Notable Children's Books¹ for younger readers for the years of 1994, 2009, and 2024?

This research seeks to examine peace and justice themes in children's literature situated within and informed by relevant theoretical debates. This study is rooted in constructivist theory with further examinations through the lenses of critical theories, critical pedagogy, and peacebuilding theory. Critical theories analyze how literature is a meaning-making tool, illuminating the ways that children's literature can serve as an instrument for how children can

¹ See: <https://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncb>

see and understand themselves and others (Ma'ayan, 2012). Critical pedagogy recognizes the pivotal role of literacy in fostering critical consciousness among young learners, particularly the development of young readers' social consciousness and moral reasoning (Freire, 1993). Peacebuilding theory highlights strategies and interventions aimed at promoting reconciliation, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace.

By examining children's literature through the lenses of these theoretical perspectives, this study seeks to gain an understanding of how peace and justice themes are portrayed and presented to young readers through children's literature and therefore how they may influence young readers' social and moral development. This study's findings may provide valuable insights to the field of peace and justice studies that could inform larger studies and future research on generational beliefs and behaviors rooted in the literary teachings they encountered as young readers. This research study has the potential to guide future children's literature publications toward specific narrative elements and symbolic representations that align with the tools, values, and hopes embedded within the field of peace and justice studies.

Literature Review

This literature review delves into the nuanced and multifaceted conceptualizations of peace and justice through exploring their intricate relationship through both philosophical and practical lenses. By examining prominent theories and discussions surrounding these concepts, this review aims to illuminate the principles that this study utilized to build the framework for the data collection and analysis of the selected children's books.

Understanding the terms ‘peace’ and ‘justice’ – and the relationship between them

The conceptualizations of peace and justice, and the relationship between them, are nuanced, multifaceted, and complex. These intricacies are rooted in the philosophical and practical considerations of how (and if) societies can simultaneously cultivate an absence of violence and the presence of justice. The pursuit of peace, as an absence to violence, may overlook deeper, systemic injustices that do not always surface in times of peace (Galtung, 1969). Notable thinkers have engaged in crucial dialogue about whether true peace can exist without justice, and whether imposed peace might actually maintain entrenched and systemic inequalities. Historian and writer Yuval Noah Harari expands on the relational dynamics of peace and justice, noting the innate subjectivity of justice (across religions, cultures, peoples), whereas peace tends to be more objective, a matter of reality rather than belief (Grant, 2024).

Johan Galtung, a prominent and influential figure in peace and conflict studies, argues if peace is the “absence of violence,” we must define and understand violence, in all of its manifestations and complexities, to understand and grow peace practices and research (1969, p. 168). To do this, Galtung delineates violence into three distinct manifestations: personal, cultural, and structural. Each manifestation is independent, yet interdependent. Structural violence, in particular, highlights the systemic inequalities embedded within social structures, which perpetuate conflict and hinder the realization of peace (Galtung, 1969).

In contrast to the notion of peace as the absence of violence, Galtung introduces the concept of ‘positive peace,’ which he defines as a state characterized not only by the absence of direct violence but also by the addressing of underlying sources of conflict and inequality (Galtung, 1969). This concept of peace in relationship with structural equality is further discussed by theorists and practitioners Rob Jenkins (2012) and John Paul Lederach (1997), who

emphasize the importance of addressing root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable peace through local ownership combined with participation and sustained engagement. Each of these approaches acknowledge the interdependence of peace and structural inequities, underscoring the necessity of addressing both in pursuit of lasting peace (Jenkins, 2012; Lederach, 1997).

These more expansive conceptions of peace align with John Rawls' seminal work, "A Theory of Justice." In this text he introduced two principles of justice that advocate for equal basic liberties and the reduction of social and economic inequalities (Rawls, 1971). Rawls argues that justice in its most basic form, is fairness, and that justice in its ideal form would be equal and protected basic liberties for all people (1971). Yet, this ideal form of justice does not exist in our global reality, which begs the questions, why are these two ideas and ideals so hard to achieve? And can they be achieved simultaneously?

This complex relationship between peace and justice is illuminated in Pete Levine's assertion that both of these concepts are distinct components of a larger moral framework, peace can exist unjustly, and justice can be pursued through unpeaceful means (Levine, 2017). Paul E. Salem digs into some of the assumptions and oversights that the Western approach has made in their attempts at conflict resolution and peacebuilding, particularly in the Arab context. In his *Critique of Western Conflict Resolution from a Non-Western Perspective*, he writes, "all successful 'empires' develop an inherent interest in peace" (1993, para. 2). Peace, and Galtung's definition of negative peace, can be used as an effective tool of the oppressor, a somewhat Faustian bargain, asking people to trade liberties for safety from violence. He posits, "Is a serious flesh wound worse than a serious injustice" (1993, para. 12)? Salem argues that for peace to also include justice, a recognition and adaptation of the diversity of societal "philosophical, moral,

psychological, and cultural frameworks” must be at the heart of any peacebuilding attempts (1993, para. 26).

Louise Arbour, former president and CEO of International Crisis Group, encapsulates the relationship between peace and justice stating, “Peace and justice are interdependent. The real challenge is how to reconcile the inevitable tensions between them” (Bennett and Wheeler, 2019, para. 2). Peter Levine (2017) reflects on King’s infamous words “there can be no justice without peace and there can be no peace without justice” (para. 9). In his interpretation, he believes King is stating that justice and peace are two distinct components of a larger category: what is moral or right.

Lisa Schirch’s *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (2005) helps bring these two concepts together by introducing the term ‘justpeace,’ suggesting that true peace cannot be attained without addressing underlying systemic injustices. In this text, Schirch emphasizes the importance of coordinating “actors and actions into an overarching framework” to address the structural dimensions of conflict and promote just and sustainable peace (p. 6). Central to this framework are the values that guide decision-making and shape the trajectory of peacebuilding efforts (Schirch, 2005). She discusses the importance of formal dialogue processes as integral components of strategic peacebuilding, as they provide opportunities for individuals to share personal experiences, perceptions, and beliefs, fostering a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and complexities inherent in conflict (Schirch, 2005). These dialogue processes facilitate a greater appreciation for the structural dimensions of conflict and contribute to the development of comprehensive strategies for peacebuilding (Schirch, 2005). Interestingly, children’s literature, particularly when read aloud, naturally fosters dialogue—a key strategy in peacebuilding practices.

Children's literature as tool for meaning-making and peace formation

Constructivism is a learning theory which posits that knowledge is best acquired through learners actively constructing their own understanding through experience and reflection (Brau, 2018). According to this theory, learners engage in a process of considering the information presented to them while drawing from their personal experiences and perspectives to construct their own interpretations. Three foundational psychologists associated with constructivism are Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey. Piaget's theories emphasize that humans generate knowledge through the interaction of their experiences and ideas, portraying learning as an active and subjective process (Brau, 2018). Vygotsky's theories focus on the social dimension of knowledge acquisition, proposing that individuals learn more effectively through interactions with others (Brau, 2018). Dewey advocated for sustained and practical inquiry as the optimal approach to acquiring knowledge (Brau, 2018).

Louise Rosenblatt was influential literacy researcher and professor, influenced by Jean Piaget's theories of learning. Rosenblatt argued that readers use literacy as a tool to make meaning through their interactions with a text (Ma'ayan, 2012). Rosenblatt developed this idea through her 'transactional theory,' which states that when a reader interacts with a text, they bring their particular way of understanding the world (through past experiences and present understandings) resulting in meaning-making for the reader. The context that an individual brings to a text includes their cultural, social, and personal history, which Rosenblatt names their "linguistic-experiential reservoir" (Rosenblatt, 1994, as cited in Ma'ayan, 2012, p. 16). This theory showcases the dynamic the process of meaning-making, as there are constant connection and interaction points between the reader, the text, and the context (Ma'ayan, 2012). Regarding the relational and transactional nature of literacy, Rosenblatt reflects, "Literacy mediates social

relationships and ideological values... Literacy serves to strengthen social and relational connections that represent particular aspects of themselves and who they are becoming in the world” (Rosenblatt, 1994, as cited in Ma’ayan, 2012, p. 16).

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and a prominent figure of the critical pedagogies in the United States whose work has roots in constructive theories, specifically theorists Piaget and Dewey. Freire believed that for students to achieve liberation within the education system, they need to move away from the didactic “banking system,” and instead engage in a more active, ‘problem-posing’ education. Problem-posing education involves students developing “their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (1993, p. 83). This, Freire claims is the “pedagogy of the oppressed, which is the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation” (1993, p. 53). For Freire, rooted in theorists Piaget, Dewey and Rosenblatt, literacy is fundamental to constructing one’s voice as part of a wider project of possibility and empowerment. To be literate is to be able to name one’s experience and critically situate oneself in the world (Freire, 1987, as cited in Ma’ayan, 2012).

Children’s literature, specifically children’s literature designed for young readers, is often read aloud with educators in school or caregivers at home. Read-alouds (a literacy practice where books are read aloud to children) are natural methods for constructivist theories to come alive, as they are innately active, interpretive, and social. Children can use their imaginations to make personal connections between themselves and others, as well as ask questions and share ideas. Read-alouds are natural dialog generators. Reflecting on dialog, a critical tool in peacebuilding, Gockel (2022) states that research has “identified such positive outcomes as increased awareness

of one's social identity and of oppression, intergroup understanding, empathy and collaboration, the development of friendships, joining together to address common social issues, increased civic engagement, social action, and support for policies that address social inequality (p. 2)."

I find a natural link in the liberal critique of peacebuilding and the opportunities held within children's literature as an additional approach for participatory and local peacebuilding. Oliver Richmond engaged with local forms of peacebuilding that he identifies as 'peace formation.' This involves looking at smaller scale and often invisible local attempts at peacebuilding. Richmond see peace formation as locally situated and driven by an emancipatory notion of peace. The aim of peace formation is "not merely to establish liberal peace but to lead society towards a more emancipatory and empathetic form of peace" (Fridman, 2022, p.22).

Content Analysis of Children's Literature

Content analysis- an umbrella term used to indicate different research methods for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society (Johnson, 2017) - is a well-utilized research method to examine children's literature (Short, 2017). Within this methodology, researchers use qualitative analysis to make inferences and interpretations from texts within contexts surrounding their use. This analysis involves the close reading and interpretation by the analyst and then contextualized in new narratives" (Short, 2017, p. 3). Utilizing this methodology is significant because of its focus on literature as representations of human experience and involves asking higher-level questions, such as, "How do I determine the significance of what happened here" (Short, 2017, p. 4)?

Historically, content analysis of children's literature has been quantitative, such as counting the images of a particular cultural group or phenomena. However, more recent research has become qualitative with researchers analyzing texts within the "social, cultural, and political

contexts in which they are considered” (Short, 2017, p. 4). Kathy Short states, “Contextual reading provides an effective frame to focus the texts selected for the research” (2017, p. 11). Initial close readings of a children’s text may include a selection of specific focus points, such as focalization and closure. Focalization would prompt the researcher to ask questions such as, “From whose point of view is the story being told?” Closure might prompt, “How is the story resolved? What are the assumptions in the story’s closure?” (Short, 2017, p. 11)

A key aspect of children’s literature is its adherence to recognizable narrative structures that guide young readers through a story’s moral lessons. These narratives often incorporate what Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth developed as the ‘hero’s journey,’ a common narrative that encapsulates a sequence of transformative events, such as the “call to adventure” with specific “tests” and a “climax/battle,” and “helpers” who accompany them along the way. The story often concludes with messages of growth or newly-found wisdom for the protagonist to share (ORIAS, 2024).

Christopher Booker, in his 2004 book “The Seven Basic Plots” underscores this notion of recognizable storylines and patterns in our shared narratives. He shares his discovery from his own research regarding the recognizable patterns and ‘basic plots’ in human storytelling that seem to get played out over and over again (p. 3). Booker boils his findings into what he terms, “seven basic plots,” which are: (1) Overcoming the Monster, (2) Rags to Riches, (3) The Quest, (4) Voyage and Return, (5) Comedy, (6) Tragedy, and (7) Rebirth (2004). Understanding these patterns in narrative storytelling allows for a lens through which to discern, classify and categorize texts into identifiable themes across a variety of texts in children’s literature. This knowledge further facilitates analysis of how certain narratives might conform to or diverge from these traditional plot structures, supporting the creation of specific coding categories.

Identification of these narratives can help recognize specific themes within the portrayal of conflict and conflict resolution, thus building a deeper understanding of how these foundational narratives echo or challenge themes of peace and justice.

Utilizing content analysis through the lens of critical pedagogy, as espoused by Paulo Freire, introduces an innovative approach to the field of literary studies (Short, 2017). Integrating peacebuilding themes and theory within the domain of critical content analysis may not only continue to bolster the research and insights across the fields of literary studies and education, but of the field of peace and justice studies as well.

Research Design and Methodology

Methodology

This study was conducted using the qualitative research methodology as it was fundamentally interpretive, as well as emergent and evolving (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This research was exploratory in nature as aimed to investigate how narrative elements and symbolic representations within children's literature reflect themes of peace and justice. The use of narrative analysis supported the examination of the ways the selected stories are structured to create meaning and to make determinations regarding the representation of peace and justice themes in children's literature. I used inductive analysis² and grounded theory³ to discover and uncover themes and patterns in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These approaches were

² Inductive analysis discovers patterns, themes, and categories in one's data without the use of an existing framework (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

³ Grounded theory is an approach to inquiry with theory generation as the primary purpose, often moving 'backward' from data collection to theory-building (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

fitting for this study as they allowed for a more open and nuanced examination of themes that may not otherwise arise through using preexisting frameworks, theories, or structured deductive methods. I remained open to explore any emerging themes, unexpected findings, and novel insights that were not conveyed through the data, as this research enabled me to construct theories and build new frameworks and classification systems.

Sampling

In determining my sample for data collection, I initially wanted to identify a set of books that would be most likely read by or to children over the course of a particular year. Yet, there isn't a single source that can reliably share the most popular or highest grossing children's books annually. This is due to there being no universal standard of measurement for the variety of metrics already in use, as well as limited reporting due to book sales often being proprietary information. As a result, I turned to the American Library Association's annual announcement of the 'top books' for children, which includes books that received the Caldecott, Coretta Scott King, Newbery, and Printz awards for that year. In using a randomized sample of books from their 'younger readers' annual lists from 1994, 2009, and 2024 for my population of interest, not only did I examine the books that the American Library Association recommended nation-wide, but I also reviewed the books that are receiving national recognition for being particularly 'noteworthy.' The ALA states that 'noteworthy' children's books include books of "especially commendable quality, books that exhibit venturesome creativity, and books of fiction, information, poetry and pictures for all age levels (birth through age 14) that reflect and encourage children's interests in exemplary ways."

In selecting these recognized titles for my study, the findings may have additional relevance as they reflect books with a heightened visibility due to the prominence of ALA-

selected books that not only hold cultural significance but also possess a far-reaching impact, such as the likelihood of being stocked on library shelves, used in educational settings, or featured in bookstores, thereby amplifying the practical implications of this research.

The ALA's annual book selections happen by the Notable Children's Books Committee, of the Association for Library Service to Children, an eleven-member committee appointed by the ALSC president (ALA). According to Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) policy, the current year's Newbery, Caldecott, Belpré, Sibert, Geisel, and Batchelder Award and Honor books automatically are added to the Notable Children's Books list. The additional evaluation criteria used are:

1. Literary quality
2. Originality of text and illustration
3. Clarity and style of language
4. Excellence of illustration
5. Excellence of design and format
6. Clarity of organization and accuracy of information
7. Subject matter of interest and value to children
8. The likelihood of acceptance by children

As this is a comparative study aimed to examine patterns and trends in peace and justice themes over time, I started with the book recommendations for younger readers (defined by the ALA as readers from ages four to eight) from 1994 in an effort to both capture the most updated list of recommendations (2024) in two fifteen-year spans.

In the year 1994, fourteen books were selected for the younger readers list. In 2009, twenty-two books were selected for the younger readers list. In 2024, forty-one books were

selected for the younger readers list. To ensure a balanced methodology that accounts for the variation in the number of books across these different years while also maintaining a manageable dataset size, I used random and proportional sampling methods to select the specific books that will be used in this study. Random sampling will be used to reduce selection bias, to gain a representative sample from the recommended books of a specific year, and to increase the generalizability of the findings. Proportional sampling was used to maintain balance across the selection years as well as ensure adequate representation from each year.

In consideration of the previously mentioned variations in the number of books listed in the selected years, a sample size of approximately 60% of the total books available for each year was chosen through proportional sampling. Randomized sampling was utilized to choose the books for each of the selected years. As such, 9 books were randomly selected from the 1994 list, 13 books were randomly selected from the 2009 list, and 25 books were randomly selected from the 2024 list. Sixty percent of total books per year was chosen because it balanced a sufficiently large sample size for meaningful analysis while still ensuring feasibility for data collection, coding, and analysis within the necessary time constraints of this study. The randomized sampling was completed through a systematic and transparent method to ensure the books selected are a representative sample. To achieve this, I listed and numbered all of the books from each of the selected years and input them into the Excel software system. One year at a time, I used the random number generator function to determine which books would be selected as a part of this study.

Data collection and methods of analysis

Data collection for this research study was conducted through a structured, systematic approach that targets specific narrative components through content analysis, which corresponds

to themes of peace and justice. Access to the selected books from the ALA's Notable Children's Book lists was obtained through public library collections and book stores. A comprehensive metadata set was created to organize information about each book, including details such as title, author, and publication year. This was followed by a rigorous reading and annotation process with a focused framework that guided the identification and analysis of words, sentences, and plotlines that either represent or didn't represent themes of peace and justice. My literature review provided both a foundational lens and a series of initial core ideas that assisted in my first pass analysis.

Each book was systemically coded based on these identified elements and representations, utilizing a predefined coding tool developed for this purpose. The coding tool was categorized into nine main themes, with each theme further divided into eighty-three specific categories that was edited and refined over several iterations and each book was coded individually (Full coding tool in **Appendix A**, sample of coding tool in **Table A: Sample of Coding Protocol**)

Table A: Table A: Sample of Coding Protocol					
Themes (9)	Categories (83)	Category Definitions	Examples	Number of excerpts (1079)	Number of books (46)
Depiction of violence	structural violence	systemic inequities embedded within social structures	disparities in access, inequality, poverty	13	6 / 13%
	cultural violence	aspects of culture used to legitimize violence	cultural stereotypes, narratives that normalize violence or dehumanize certain groups	2	2 / 4%
Depiction of conflict	personal violence	direct physical, verbal, emotional harm to individuals	physical aggression, bullying, verbal abuse	27	7 / 15%
	interpersonal	two or more characters in conflict/disagreement	sibling rivalry, bullying	32	11 / 24%
	intrapersonal	internal struggles within a character; psychological	moral dilemmas (telling the truth; obey rules or desires)	49	25 / 54%
	conformity	aligning beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors with others	relinquishing individuality for societal norms	12	6 / 13%
Depiction of peace	exclusion	isolating someone(s) from a group or institution	often rooted in factors linked to identity, social standing, religion, etc.	20	8 / 17%
	negative peace	the absence of violence	conflict is avoided/absent but underlying issues not addressed	2	2 / 4%
	positive peace	addressing the root causes of conflict and inequality	communities thriving from cooperation, shared prosperity	0	0 / 0%
	sustainable peace	long-term solutions to prevent conflict recurrence; self-pe	communities developing peacebuilding tools (education, dialog)	0	0 / 0%
Depiction of justice	psychological (inner) peace	individual internal peace	finding peace through emotionaland/or individual healing and expression	31	25 / 54%
	distributive justice	fair distribution of resources	poverty, privilege, resource scarcity	0	0 / 0%
	procedural justice	fairness in processes	fairness of rules and their enforcement	0	0 / 0%
	restorative justice	repairing harm/restoring relationships	actively mending damage or harm caused	3	2 / 4%
	retributive justice	punishment for wrongdoing	facing consequences for one's actions	0	0 / 0%

These coding themes and categories, along with the book transcriptions, was entered into the Dedoose coding program alongside the corresponding metadata. Thematic and content analysis was used in order to analyze the coded data, as well as identify patterns and trends in the themes and categories across the selected books.

Validity and generalizability

To ensure the validity and generalizability of the data collected for this research study, inductive analysis, triangulation, and critical reflexivity were employed as essential methodological strategies. Inductive analysis was used to allow for patterns and trends to naturally emerge without preconceived theories or frameworks. Triangulation was utilized to corroborate and validate the collected data by cross-referencing the collected data across multiple sources and methods, such as journals and articles from the field, exploring available author biographies or interviews, and using textual analysis software (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Critical reflexivity was used to identify and address potential sources of bias or subjectivity through the written statement of positionality, engaging in discussions with my advisor, other professors, and my peers to gain feedback and additional perspectives on the study and any blind spots I may hold, as well as preemptively capturing any preconceived notions or assumptions I have that could influence this research process through journaling (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Positionality of the researcher

As the researcher, I am sensitive to how my personal biography will influence this study, and remain committed to using systematic inquiry and reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My background as a white, upper-middle-class woman and mother inherently informs my perspectives and biases, particularly regarding issues of privilege and power. Recognizing the importance of critical reflexivity, I am committed to critically examining and addressing the conscious and subconscious biases that will arise from my social positioning and the complexities of my own social identity within the context of this research. I acknowledge that my background and experiences as a former early childhood educator provide valuable insights into the landscape and context surrounding children's

literature and human development, allowing me to navigate this study with that awareness and sensitivity.

My identity as a parent, who is actively selecting texts for my children to consume, paired with a deep personal commitment to issues of social justice, also impacted my approach to this study. As I immersed myself in my graduate studies, I became cognizant that the books my children were progressively glued to seemed to center violence as a critical narrative element. As an early childhood educator, I am cognizant of the power of storytelling and literature in framing a young person's cognition and thinking. These narrative elements I was observing seemed out of sync with the theoretical and practical approaches to peace and justice work I was studying. These observations and experiences drove my interest to develop this research study.

Ethics of the research

Although this study will not include human subjects, it is essential that study is designed and conducted ethically. In order to achieve this, I first received IRB approval before beginning any research. I used two software programs, Excel and Dedoose, for data transparent systemization, collection, storage, and use. I am aware of the importance of respecting copyright and intellectual property rights for the authors and illustrators of the books that were selected and utilized in this research. I commit to accuracy in my reporting the data and this study's findings.

Limitations and delimitations

This study is limited to analyzing a select number of children's books from the ALA's Notable Children's Book selections for the selected years of 1994, 2009, and 2024. This selection does not capture the full range of children's literature from the Notable Children's Book selections lists nor the full scope of children's literature available during the selected years. This study also does not capture how broadly these books were distributed and what

demographics of children were exposed to them. Because of the temporal scope, limitations are in place for capturing a broader historical timeframe.

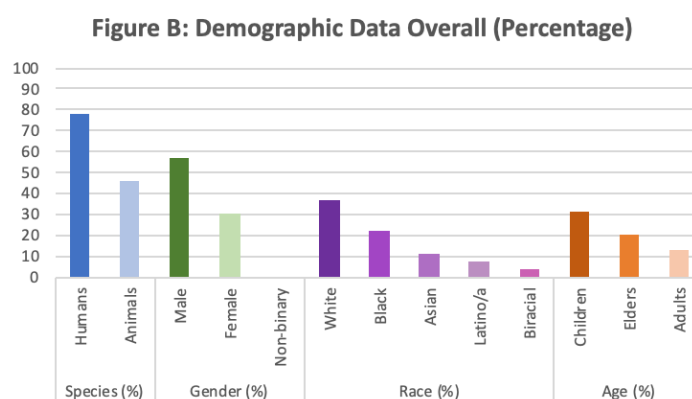
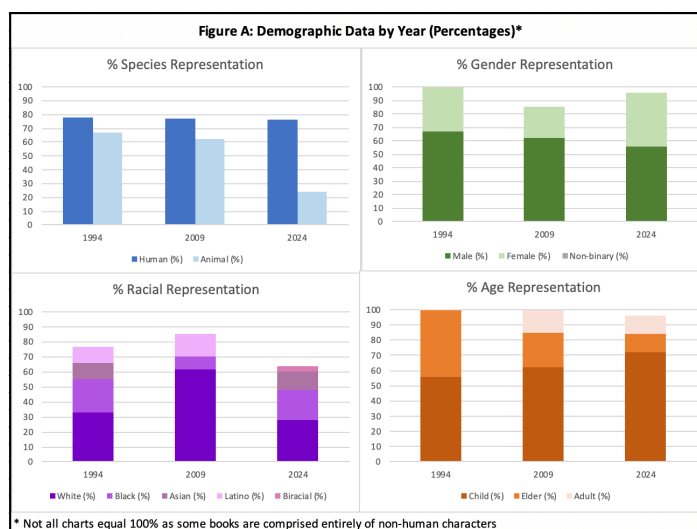
This study focuses on children's literature that is written in English. This study is embedded within the context, culture, and primary language of the United States. The findings therefore may not be generalizable to other cultural contexts and languages. Finally, my analysis of the narrative elements and symbolic representations in the selected books is inherently subjective and filtered through my own perspectives and interpretations. Another researcher may interpret the same texts differently, leading to a variation in the results.

Findings

Demographic depictions

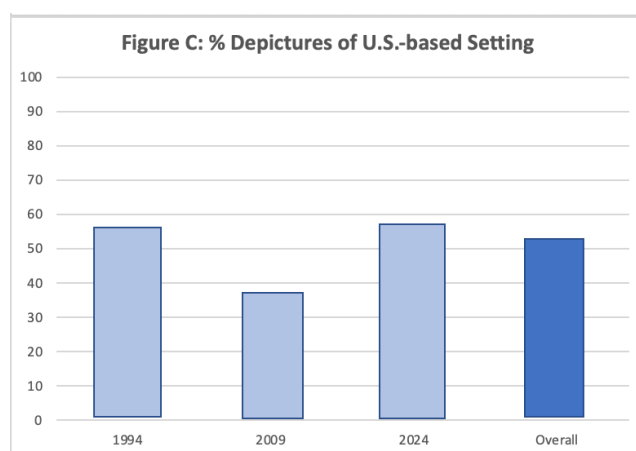
In this research study, I sought to analyze how peace and justice themes are represented in the American Library Association's (ALA) Notable Children's Book selections for the years 1994, 2009, and 2024. Included in my analysis was demographic representation within each of the selected texts, which included the following categories: species, gender, race, sexuality, setting, and age. While peripherally connected to the research question, examining these demographic categories offers this study additional insights into the diversity of characters and experiences represented in this selection of children's literature over time. These insights help establish critical context by which the data on peace and justice themes will be analyzed as well as ultimately interpreted and understood by young readers and their caregivers.

Overall and within each year examined in this study dominant cultural norms in the United States remained in place (**Figure A** and **Figure B**). White characters were the most frequently represented racial group, making up 37% of the characters overall, with a peak of 62% in 2009. Black characters were present in 22% of the books, followed by Asian characters at 11%, and Latino characters at 7%. Male characters appeared in 57% of the books overall, with a slight variation across the years: 60% in 1994, 58% in 2009, and 53% in 2024. Female characters constituted 30% of the total, with consistent year-by-year representations of 30% in 1994, 29% in 2009, and 31% in 2024. No books featured explicitly non-binary characters nor characters from the LGBTQ+ community.



Human characters were prominently featured in 78% of the books. Animal characters were present in 22% of the texts, with a notable decline in their representation from 67% in 1994

to 24% in 2024. Child characters were the most common protagonists, featured in 67% of the books overall. Their presence steadily increased over the years, from 67% in 1994 to 72% in 2024. Elder characters appeared in 20% of the books, with their representation declining from 44% in 1994 to 12% in 2024. Adult characters consistently represented around 13% of the protagonists throughout the years. More than half of the books (52%) were set in the United States and depicted various aspects of U.S. culture. This trend remained relatively consistent across each years of this study, with 52% in 1994, 53% in 2009, and 50% in 2024 (**Figure C**).



Emergent themes and categories

Looking beyond demographic findings, the data that emerged from the selected 46 texts was divided into eighty-three categories across nine themes. The following analysis is based on the frequency of the number of books in which each category appeared both overall and in the specific year of its publication. These findings provide detailed insights into each themes and category, revealing the extent and nature of their representation with this study.

Depictions of violence, conflict, and tools of conflict (Figure D)

Personal violence was the most frequently depicted form of violence, noted in 7 (15%) books. Structural violence was found in excerpts from 6 (13%) books, while cultural violence appeared in excerpts from 2 (4%) books. Notably, 1994 had the most depictions of violence with

a (11%) book depicting cultural violence, 3 (33%) books depicting personal violence, and (4) 44% books depicting structural violence.

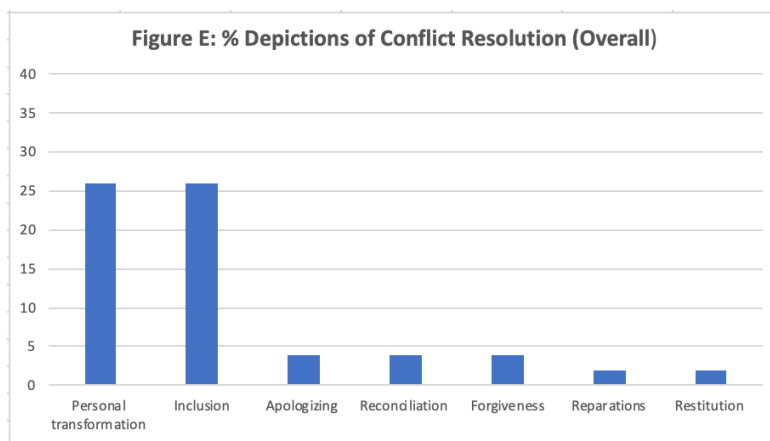
Conflict was a prevalent theme, depicted both as interpersonal and intrapersonal. Intrapersonal conflict appeared in excerpts from 25 books (54%), making it the most frequently cited category both from each year and of overall. Interpersonal conflict was found in excerpts from 11 (24%) books. Exclusion was depicted in excerpts from 8 (17%) books, while conformity appeared in 6 (13%) books overall.

Depictions of tools used in conflict was fairly minimal, with avoidance cited most frequently, appearing in 6 (13%) books. Judgment and isolation were each depicted in 4 (9%) books, while distraction was found in 3 (7%) books. Interestingly, avoidance and judgment were the only tools of conflict presented across all three years of study. Additionally, the data found that 1994 had only one book (11%) using a tool of conflict, whereas both 2009 (38%) and 2024 (20%) had five books each depicting tools of conflict.



Depiction of Conflict Resolution (Figure E)

Conflict resolution strategies were diverse and varied. Personal transformation and inclusion were the most frequently depicted both overall and across the years of study, each category was highlighted in 12 (26%) of the books. Less frequently depicted strategies included apologizing, reconciliation, and forgiveness, each found in 2 (4%) of the books. Reparations and restitution were the least represented, each appearing in just 1 (2%) book.

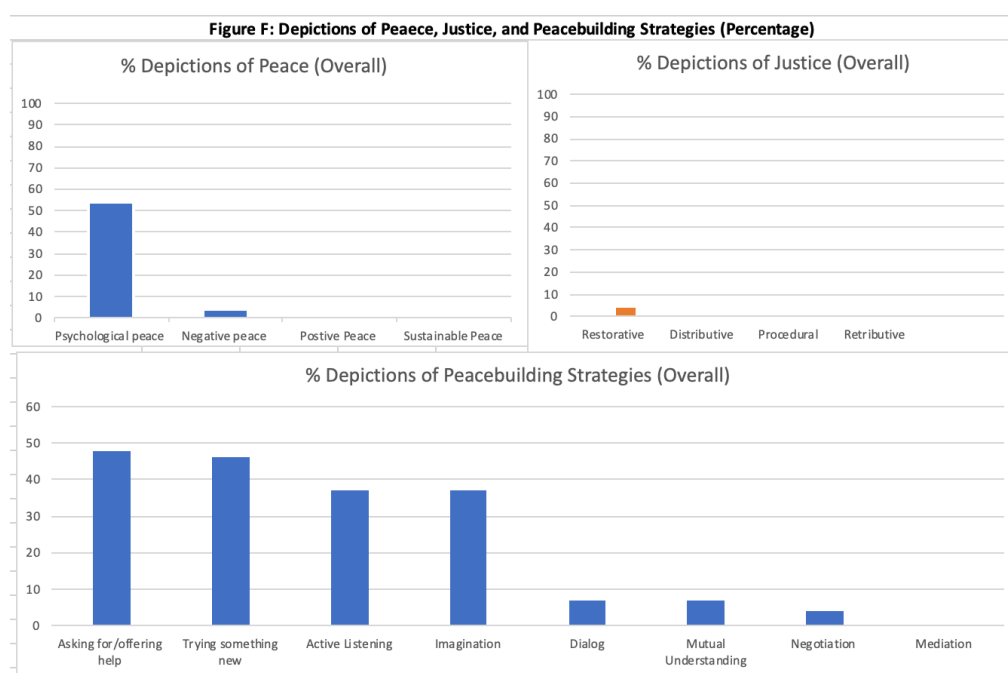


Depictions of Peace, Justice and Peacebuilding Strategies (Figure F)

Psychological peace was the most prevalent peace category, found in 25 (54%) books. Negative peace was found in 2 (4%) books, while positive peace and sustainable peace were not depicted in any of the texts. Justice was less frequently depicted in the texts. Restorative justice appeared in 2 (4%) books while distributive justice, procedural justice, and retributive justice were not found in any excerpts or books.

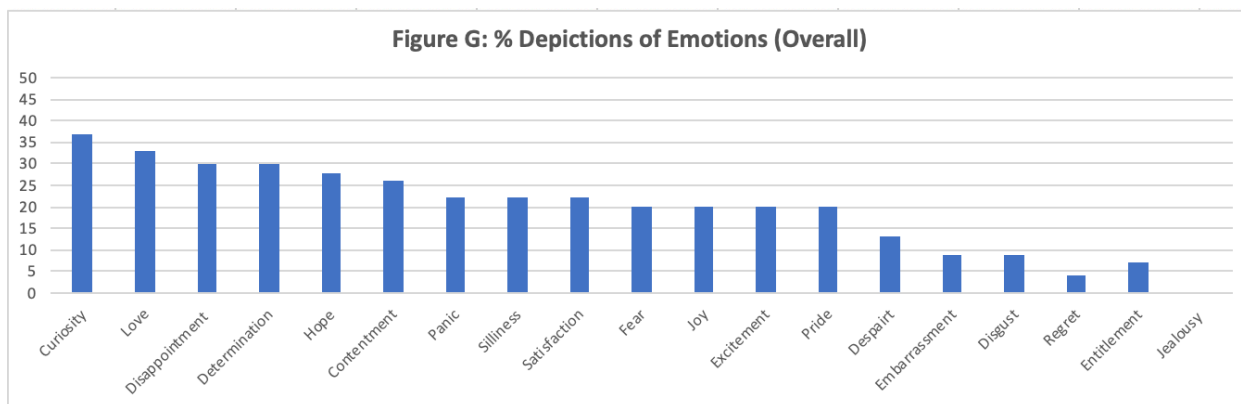
Peacebuilding strategies were explored through various actions and practices. Asking for or offering help was the most frequently cited peacebuilding strategy, appearing in 22 books (48%), with increased citations in 1994 and 2009. Trying something new was the only strategy cited in over 30% of the texts in all three years, highlighted in 21 (46%) books. Active listening and imagination were each depicted in 17 (37%) books, with active listening skewing high in

1994 and 2024, and imagination skewing high in 2009. Dialog and seeking mutual understanding appeared in 3 (7%) books, and negotiation was found in 2 (4%) books. Mediation was not depicted in any of the texts. Additionally, 2024 showed a notable skew towards being seen, heard, or validated, and encouragement.

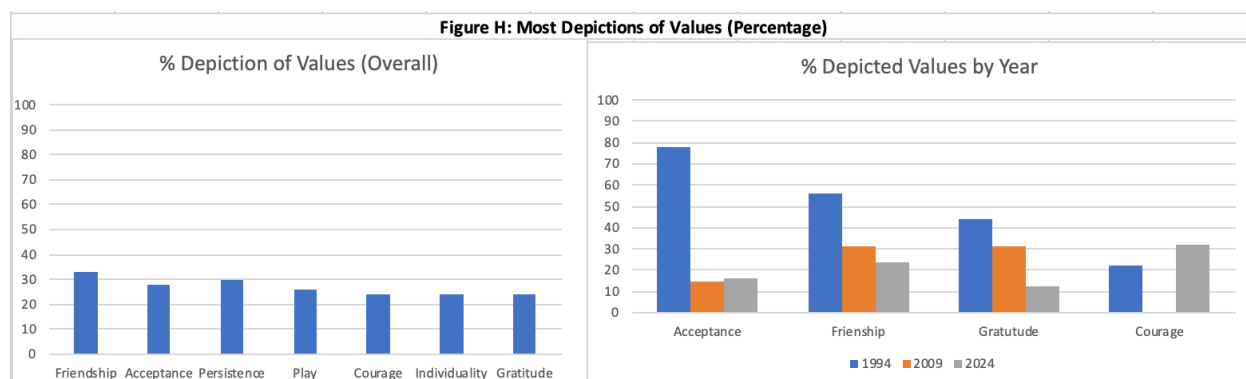


Depictions of characters' emotions and values (Figure G and Figure H)

Curiosity was the most prominent emotion overall, depicted in 17 (37%) of the books, and the only emotion cited in at least one-third of the texts from each year studied. Love followed, featured in 15 (33%) of the texts, with disappointment and determination each present in 14 (30%). Hope appeared in 13 (28%) of the books, while contentment was noted in 12 (26%). Panic or anxiety, silliness, and satisfaction were each represented in 10 (22%) books. Fear and joy each appeared in 9 (20%) of the books, along with excitement and pride. Less frequently depicted emotions included despair (13%), embarrassment (9%), disgust (9%), entitlement (7%), and regret (4%). Notably, jealousy was absent from the analyzed texts.



The study found no meaningful overlap in depictions of values across the years of study. 1994 cited the highest in acceptance, friendship, gratitude, and humility, 2009 cited the highest in friendship and gratitude and 2024 cited the highest in courage. Overall, friendship was the most frequently depicted value, present in 15 (33%) of the books. Acceptance followed, depicted in 13 (28%) of the books. Persistence appeared in 14 (30%) books, play appeared in 12 (26%) books, while courage, individuality, and gratitude were each noted in 11 (24%) books.



Discussion

The analysis of the data reveals several significant insights into the representation of peace and justice themes in children's literature as selected by the ALA Notable Children's Book young reader's selections in 1994, 2009, and 2024.

Individual vs. collective approaches to conflict and peace

The study found that the most frequently cited type of conflict in the books was intrapersonal, characters grappling with moral dilemmas or psychological challenges, such as the character of Bear in the book *A Visitor for Bear* (Becker, 2008). The text states, “No one ever came to Bear’s house. It had always been that way, and Bear was quite sure he didn’t like visitors. He even had a sign.” Or the child protagonist in *Artivist* (Smith, 2023) who thinks, “But sometimes the world that I see is not the world that I wish to see. And the problems seem larger than life.”

Correspondingly, conflict resolution and depictions of peace were predominantly presented at the personal and psychological level. Characters achieved inner peace and transformation through personal growth and self-reflection, such as the three little wolves in the book *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* (Trivizas, 1993), who eventually transition from behaviors of fear and exclusion to behaviors inclusion and acceptance. The book states, “They invited him into the house. They offered him tea and strawberries and wolfberries, and asked him to stay with them as long as he wanted.”

While the books depicted instances of structural and cultural violence, such as systemic inequalities and cultural stereotypes, they were met with a lack of representation of positive or sustainable peace, such as the *Artivist* character who finds the way to create change around the big societal challenges he sees is through painting murals. He states, “I love to paint. It relaxes me” (Smith, 2023). Similarly, the 1993 book *Peppe the Lamplighter* (Bartone) highlights the systemic and cultural challenges of early Italian immigrants working to integrate and achieve stability in New York City, but closes with Peppe’s dad accepting his young son’s need and desire to work. The text states, “For the first time in a long time, he put his hand on Peppe’s shoulder. ‘It’s a good job, Peppe,’ he said. ‘Light the lamps. You make me proud.’”

The absence of long-term, collective solutions to these broader issues suggests a gap in the literature. Instead of addressing systemic problems through community efforts or societal change, the narratives instead focused on individual actions and/or personal transformations, indicating missed opportunities to present young readers with examples of collective action and structural change. This singular focus on the individual might limit young readers' understanding of the power of community efforts and the importance of working together to address larger societal issues.

Lack of peacebuilding strategies and conflict resolution tools

The study revealed a minimal presence of conflict resolution tools such as reconciliation, reparations, and restitution in the books analyzed. Similarly, the texts showed minimal excerpts presenting common peacebuilding strategies utilized by practitioners such as dialog, negotiation, and mediation. These strategies, which are essential for resolving conflicts and building lasting peace, were not prominently featured. This suggests that the literature might not be fully equipping young readers with exposure to nor examples of the knowledge and skills to engage in peacebuilding practices. For example, in the text *Henry, Like Always* (Bailey, 2023), Henry portrays a young student who is likely neuro-diverse. When his class' typical schedule is disrupted during the week, he struggles to cope. Rather than educators, adults, and peers stepping in with tools to support him, he is left to figure out his own methods for coping and while still participating as usual (apropos of the title 'like always').

The study also found minimal excerpts that depicted peacebuilding skills commonly emphasized in early childhood education, such as apologizing and forgiveness. Only one book presented an apology met with forgiveness, another depicted forgiveness without an explicit apology, and one included an apology without explicit forgiveness. This limited representation

suggests that these important social skills might not be adequately addressed in the literature. For example, in the 2023 book *Big* (Harrison) the protagonist grapples with the shifting meaning of being called “big” as she grows up. While she attempts to ‘give back’ the hurtful words and attitudes that were put upon her, she is met with defensiveness and confusion by those who hurt her. Ultimately, she decides to own the adjectives that feel right and reject the hurtful ones, but that is a personal transformation she herself makes in order to have psychological peace with the world around her. She does not get there through engaging in any common peacebuilding strategies with other characters, such as apologies or forgiveness, nor is any accountability of transformation presented for any of the other characters involved.

The concepts of multiple truths/pathways and personal responsibility were also minimally represented, with only 3 books (7%) featuring multiple truths and 5 books (11%) emphasizing personal responsibility. The book *The Truth about Dragons* (Leung, 1993) stood out as an exemplar in its presentation of these themes. In this story, a biracial boy learns to connect to his two cultures and embrace his grandmothers’ identities through dragon stories as told by his mother. She tells him, “Mostly adventurers have only one story to call their own. And some who cannot travel more than one path may demand that you choose between the clouds and the caves. For dragons cannot dwell in both, they say.” She goes on to help him understand that one grandmother’s interpretation “would be one truth about dragons” and his other grandmother’s interpretation “would also be a truth about dragons.” She encourages him that his heart is big enough to hold both of these truths simultaneously. These concepts are vital for developing empathy, understanding perspectives, and fostering accountability in young learners.

Children as agents of change and the role of symbolism in narratives

This study revealed that children were most often depicted as the agents of change in the narratives. They led adults, elders, and other children towards instances of personal transformation or psychological peace. This portrayal underscores the potential of children to drive positive change and highlights their ability to be active agents in resolving conflicts and promoting peace. For example, in *The Outside Dog* (Pomerantz, 1993) a young girl works to slowly convince her grandfather to let her keep a stray dog. Her grandfather begins the book adamantly opposed, and almost hostile towards the stray dogs in their community. The text states, “Whenever a dog came into the yard, Grandfather chased it away. ‘Vete!’ he yelled. ‘Scram!’ Yet, gradually through persistence and small and intentional steps, she warms his heart to the benefits a loyal dog can bring to their small family, ultimately leading to this closing conversation.

“I just wondered if Pancho really is our dog.”
 “Marisol,” said Grandfather, “I told you from the start that once you feed a dog, he thinks you own him.”
 “Do we own him?” asked Marisol.
 Grandfather chuckled.
 “I don’t know,” he said.
 “But he sure owns us.”
 “Does that mean we will always feed him?”
 “I guess so,” said Grandfather.

Animals, imaginary creatures, and items played a significant role in many of the narrative elements through symbolic significance, often providing a 'safe' tool for children to use in their pursuit of personal transformation. These characters and items served as companions, guides, or symbolic representations, helping the young protagonists navigate their challenges and achieve personal growth. This study found that they can represent or help foster various aspects of the human experience, such as developing wisdom, courage, and connection. By interacting with

these symbolic figures and items, children in the stories can explore and develop certain values and behaviors through their imaginations or in a way that may feel more psychologically secure. For example, in *Beneath* (Doerrfeld, 2023) and *Cape* (Johnson, 2023) blankets act as a source and symbol of both protection and courage for young children dealing with loss and grief and needing the courage to connect. While *What Can You Do With a Rebozo* (Cardova, 2008) the young girl's the large scarf serves as a source of playfulness and interconnection between her and her family, and in *Scroll* (Illus, 2023) a young girl is enveloped into her grandfather's Chinese scroll, testing her wisdom and courage while connecting her to her culture and ancestors. The use of non-human characters might also make peace and justice themes more accessible to young readers, allowing them to explore complex concepts in a more relatable and engaging way.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the question: How are peace and justice themes reflected in the narrative elements and symbolic representations from American Library Association's (ALA) Notable Children's Book selections for younger readers for the years of 1994, 2009, and 2024? The collected data revealed that selected texts predominantly focus on individual character development and personal transformation, often neglecting systemic solutions and collective actions. Despite some marginal progress in the diversity of character demographics, the data analysis revealed persistent gaps in the representation of critical peace and justice concepts.

Practical applicability

The findings from this study provide insights on how themes of violence, conflict, peace, justice, and conflict resolution are represented in children's literature. The frequent depiction of

intrapersonal challenges and personal peace paired with the absence of certain types of justice and sustainable peace highlights areas where children's literature could expand to provide more diverse and holistic representations of these themes.

Peace and justice scholars and practitioners may be surprised by the lack of peace and justice themes and representations within the selected texts of this study. What these experts may see as self-evident, may not transfer into children's literature and ecosystems as they assumed or hoped it would. Erica Chenoweth, in their 2013 TEDx Talk on the success of non-violence resistance, shares a key call to action, imploring their audience, "Encourage your children to learn about the nonviolent legacies of the past two hundred years and explore the potential of people power" (11:48). They go on to state, "I see it as our shared responsibility to spread the word so future generations don't fall for the myth that violence is their only way out" (12:30). Knowing this, peace and justice scholars may want to delve deeper into how children's literature could be an effective vehicle for peace and justice education. This would involve examining a broader range of books and exploring how different narratives impact children's understanding of peace and justice concepts through continued refinement of developed frameworks and coding tools. This can help standardize the assessment and comparison of different texts, making it easier for peace and justice researchers to identify trends and gaps.

Educators and child/human development professionals may think about what is both present and absent from the texts in this study and the impacts that may carry for the internalization and identity development of young readers, as well as the implications for these young readers' orientation and attitudes towards the values emended within the goals of peace and justice work. There are opportunities for these practitioners to use these findings to both seek out and/or encourage the development of texts and curricula that emphasize peacebuilding and a

more holistic suite of peace and justice themes and conflict resolution skills, providing students with a more rounded understanding of societal issues and resolutions.

Authors of children's literature for young readers may want to interrogate the rationale behind how these patterns in the data emerged as they did. Possibly an overreliance of Booker's "The Seven Basic Plots" or Campbell's 'Hero's Journey.' Perhaps it is an author's own understanding and exposure to (or lack thereof) certain themes within the field of peace and justice. Utilizing Freire's approach to bringing the lens of critical pedagogy into the literature for young readers, as well as explicitly embedding peacebuilding themes and theory within critical content analysis to not only strengthen the fields of literary analysis, but also peace and justice studies, could be meaningful approaches to creating a shift in this data. The demographic findings of this study may also be of interest to the authors, illustrators, and publishers of young children's books, as despite passage of thirty years between the publishing dates examined during this study, very few meaningful demographic shifts occurred, with the dominant cultural norms in the United States remaining firmly in place.

Additionally, the prevalence of narratives focused on personal agency and transformation suggests a reinforcement of the United States' cultural predisposition (intentionally or unintentionally) toward individuality. By frequently depicting characters who achieve resolution through their own efforts rather than collective action, the literature may be privileging the idea that change is (or should be) primarily driven by individual action, subtly strengthening the messaging that personal initiative is a primary solution to conflict.

This study may provide the ALA an opportunity to reflect on their recommendations for young readers and both consider and reconsider the process and criteria they utilize to put

together their notable book lists, and any larger educational themes or purposes they may like their recommendations to emulate or instill in their reader-base.

The implications of this study underscore the importance of peace and justice themes in children's literature. By understanding and addressing the current gaps found in this research, authors, educators, scholars, and the broader literary community can work together to create a more inclusive and enriching educational literary landscape for young readers. This may enhance the reading experience for young readers, and ideally it will also equip them with knowledge and skills that could contribute to the development of a more just and peaceful society.

Recommendations for further research

The findings from this study offer a valuable starting point for further research into the representation of peace and justice themes in children's literature. There are several ways to build on these findings that would uncover further insights into the research question. Future studies should incorporate a larger sample size of books and may want to expand the research to texts outside of the APA's notable book lists. This would allow for a larger sample size, leading to more robust and generalizable findings, as well as a larger range of coding opportunities, providing a more comprehensive overview of peace and justice themes in children's literature. More researchers should be included in the research study to bring both a diversity of perspectives and expertise as well as the opportunity to cross-validate the results, further ensuring greater reliability and validity of the results. Finally, exploring the cross-cultural possibilities by conducting a similar study in different countries could provide intriguing insights and opportunities to uncover both universal and unique patterns within the data.

Additional research should investigate why depictions of justice, positive and sustainable peace are underrepresented in children's literature and explore ways to incorporate more

narratives that incorporate these concepts. This can include interviewing authors, illustrators, publishers, educators, and practitioners in the young reader literary community. Also, conducting research to examine the impact of peace and justice themes on young readers' understanding of fairness and conflict resolution and how that understanding might influence their behaviors and skills to manage conflicts in real life. Finally, conducting a longitudinal study to understand the long-term impact of different levels of exposure to peace and justice themes in literature might provide meaningful insights into how early literary experiences shape children's values and behaviors into adulthood. By addressing the observed gaps and expanding the scope of research, future studies can contribute to creating more inclusive, holistic texts that better reflect the complexities of peace and justice.

In the book *The Truth about Dragons* (Leung, 2023) a mother shares with her son, “Inside your heart is where the two forests meet. Both journeys are yours to take. Both worlds are yours to discover.” In this era marked by widespread uncertainty, division, and political violence, it is essential for children to learn about both the larger themes embedded within the field of peace and justice, as well as the skills and strategies used within the field to promote understanding and equilibrium. Children’s literature can be a powerful tool to increase exposure to these themes for young readers. Depicting hope, seeking to understand through curiosity, taking personal responsibility, and being active agents of change are among many key skills and attitudes we can be proactively building in our youth. Increasing the access to, and quantity of, books available to young readers which balance both personal transformation with collective and systemic solutions, has the potential to lead to valuable outcomes for the field of peace and justice, now and in the long-term.

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Appendix A: Comprehensive Coding Protocol

Themes (9)	Categories (83)	Category Definitions	Examples	Number of excerpts (1079)	Number of books (46)
Depiction of violence	structural violence	systemic inequities embedded within social structures	disparities in access, inequality, poverty	13	6 / 13%
	cultural violence	aspects of culture used to legitimize violence	cultural stereotypes, narratives that normalize violence or dehumanize certain groups	2	2 / 4%
	personal violence	direct physical, verbal, emotional harm to individuals	physical aggression, bullying, verbal abuse	27	7 / 15%
Depiction of conflict	interpersonal	two or more characters in conflict/disagreement	sibling rivalry, bullying	32	11 / 24%
	intrapersonal	internal struggles within a character; psychological	moral dilemmas (telling the truth; obey rules or desires)	49	25 / 54%
	conformity	aligning beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors with others	relinquishing individuality for societal norms	12	6 / 13%
Depiction of peace	exclusion	isolating someone(s) from a group or institution	often rooted in factors linked to identity, social standing, religion, etc.	20	8 / 17%
	negative peace	the absence of violence	conflict is avoided/absent but underlying issues not addressed	2	2 / 4%
	positive peace	addressing the root causes of conflict and inequality	communities thriving from cooperation, shared prosperity	0	0 / 0%
Depiction of justice	sustainable peace	long-term solutions to prevent conflict recurrence; self-pe	communities developing peacebuilding tools (education, dialog)	0	0 / 0%
	psychological (inner) peace	individual internal peace	finding peace through emotionaland/or individual healing and expression	31	25 / 54%
	distributive justice	fair distribution of resources	poverty, privilege, resource scarcity	0	0 / 0%
Depiction of peacebuilding strategies	procedural justice	fairness in processes	fairness of rules and their enforcement	0	0 / 0%
	restorative justice	repairing harm/restoring relationships	actively mending damage or harm caused	3	2 / 4%
	retributive justice	punishment for wrongdoing	facing consequences for one's actions	0	0 / 0%
Depiction of conflict resolution	active listening	focused concentration (understanding and remembering) o	showing support and understanding without rushing to offer advice	19	17 / 37%
	dialog	open communication to reach mutual understanding	seek to understand differing perspectives	5	3 / 7%
	negotiation	seeking to reach agreement with best possible solution for	compromising, prioritizing and communicating needs	4	2 / 4%
Depiction of emotions	mediation	neutral third party helping disputants reach resolution	intentional facilitation of communication and understanding between two or more parties	0	0 / 0%
	trying something new	innovative/creative approaches to problem solving/improv	breaking away from traditional methods; taking a risk	29	21 / 46%
	asking for/offering help	recognizing the need for assistance and seeking it; proacti	fostering collaboration, relationship building	56	22 / 48%
Depiction of conflict resolution	imagination	form new ideas, images, or concepts not present to the se	individuals envisioning alternative futures, solutions to conflicts, and empathize with others'	29	17 / 37%
	being seen/heard/validated (of	acknowledgment and affirmation of one's or another's ex	human connection and communication	15	10 / 22%
	personal responsibility	acknowledging and accepting the role one plays in a situa	taking proactive steps to address and rectify issues	9	5 / 11%
Depiction of emotions	encouragement	providing support, confidence, or hope to someone	helping another to overcome obstacles and pursue positive actions	12	8 / 17%
	multiple truths/pathways	recognizing that different people can have varied perspect	understanding and accepting a diversity in perspectives and experiences	5	3 / 7%
	reconciliation	restoration of relations	after conflict, finding common ground and a path forward	2	2 / 4%
Depiction of emotions	apologizing	the act of expressing regret for a wrongdoing or mistake	acknowledging harm and paving a way for reconciliation and healing	2	2 / 4%
	inclusion	the act or state of including or being included in a group	being or feeling valued, respected, seen, affirmed by others	18	12 / 26%
	forgiveness	letting go of resentment	choosing to move past a specific incident	2	2 / 4%
Depiction of emotions	reparations	compensation for past harms or injustices	material or symbolic amends for one's loss or suffering	1	1 / 2%
	restitution	restoring what was lost or stolen to proper owner	paying for damages after an accident	3	1 / 2%
	personal transformation	a dramatic change in understanding or behavior	integrating new perspectives, managing difficult emotions	19	12 / 26%
Depiction of emotions	hope	expectation or desire for a certain thing to happen	optimism; looking forward to positive outcomes	23	13 / 28%
	despair	the loss or absence of hope	situation is perceived as insurmountable	7	6 / 13%
	satisfaction	feeling of fulfillment	one's expectations are met	14	10 / 22%
Depiction of emotions	disappointment	feeling of sadness	one's expectations are unmet/unfulfilled	25	14 / 30%
	fear	emotional response to threats or danger	heightened senses; readiness to respond to uncertainty or danger (perceived or real); desire to	32	9 / 20%
	joy	feeling of great pleasure or happiness	often triggered by achievements or simple pleasures	13	9 / 20%
Depiction of emotions	love	strong feelings of affection for another	deep, connected bond	28	15 / 33%
	disgust	strong feelings of aversion or revulsion	something or someone is perceived as unpleasant or offensive	7	4 / 9%
	panic/anxiety	strong feelings of fear and worry	fear and worry, often about future events or the potential for adverse outcomes	23	10 / 22%
Depiction of emotions	jealousy	unease from fear of losing someone/something valuable	someone has something/someone one wants/has/needs	0	0 / 0%
	regret	feelings of sadness or disappointment over the past	something that has happened or been done, a missed opportunity	2	2 / 4%
	embarrassment	self-conscious discomfort	feelings of social vulnerability or exposure from an awkward or inappropriate circumstance	7	4 / 9%
Depiction of emotions	anger	feelings of great displeasure	hostility towards a perceived/real wrongdoing	9	7 / 15%
	entitlement	belief one is inherently better or more deserving	belief one deserves special privileges, treatment... others are beneath them	11	3 / 7%
	curiosity	desire to learn and know more	earnest inquiry; questioning	24	17 / 37%
Depiction of emotions	determined	strong motivation to achieve a goal	overcoming obstacles to attain achievement	24	14 / 30%
	shame	feeling stemming from dishonor or improper behaviors	state of consciousness from wrongdoing; betrayal of values	11	5 / 11%
	pride	high opinion of self or others; satisfaction from achievement	pleasure from a relationship or achievement; honor	25	9 / 20%
Depiction of emotions	doubt	uncertain; lack of conviction	unsure of one's own or another's ability to do something	11	7 / 15%
	silly	state of playfulness	lighthearted, amusing, or foolish behaviors	19	10 / 22%
	loneliness	feelings of isolation from a lack of connection to others	lack of companionship	5	5 / 11%
Depiction of emotions	excitement	feelings of enthusiasm and eagerness	anticipation for something positive or thrilling	11	9 / 20%
	confusion	lack of clarity or state of bewilderment	struggling to understand or make sense of a situation	10	7 / 15%
	sadness	feelings of unhappiness, sorrow, melancholy	feelings stemming from unfulfilled dreams, harsh realities, grief, disappointment	6	3 / 7%
Depiction of emotions	worry	state of unease or anxiety about future uncertainties	feelings of concern for safety, security, well-being, etc.	6	3 / 7%
	contentment	state of satisfaction and happiness	sense of peace and fulfillment	12	12 / 26%
	nostalgia	sentimental longing for the past	desire for previous place or people with happy personal associations	5	3 / 7%
Depiction of values	cooperation	individuals or groups working together to achieve common	sharing of responsibilities, ideas, accountability,	10	7 / 15%
	honesty	being truthful, free from deceit	telling the truth despite the consequences	8	6 / 13%
	advocacy	supporting/defending/pleading on behalf of others or one's	seeking justice; raising awareness to important issues	4	2 / 4%
Depiction of values	vulnerability	exposure to the possibility of being physically or emotional	openness; emotional exposure	12	6 / 13%
	courage	ability to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty	can be moral or physical	19	11 / 24%
	friendship	mutual bond between individuals	companionship, shared interests, emotional support, loyalty	10	15 / 33%
Depiction of values	acceptance	acknowledgement and appreciation for another	embracing differences (traits, perspectives, identities) without trying to alter them	25	13 / 28%
	humility	modest views on one's importance	valuing others' contributions without arrogance	9	6 / 13%
	individuality/be yourself	distinguishing quality(ies)	character trait that makes one stand out from the rest	24	11 / 24%
Depiction of values	persistence	continuing despite challenges	not giving up easily; pursuing goals	18	14 / 30%
	kindness	being considerate of others	generosity, concern for others, helpful	10	5 / 11%
	gratitude	being thankful; showing appreciation	recognizing and acknowledging the goodness and good things	17	11 / 24%
Depiction of values	interconnectedness	mutual dependence; interrelatedness	individuals and actions are linked in web of relationships, connections	12	8 / 17%
	play	activity motivated by pleasure and enjoyment	involves imagination, creativity, and engagement	26	12 / 26%
	community	group of individuals who share common values, goals, loc	fostering a sense of belonging, support, mutual care	17	7 / 15%
Depiction of values	creativity	ability to generate novel and valuable ideas, solutions, exp	thinking outside the box, using imaginative thinking, applying innovative approaches	18	10 / 22%
	adventure	pursuit of an exciting (often new or risky) experience	involves exploration, challenges of the unknown; desire for discovery	10	4 / 9%
	judgement	forming an opinion or conclusion about someone/someth	can be critical or disapproving; often without fully understanding the context or circumstances	9	4 / 9%
Depiction of values	blame	holding someone responsible for a fault, wrong, mistake	assigning responsibility for a negative outcomes	4	2 / 4%
	avoidance	act of evading or dodging a person, situation, responsibility	escaping conflict or discomfort	12	6 / 13%
	guilt	feeling of responsibility or remorse for an offense	feelings of responsibility or remorse for a wrong can be real or imagined	7	3 / 7%
Depiction of values	distraction/not paying attention	diverting attention away from issue, task, person	can lead to neglect, hurt feelings, or unresolved conflict	5	3 / 7%
	isolation	separating oneself or being separated from others	can lead to feelings of loneliness; can exacerbate conflicts	4	4 / 9%