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Portrayal of Diverse Family Structures in Children's Literature

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Abstract

Throughout their daily lives, students continuously make connections between themselves and their world, which aids in constructing meaning, strengthening understanding, and facilitating empathy toward others. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to ascertain the extent to which diverse family dynamics are represented within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award. The research questions addressed in this study include: What is the extent of representation regarding diverse family dynamics within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award book award, and how human families are portrayed. All fifteen novels containing human families were analyzed using a chart developed and adapted from studies by Despain, 2012; Goddard & Grant, 2009; and Randolph, 2013, which focused on first identifying what type of family unit was present in each novel, and then to what extent these relationships are portrayed. This study utilizes qualitative content analysis to identify the type of family unit portrayed in each work resulting in the discovery of emergent themes pertaining to personal challenges originating within the family unit, personal challenges encountered outside of the family unit, and gender roles of single parental figures within the text. From this study, three themes emerged: personal challenges originating within family structure, personal challenges originating outside of family structure, and gender trends within the single parental/guardian roles. The researcher concluded that (1) given the source of this sampling of books, an adequate amount of diverse family units were demonstrated, and (2) the majority of strong, supportive, and independent adult figures within these family units were female.

PORTRAYAL OF DIVERSE FAMILY STRUCTURES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
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by
Beth Grafft
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Degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout their daily lives, students continuously make connections between themselves and their world, which aids in constructing meaning, strengthening understanding, and facilitating empathy toward others. **The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to ascertain the extent to which diverse family dynamics are represented within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award.**

The research questions addressed in this study include: What is the extent of representation regarding diverse family dynamics within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award book award, and how human families are portrayed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the span of decades, what has traditionally been defined as a “family unit” has undergone significant change. American society no longer idealizes the picture-perfect world of June Cleaver or Wilma Flintstone, with husbands coming home from a long day at work, and veering expectantly toward the dinner table. No more are there consistent table settings for four, with ‘Mother Parker’ from *A Christmas Story* serving up a hot meal to her family, sacrificing the quality of her own food as it grows cold. Also absent from many family scenarios is Fido curled up under Junior’s feet, waiting patiently for those inevitable scraps to fall from the tabletop, as Junior excitedly conveys details of his school day. Also missing is the scene of Jane poking disinterestedly at her meatloaf with a fork, while twirling her ponytail, with its perfectly coordinated ribbon, and daydreaming about her beloved “Billy.” These narrative threads depicting every day family lives have been woven into our American popular culture for over 60 years.

Justification of Problem

While these aforementioned images may be comforting to some in the sense that they are familiar, or seemingly traditional, they are very much antiquated and may be difficult for children to identify with, as the representation of more diverse structures of the traditional American family has continued to evolve in popular literature. Since the Obama Era, perceptions have continued to move away from the image of a nuclear, or traditional, American family consisting of a married mother and father and at least one biological child of this union (Rankin, 2018). Waters (2017) notes that 21st century families no longer fit into what older generations

recognize to be the “traditional” family setting, and as such there has been an increase in the production of more modern portrayals in text of these diverse dynamics (p. 126). Through the use of pictures and text, children’s books aim to assist students in recognizing that there are, in fact, many manifestations of family that exist outside of their own familial reality. With more exposure to diverse settings that “reflect their living arrangements and family types, [this] can help to validate children’s experiences” (p. 126). Additionally, Randolph (2013) indicates when children are exposed to literature that positively portrays their own family dynamic, they build self-confidence in the idea that there are others out in the world who are like them (p. 10).

Access to literature, especially at the elementary level, consists primarily of what is available in both the teacher’s classroom, as well as the school library, which vary from teacher-to-teacher and from school-to-school. It is the responsibility of both the teacher and the teacher librarian to offer a rich representation of “[our] students and society as a whole” and to include books “that help children recognize and understand different types of family [that are] crucial in their perception of themselves and others” (Randolph, 2013, p. 10). This study is informed by the following lines of research: evidence of how stories help children cope with personal challenges related to family; how stories assist children with understanding themselves and others around them; and portrayals of family in children’s literature.

Stories Help Children Cope with Personal Challenges

According to Waters (2017) literature can provide freedom and refuge to students who are struggling with a variety of home life issues that may range anywhere from grief and divorce to the adjustments to new marriages that bring with them new siblings and an overwhelming amount of change to a family dynamic. In some cases, there could be a combination of issues

coupled with the lack of support and/or resources to effectively cope with the situation and children are in need of outside resources to draw upon in order to help them cope with these traumatic shifts. When provided with relatable texts that reflect a student's living arrangement or family dynamic, they may then have the opportunity to find support and validation of their own experiences, with the added bonus of creating a more accepting classroom climate where they may discover similarities between themselves and their peers (p. 126).

Stories Assist Children with Understanding Themselves and Others

Included in the area of common beliefs of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) is that reading initiatives may be elevated through the use of stories and personal narratives to engage learners (AASL, 2020, p. 1). The stories and narratives that are accessible to many students rely heavily on the comfort level of those presenting the material and may not always be "honest portrayals of the individuals who make up our society," but rather consist of the less edgy, and "safe" storylines that avoid the harsh realities and are not likely to ruffle feathers or create controversy (Mick, 2019, p. 9). Albert Einstein has been attributed to the saying, *What is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right*. Providing students access to works of literature that are rooted in reality may cause heart palpitations for those who experience difficulty relating to the characters and stories in a text, or are generally hesitant to incorporate books addressing diversity in their classroom; however, access to modernized portrayals of diverse family dynamics is absolutely necessary in promoting well-informed and empathetic readers, thus reinforcing the necessity of this study (Waters, 2017, p. 127).

Portrayals of Family in Children's Literature

Children need to see their families depicted in literature and the assumption is that this is not always the case. For instance, some children who come from same-sex households may find it difficult to relate with a more traditional story such as *Little House on the Prairie*. By using diverse family literature, teachers can unlock children's concerns and help them realize that there are others in their same situation, and they may also learn that others may not share the same values or belief systems that they possess (Gilmore & Bell, 2006, p. 281).

Rationale

According to the most recent family data reported on Iowa.gov (2017), 794,614 families reside in Iowa, with the average family size consisting of three individuals. Of this number, 38% are married couple families with children under 18 years of age, and almost 64% percent are all-female householders with no husband present with children under 18 years. However, depictions of diverse family dynamics are not merely limited to situations of separation or divorce. In a 2015 report from the Child Welfare League of America (2017), 5,918 children in Iowa lived apart from their families and were being cared for outside of the home. Over 1,000 - or 17% of these children were awaiting adoption. Additionally, during that same year, over 16,000 grandparents were reportedly the primary guardians of their grandchildren. Contributing factors to these statistics involve, but are not limited to, instances of abuse, neglect, and substance abuse by the biological parent(s).

Gilmore and Bell (2006) argued that people are better informed about children when they understand the number of children within a given region who live in these diverse family structures, and as such, those adults are better able to recommend literature that might be most

relatable or engaging to them and/or what might best represent them (p. 280). Access to this literature helps students make those crucial *text to self* and *text to world* connections and broaden their literacy skills in the process (Waters, 2017, p. 127).

Identifying portrayals of families in the most recent list of books nominated by students for the Iowa's Children's Choice Award is beneficial for Iowa teachers and librarians in both analyzing and guiding the selection of literature for their classrooms and school libraries. A statewide promotion of the purchase of Iowa Children's Choice titles in school and public libraries and the reading programming structured to motivate students to read these books and to participate in voting for their favorite (IASL, n.d., p.1) means that it is worthwhile for educators to know how representative these books are in relation to family dynamics. Additionally, better understanding the portrayal of families in these books will also reveal some indication of the reading interests of children in Iowa because students nominate books for the ICC list (IASL, n.d.). As such, not only do these benefits offer the potential to engage student readers, it opens up possibilities for teachers to connect with their students, and for libraries to update current collections with more recent and relevant depictions of family lives, which in turn serves to strengthen the aforementioned potentialities.

Uncertainty and Deficiencies On This Topic From Past Research

Randolph (2013) reported that the Children's Choice books in Ohio that were analyzed for that study seemed to reflect the predominant family units in the United States. The two types of family structures most frequently reported to the United States Census Bureau involved children living with their married, biological, or adoptive parents, as well as children living in one-parent mother-led families. In order to further understand how families are depicted in

modern children's literature, this study replicates Randolph's research and updates that study with a focus on analyzing family structures within the recommendations from books nominated by students for the Iowa Children's Choice Book List between the years of 2018 to 2019.

Summary of Problem Statement

Children's literature does not always accurately portray the many facets that make up the modern family unit, and students need access to these accurate and diverse narratives in order to promote a more engaging reading experience that widens their perspectives about themselves and others.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to ascertain the extent to which diverse family dynamics are represented within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of representation regarding diverse family dynamics within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award book award?
2. How are human families portrayed in the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice book award list nominations from 3rd through 6th grade students?

Assumptions and Limitations

The assumption maintained by this researcher is that classroom and school libraries lack children's literature that portrays adequate diversity of modern family structures. The constraints

of this research involve the limits of one state's book award nominations that are suggested by children for the annual Children's Choice book award.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to ascertain the extent to which diverse family dynamics are represented within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award. Three subthemes become evident as one delves into the area of analysis: the role of story in dealing with personal challenges, support of empathy in young readers, and portrayals of family in children's literature.

Stories Help Children Cope with Personal Challenges

Research has shown that if children feel that their own situations or struggles are being ignored in the classroom, it may send a message to them that minimizes the validity of their feelings, which is detrimental. Furthermore, if young children are feeling out of place in their classrooms, it affects their learning of educational topics (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Pohan & Bailey, 1998; White, 2015). Potter (2010) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the role of psychosocial well-being as defined by Carol Ryff (1989), consisting of factors such as self-acceptance, maintaining positive relationships with others, feeling a sense of purpose, and experiencing personal growth in relation between divorce and children's outcomes. Potter (2010) used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the National Center for Education Statistics and reports from the teacher, parent, or child indicating the internalization and externalization of problems, as well as social skills, were used to measure psychosocial well-being. Potter concluded that fifth grade students from divorced families scored an average of five points lower on assessments than peers from non-divorced households, with a well-being score that widened from the kindergartner's score of .04 to 0.12 points. This indicated that

divorce may play a role in these outcomes by “increasing disparities in children’s psychosocial well-being,” which could also contribute to student academic struggles (p. 940).

White (2004) compared the effects of being raised by single mothers and single fathers, and, additionally, examined parenting by same gender partnerships. The primary focus was on the psychological well-being and academic performance of the children who were being raised in these family situations. The study’s usefulness to educators is important, as it provides a way of understanding the obstacles that hinder a child’s emotional and academic development in a diverse family situation. White indicated that the results of this review of literature from 1989 through 2004 showed conflicting information as to which living arrangement was best for children, as mothers and fathers exhibited different parenting strengths and offered differing emotional, academic, and financial resources to their children. The results of this study found that custodial parents who adjusted well to divorce and who offered a more stable and caring environment were more likely to raise well-adjusted and academically successful children than custodial parents who struggled in these areas (pp. 24-25).

Segermark (2017) conducted a mixed methods study that used quantitative data analysis, as well as qualitative interviews. She examined the research literature pertaining to school performance of students in foster care and the expectations placed upon teachers of special education. She hoped to answer how students in foster care were performing on measures of school success and what the implications were for special education teachers who work with students in foster care. Segermark indicated that students in foster care “fall behind their peers on every measure of school success: academic achievement scores, [high rates of] behavioral referrals and disciplinary actions, identification as special education students, grade retention and

graduation rates” (p. 31). Numerous factors contributing to school failure were indicated, including, but not limited to, multiple school transfers, disrupted attendance, attendance at low-performing schools, unmet mental health needs, and inadequate and/or unsatisfactory communication between the schools and welfare agencies. Students experiencing these kinds of disruptive, home life situations need the support that relatable literature can offer by placing value upon their circumstances and allowing them a means of escape.

It is clear from Segermark’s (2017) study that students struggle with personal challenges when enduring traumatic events such as divorce or foster care situations. Potter (2010) suggests that circumstances such as these (specifically divorce) diminish children’s psychosocial well-being, which seems to impact academic performance. As literature also teaches children about the world in which they live, a world that undergoes vast changes by the day, it plays a pivotal role in the perceptions they grow to have. When they are able to find a common ground within what they read, there is hope that they might find a mechanism by which to cope (White, 2004).

Stories Assist Children with Understanding Themselves and Others

Bal and Veltkamp (2013) aimed to determine if reading fiction truly does influence one's level of empathy. They define empathy as “the cognitive and intellectual ability to recognize the emotions of other persons and to emotionally respond to other persons” (p. 3). To determine if reading fiction influences one’s level of empathy, two studies were performed that relied on the narrative transportation theory, which, according to Oxford Research Encyclopedias (2017), is the ability to lose one’s self in reading (p. 56). For both studies, students were placed into either a control group and provided nonfiction writings or a fiction group, which was provided fictional

readings. The first study's control groups' reading selection was from a high-quality, Dutch newspaper, while the fiction group was given a short story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle from the Sherlock Holmes series entitled, "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons." Similarly, in the second study, participants in the control group were given readings from a different newspaper, and the fiction group was provided with a Dutch translation of Nobel Prize winner José Saramago's *Blindness* (p. 7). Over the course of a week, students independently filled out questionnaires pertaining to their readings that asked them to provide demographic information, gauge themselves on an empathy scale, and compose summaries after the readings were completed. While the studies did not provide immediate impacts on empathy, it was evident that self-reported empathetic skills significantly changed over time for readers who were fully engaged in the story and identified strongly with the main characters of the fictional short stories (pp. 5-8).

Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor (2014) explored the idea of the dangers of the single story, which is powerful, and how it creates an incomplete story, which then makes one story become the only story (p. 30). They found factors contributing to the power created by the single story including the decisiveness of the story being told and who gets to tell it, as well as when and how these stories are told (Adichie, 2009). When people or events are repeatedly shown one way, over time, these narratives become so ingrained that it is difficult to perceive other ways in which a story could possibly go, and thus becomes the definitive way that people, groups, or circumstances are viewed. This type of limited and controlled storytelling contributes to prejudice, and by "disrupting single stories with narratives told from other perspectives," it is possible to form a more nuanced portrait of the people, issues, or ideas at hand, and, therefore,

contributing to a more empathetic and educated audience (Tschida et. al., 2014). Many perspectives exist in relation to story-telling and to limit the scope to a single version of a narrative threatens to disengage readers from diverse familial backgrounds.

According to Kucirkova (2019), “There is an increasingly popular view among several authors, publishers, educators and literacy organizations, that storybook reading is the primary strategy to nurture children’s empathy skills.” Kucirkova proposed a research-informed, conceptual framework for “understanding the developmental mechanisms and literary characteristics that bind children’s storybooks with empathy” (p. 1). While the framework specified that “not all storybooks promote positive cognitive empathy,” those that do challenge readers to understand the perspectives of characters who are unlike them. The study also concluded that “there is enough empirical evidence to claim that books provide a context for practicing perspective-taking and identifying with the ‘other’” (p. 12). Furthermore, children’s storybooks could play a part in promoting the understanding of others’ perspectives, if there is a balance between the set requirements: cognitive/affective empathy, in-/outgroup identification, story immersion/character identification, narrative representation in words and adults’ conversational mediation” (p. 12).

Kucirkova (2019) suggests that there is a positive correlation between immersion within a story and story engagement, in that the more the child is involved with the story, the more engaged they become, which results in more delight and pleasure during the reading experience. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) seem to reinforce this idea, as their study suggests that readers do develop a greater sense of empathy over time when engaged with texts when they are emotionally transported into the story. According to Tschida et. al. (2014), the reality is that for

many readers, they do not see themselves reflected in children's literature, and this must be rectified in order to ensure engagement and fulfillment.

Portrayals of Family in Children's Literature

Whether in literature or reality, the family continues to be a vital part of any child's life experience (Bartoszuk & Pittman, 2010). Because children come from a greater diversity of family dynamics and face different struggles, triumphs, prejudices, and perceptions than peers of the past may have experienced, educators and librarians have the responsibility of being sensitive, aware, and accepting (Despain, 2012).

A content analysis of family structure in Newbery Medal or Honor books was performed by Despain (2012). The study examined 87 realistic fiction books published between 1930-2010 and census data to determine how well the texts reflected the structures of families during the specified time frame, as well as during which decades the books most broadly reflected family. Overall, Despain found that the families structures within these texts were relatively clear-cut and those that were consistently dealt with over the decades included "children of married couples, divorced or widowed parents, parents with a spouse absent, adults living alone, and children living with grandparents [and] there were few, if any, portrayals of same-sex or interracial couples or younger adults still living at home" (p. 39). One surprising category Despain found impossible to compare involved stepfamilies, as the census failed to include this piece. Despain suggests that these latter categories are clearly areas in need of investigation in future studies, as books mirror culture, and what is written generally reflects the values and ideals of society, as well as what constitutes normality in a reader's mind (p. 39).

A theoretical framework presented by Goddard and Grant (2009) supports the need to develop sensitivity toward diverse families and suggests that children's literature can be an effective tool to heighten this sensitivity (p. 75). While engaging in culturally-responsive teaching is an applicable goal for all educators, this framework focuses specifically on supporting new teacher candidates in an effort to discourage "choos[ing] only family-themed books within their experiential background and comfort level," and shift these emerging practitioners into becoming "proactive family advocates" by raising awareness in both practice and reflection (p. 75). A template for evaluating culturally-diverse literature, which may also be adapted for general usage regarding families, is included, as well as examples of children's literature that aim to heighten sensitivity toward families. The application of this template to children's literature may serve in aiding teachers and librarians in the selection of quality, family-themed books, as it explores stereotypes presented by family members, the potential impact towards understanding family relationships within the culture, as well as the variety of changing roles across families, to name a few (p. 77).

A content analysis conducted by Parsons, Fuxa, Kander, and Hardy, (2017) examined how adoption and adoptive families are depicted in contemporary realistic fiction for young adults. Thirty-seven books were selected from the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database using the search terms "adoption," "adoptive families," and "birth parent," and the search was then limited to books published after the year 2000 - with one exception of a book published in 1998 that was a partner to another book by the same author (pp. 75-76). The findings of this study revealed "themes and images across texts that together construct a narrative about adoption [with] troubling assumptions, but [that] also open the door to important

discussions about cultural and social identities, power and choice, and how adolescents are positioned and viewed” (p. 77). As adoption is just one of the many prevalent facets comprising family structure it is still “often unrecognized as an aspect of identity, yet it is significant in the lives of youth and their families” (p. 72).

Books are such a powerful tool to communicate and are a vital component of education and learning, and it is imperative that teachers and librarians understand the role literature plays in the formation of identity. It is through the use of books and stories that students can learn that there are many types of family structures that function and can be acceptable in society (Despain, 2012). Parsons et al. (2017) suggests that limiting a reader or viewer’s exposure to accurate and balanced portrayals of family structure may impact their understanding of their own lives and the world around them, which could create negative ramifications on how students view their families, as well as how they view others. It is only through exposure to these stories that educators can hope to develop an awareness of empathy and daily struggles and it is crucial that teachers and librarians take care to consider these portrayals when selecting reading materials (Goddard & Grant, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Prior studies revealed a need for analyzing portrayals of diverse family structures to identify themes present in the literature. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to ascertain the extent to which diverse family dynamics are represented within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award. This study evaluated how human families were portrayed within these recommended books, which were recommended by 3rd through 6th grade students.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative content analysis approach, which is one that enables researchers to understand social reality in a manner that involves both subjectivity and science (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 318). Additionally, unlike a quantitative approach, which “produces numbers that can be manipulated with various statistical methods. . . the qualitative approach usually produces descriptions or typologies. . . and pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of meanings of [a] phenomenon” (pp. 318-319). Specifically this study uses the *directed content analysis* (p. 319) research design that is well-suited for the current study because it started with categories from past studies and also had the potential for themes to emerge from the collected data.

Sample of Books

The selection of 15 books in this study were derived from the list of Iowa Children's Choice Award 2019-2020 nominees. The Iowa Children's Choice Award serves many purposes; most importantly, it encourages students to read more books, while also allowing them the

opportunity to express their voices yearly in what book is chosen to receive this prestigious award. The award committee, made up of librarians, used an initial list of books suggested by the 3rd - 6th grade students during the 2018-2019 school year and narrowed the list to these 20 nominees for the 2019-2020 reading list. As such, the list represented the literature preferences of 3rd through 6th graders in Iowa. Nominated books that did not meet the specified requirements of analysis pertaining to human family portrayal were eliminated for purposes of this study, thus paring the sample down from 20 to 15 qualifying books, which are included in Appendix A.

Procedures

Data Sources

The sample of books from Appendix A were read and evaluated using guidance in Appendices B and C. Appendix B included elements of diverse family structures that were adapted from prior studies and research by Randolph (2013), Despain (2012), and Goddard and Grant (2009).

Data Analysis

This study used a qualitative content analysis, which “is mainly inductive, grounding the examination of topics and themes, as well as inferences drawn from them” (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 19). Wildemuth suggests eight steps for the process, the first step of which involved preparing the data. All 15 books from the list were checked for quality and recommendations against two of H.W. Wilson’s core collection databases, Children’s and Middle and Junior High, showing that 12 of the titles also appear on Wilson’s core lists. The second step of the study utilized an individual theme as the beginning unit for analysis, which involved ascertaining the level of

representation of diverse family dynamics within the selected texts. The third step involved creating categories, which included the type of family unit, evidence of family function in the plot, and the impact of family relationships. The thematic analysis was extended to include whether or not these relationships were merely mentioned or if they played a crucial role within the plot. The categories and coding scheme involved finding evidence of types of family units and family function, and the impact of family relationships regarding the plot. The fourth and fifth steps involved reading the texts and focusing upon three areas: plot, function and impact, and evidence, which were recorded and coded in Appendices B and C. The sixth step involved rechecking the coding consistency, and the beginning sample was revisited using the same coding process to determine how family dynamics were portrayed, as well as the impact of the family relationship upon the plot, keeping in mind any new or emerging themes, which were also recorded. Step seven involved drawing conclusions from the data collected in the charts listed in Appendices B and C and described in Chapter 5. This data analysis allowed the researcher to determine to what degree diverse family units were portrayed in the texts, as well as the level of impact the parental involvement had on the plot, which assisted with providing a point of dialogue for teachers and librarians regarding the importance of providing relatable texts to students of various family backgrounds. The eighth and final step involved reporting the findings from the content analysis of the books read to perform this study.

Limitations

The sample of books was limited to one list of nominated books for a specific award from one state. There was only one researcher reading the books and coding. Thus, there was a possibility of bias resulting from personal and professional experiences.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This qualitative content analysis examined 15 qualifying books included on the nominations list for the Iowa Children's Choice book award. Out of the 15 books, 12 were also recognized through their inclusion in the *Wilson's Children's Core* and/or *Wilson's Middle and Junior High Core* databases for students in grades 3-8 (see Appendix A) and are indicated as such in the analysis.

The researcher read these nominated titles and utilized the book evaluations charts located in Appendices B and C to determine the level of diverse family portrayals, evidence of how human families are portrayed, as well as emerging themes. In response to the first research question regarding to what level of representation do diverse family dynamics exist within each text, the researcher utilized the "Type of Family Unit" chart located in Appendix B, which covers a vast variety of family situations including: one parent (mother-led or father-led), blended (stepmother or stepfather), same-sex parent, foster, adopted, and family member as the legal guardian. An additional category indicating parental death was also included to further identify family function, as all titles found themselves appearing in other family type categories. In response to the second research question regarding how human families are portrayed, the researcher used the "Evidence of Family Function in Plot and Impact of Family Relationships" table located in Appendix C to determine to what level family interactions impacted the plot of the story and provided textual evidence, quotes, and page numbers to convey the family's impact upon the plot, as well as identify emerging themes throughout the texts.

Summary of Family Portrayal in Each Book Analyzed

A very brief summary written by the researcher for each of the qualifying books is provided below to offer an insightful preview into the portrayal of family surrounding the characters and plot of each title.

A Boy Called Bat (Arnold, 2017)

Bixby Alexander Tam, or 'Bat,' as he is referred to by those close to him, is a compassionate, but ornery-when-it-comes-to-following-the-rules, third-grade boy, who is tasked with caring for an orphaned skunk by his single, and encouraging veterinarian mother. A bond quickly develops between Bat and his newly-found, furry friend, and he soon finds himself involved in a self-proclaimed campaign to care for this animal of tragic circumstance until it is strong enough to re-enter the wild.

Soar (Bauer, 2016)

Walter Lopper is a twelve-year-old boy with a lot of heart - ironically, this heart of his is not his own, as he endured a transplant when he was younger. Despite the physical hardships that this transplant has brought upon him, Walt's can-do attitude breathes life back into the realm of his own life that he is most passionate about: baseball. After moving to a very sports-enthusiastic, small town in Ohio, Walt is really able to spread his wings and soar as a coach, with the support of his single, adoptive father, who took him in when Walt's mother abandoned him.

A Whole New Ballgame (Bildner, 2015)

Fifth-graders Rip (Mason Irving) and Red (Blake Daniels) are best buddies who live and breathe basketball. While these boys are as different as can be in that Red suffers from autism,

but is a phenomenal free-thrower, and Rip does his best to meet the expectations of his single mother, who is the principal of the school, they work together to find ways to maneuver through the many challenges that prepubescent life presents to them. One challenge they aren't prepared for involves their new, zany teacher and coach, Mr. Acevedo, who is an out-of-the-box thinker, and pushes the boys past their boundaries of comfort both on the basketball court and in the classroom.

Walking with Miss Millie (Bundy, 2017)

Eleven-year-old Alice is absolutely gutted when she finds out that she, her mother, and her younger brother are moving from Columbus, Ohio, to Rainbow, Georgia, to care for her ailing grandmother. As she remains hopeful for her father's return to the family he has abandoned, Alice adjusts to the new ways of life the south has presented to her. Along the way, she meets Miss Millie, a kind and elderly African-American neighbor, and the two weave together the threads of a strong, unexpected, and heart-warming friendship that spans the generational gap.

All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook (Connor, 2016)

Perry T. Cook is an eleven-year-old boy with a rather diverse upbringing: he was born and raised inside of a correctional facility in a southwestern Nebraska town called Surprise. When the new and infuriatingly-ambitious District Attorney learns of Perry's situation, he thrusts him into an unwanted foster situation and creates issues in terms of his mother's impending release. Perry's perseverance provides him the tools necessary to survive the two months of anxiety in this new environment, while also inspiring him to find out the truth behind his mother's crime.

The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street (Currie, 2017)

Seventh-grader Tessa Woodward moves across the country from hot and humid Florida to the windy city of Chicago. While she is disappointed to leave her best friend behind, Tessa is not like typical teenage girls in that she does not resent her open-minded and free-spirited parents for uprooting her. Instead, she makes the best of the “peculiar” scenarios presented to her in their newly-established and haunted abode. With the help of her new friends, Andrew and Nina, she attempts to solve the decades-long mystery that has plagued this place on Shady Street.

Space Case (Gibbs, 2015)

Twelve-year-old Dashiell “Dash” Gibson certainly finds himself living up to his name, as he dashes headfirst into playing detective when a mysterious murder disrupts the life on the space base where he lives with his family. As Dash and his friends uncover clues to help discover the truth behind this heinous crime, he realizes important life lessons: the truth is multi-faceted and people aren’t always who they seem to be.

Moving Target (Gonzalez, 2015)

Eighth-grader Cassie Arroyo lives with her dad, a widowed, 45-year-old art historian, in Rome, Italy, where she soon grows restless. One afternoon, when a random bullet meant for her strikes her father, Cassie’s world is turned upside down. She soon discovers her life isn’t what she thought it was, and she struggles with coming to terms with her newly-discovered identity, while dodging assassins on her quest to learn the truth about herself. It truly does take a village when it comes to survival and it’s through her friendship with Asher that she’s able to answer the riddles and uncover the clues to seek the answers she desperately needs to save herself and those she loves.

Left Out (Green, 2016)

One of Landon Dorch's deepest and truest desires has been to be just like everyone else. He is deaf and suffers complications attributed to this disability, which impairs his ability to fully fit in with his seventh-grade peers, and has, in turn, caused him to always feel "left out." It isn't until Landon is discovered by football coaches due to his size that his life starts to shift in unexpected ways. While bullies and team politics hinder Landon's progress toward his dream of playing football, kindness and compassion creep their way in from unexpected places and help him battle back onto a more level playing field.

Restart (Korman, 2017)

Eighth-grader Chase Ambrose finds himself in a unique situation where he is able to "restart" his life, as he recovers from amnesia incurred from a fall off a rooftop. When he returns to school, he maneuvers his way through a sea of unfamiliarity and ultimately discovers more about the person he used to be. What he finds out about himself rattles him and now he must face the decision of either becoming the malevolent version of himself again that people expect, or daring to embrace and cultivate a version of himself that's far more benevolent.

The Bicycle Spy (McDonough, 2016)

Marcel Christophe is a twelve-year-old boy living in occupied France during the early 1940s. When he discovers his family's secret involvement in The Resistance, he finds himself wholeheartedly embracing the opportunity to stand against injustice and save the life of his new friend, Delphine Gillette, who is part of a Jewish family on the run. When she and her family are discovered and are placed in danger, Marcel and his family must work together to save them from the Nazis.

Upside-Down Magic (Mlynowski, 2015)

Elinor Boxwood Horace, or “Nory,” the fifth-grade daughter of headmaster Horace, is plagued by “wonky” magic, in that she’s unable to properly flux into the various forms of animals required of her to pass “the big test.” She finds herself failing on the big day and is sent to live with her aunt, and attends a special school for those who struggle with magic. There, she finds herself allied within a core group of four similar magical misfits and together they learn to embrace their peculiarities and discover the magic of true friendship.

The Thing About Leftovers (Payne, 2016)

Twelve-year-old Elizabeth “Fizzy” Russo is a kind, Southern girl who is cognizant of confidentiality, in that she keeps her emotions and the business of her family to herself. After her parents divorce, their new partners present new challenges for Fizzy in terms of meeting new expectations. She never feels at home around her nearly-perfect stepmother, or her mom’s overly neat and particular boyfriend. The situation serves to strengthen Fizzy’s bond with her amicable Aunt Liz, who shares her love of the culinary arts, providing the only place Fizzy really finds solace. Here, she is able to push past the feeling of being a “left-over,” and throws together the spices of life in order to create a better one for herself.

The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade (Sonneblick, 2017)

Life is not at all fair or easy for sixth-grader Maverick Falconer. He lost his father who was serving in Afghanistan and now he’s left being the caretaker of his alcoholic mother, who seems to attract abusers like a moth to a flame. Fortunately, Maverick can always rely upon his father’s sister, Catherine - or Aunt Cat - when he is in need of a responsible adult presence in his life, and while she serves as a hero of sorts for him, Maverick aspires to be one to his classmates.

He channels courage from the sheriff's star his father left him and goes on a mission to make his school a better place for everyone.

Finding Perfect (Swartz, 2016)

To twelve-year-old Molly Nathans, perfect means many things: the number four, the tip of a freshly sharpened No. 2 pencil; a fresh, new pad of crisp, white paper, and her strategically and perfectly arranged menagerie of glass animal figurines. Her world of perfection is shattered when her mother abandons her family in pursuit of her career, promising to return after a year. Molly soon realizes this is a pie crust promise: easily made, easily broken. In an effort to bring her mother home, she seeks to be the winner of the local poetry slam contest, as she believes this prestigious honor will draw her family back together. Molly soon learns that not all aspects of life can be controlled and she ultimately discovers that true perfection does not exist and life is messy and complicated.

Diverse Family Structure and Dynamics

There were eight different family structures identified in this study, as well as two categories that contributed to further identifying not only the impact of family structure upon the plot, but also the impact of emerging, personal character challenges. Of the 15 books analyzed, six of them (*A Boy Called Bat*, *A Whole New Ballgame*, *Walking with Miss Millie*, *Restart*, *The Thing About Leftovers*, *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*) displayed one-parent, mother-led families. Five titles (*The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook*, *Upside-Down Magic*, *Restart*, *The Thing About Leftovers*, *Moving Target*) depicted a combination of at least two or more types of family units. Traditional, two-parent households were present in four titles (*The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street*, *Space Case*, *Left Out*, *The*

Bicycle Spy). Parental deaths appeared in three titles (*Moving Target*, *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, *Upside-Down Magic*), which were all subsequently included in the list of combined family unit types and contributed to identifying additional protagonist challenges. One-parent, father-led families accounted for two titles, while there were six titles with mother-led families (*Upside-Down Magic*, *Finding Perfect*). Blended families consisting of a step-parent also made up identified family structures in two titles (*Restart*, *The Thing About Leftovers*). Family members acting as the protagonist’s guardian were represented in two titles (*The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*, *Upside-Down Magic*), and the same number depicted foster families (*All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook*, *Moving Target*). Only one title (*Soar*) displayed adoption and there was no representation at all of same-sex family units in any of the student-nominated Iowa Children’s Choice titles that were analyzed in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Type of Family Units Observed

Type of Family Unit	Number	Titles
One Parent Family: Mother-Led	6	<i>A Boy Called Bat</i> , <i>A Whole New Ballgame</i> , <i>Walking with Miss Millie</i> , <i>Restart</i> , <i>The Thing About Leftovers</i> , <i>The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade</i>
*Combination	5	<i>The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade</i> , <i>All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook</i> , <i>Upside-Down Magic</i> , <i>Restart</i> , <i>The Thing About Leftovers</i> , <i>Moving Target</i>
Two-Parent Household	4	<i>The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street</i> , <i>Space Case</i> , <i>Left Out</i> , <i>The Bicycle Spy</i>
*Parental Death	3	<i>Moving Target</i> , <i>The Secret Sheriff</i>

of Sixth Grade, Upside-Down Magic

One Parent Family: Father-Led	2	<i>Upside-Down Magic, Finding Perfect</i>
Blended (Stepfather/Stepmother)	2	<i>Restart, The Thing About Leftovers</i>
Family Member Acting as Guardian	2	<i>The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade, Upside-Down Magic</i>
Foster	2	<i>All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook, Moving Target</i>
Adopted	1	<i>Soar</i>
Same Sex	0	N/A

Note: bolded titles indicate a combination of family unit types and the asterisk denotes contribution to further identifying the impact of family upon the plot.

Emerging Themes

The second research question of this study asked how families are portrayed and addresses thematic trends occurring in the evidence of family structures throughout the 15 analyzed titles. The researcher used textual evidence and quotes from each of the novels that demonstrated at least one of three emergent themes, and Appendix C accounts for the specific pieces of evidence solidifying these observations. The three themes that emerged are explained below within the context of the books.

Personal Challenges Originating Within the Family Structure

Nine out of the fifteen titles contain emergent, thematic examples of personal challenges that originate within the family structure, whether as a result of a divorce or a separation from biological parents - whether it was intentional or due to some type of disaster. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that provided contextual evidence of the challenge(s) and the resulting extensive list of examples may be found in Appendix C.

In *Soar* (Bauer, 2016), Jeremiah Lopper is abandoned at birth by his mother, and whenever he feels discouraged, whether due to his heart condition or deficits he may internalize in other aspects of his life, which happens quite a bit throughout the story. He remembers the important lesson learned from Walt, his adoptive father, which is, “when someone decides not to give up on you, it’s proof positive that you better not give up on yourself” (p. 215). While his own mother may have perceived Jeremiah as a burden, which negatively impacted his self-esteem, the relationship he has with someone who is not flesh and blood provides him the confidence to face the personal challenges that continue coming his way.

Alice is an eleven-year-old girl in *Walking with Miss Millie* (Bundy, 2017) who is a recent transplant from Ohio and finds herself starting over in her new environment in Georgia, due to the combination of her father’s abandonment of the family and her grandmother’s illness. Every day, she must find the strength not to break down over it all and admits she “made it through talking to Mama about Grandma thinking Grandpa had just died without me crying. I made it through hearing the doctor say there’s not a dang thing he can do for Grandma without me crying. And the hardest of all - I even made it through hearing Mama cry last night when she thought I was asleep, without me crying” (p. 71). Alice must overcome these overwhelming

feelings stemming from these family tragedies. Thanks to her friendship with Miss Millie, she ultimately allows herself to trust again and is finally able to begin to heal.

Perry Cook, in *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2017), spends 11 years of his life living in a penitentiary, while his mother serves time for a crime that occurred before Perry was born. When the new District Attorney, Thomas VanLeer, discovers this unique living arrangement, he immediately whisks Perry away into a foster situation, effectively ripping him away from the only place he's ever known as home. On his quest to discover the truth behind his mother's incarceration, he is faced with both self-doubt and also bouts of what he refers to as wicked washes of homesickness. He goes on to say that "it's been like this the two whole weeks. I'm fine, and then suddenly there's an ache in my face, and I know the corners of my face are turning downward. My eyes start to tear. It takes me a few seconds to get rid of that" (p. 169). Ironically, the one place considered to be an institution of restraint and punishment is the very place to which Perry wishes he could return.

Cassie Arroyo is an eighth-grader who is blindsided by the revelation of a double life in *Moving Target* (Gonzalez, 2016). When presented with the news that the person she has always believed to be her father really isn't, she grows angry and responds with, "You think I'm adopted?" I threw aside the ridiculous notion. 'No, you're wrong. That's crazy. I've seen pictures of my mom pregnant with me and the two of them holding me as a baby. That chart is wrong'" (p. 243). This particular situation is loaded with personal challenges the protagonist must face, as she experiences difficulty accepting this new reality and begins to doubt everything she has ever known.

Twelve-year-old Elizabeth “Fizzy” Russo endures identity issues in the form of not feeling loved in *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2017). She spends the majority of the story feeling unwanted by both her mother and father, as they have divorced and started new families. She indicates her frustration by admitting that to herself that “ever since my parents’ divorce, I felt like I’d lost a really important grocery bag, the one with all the important ingredients - for my life” (p. 191). Using the analogy of cooking, which is her favorite hobby, Fizzy uses the terminology of substitutions being made when she thinks about her “new house, new neighborhood, new school, new friends, new stepmother, new stepfather, and finally a new brother! These are all highly noticeable changes in the recipe of [her] life, which means they aren't good substitutions, because good substitutions aren't noticeable. But these were so noticeable” (p. 191). Despite being handed the ingredients for what she feels to be someone else’s life, she ultimately knows she must keep on going. And in order to fill the gaping hole caused by these insecure feelings about all of the changes she must face, she finds solace in a cooking contest. Yet, even then, it isn’t until she is able to communicate her feelings to her parents that she’s able to overcome her feelings of inadequacy.

In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonneblick, 2019), Maverick Falconer endures several personal hardships as a result of his drunken mother and ensuing string of abusive boyfriends. He believes “if [his] father had been alive, [he] wouldn’t have ever had to worry about [his] mom’s long string of losers. Or [his] mom’s drinking. Or [their] money issues. Or anything” (p.7). Thankfully, he has his aunt to rely on, and it is his relationship with her, and the stable environment she creates for him, that helps him make it through.

In *Finding Perfect* (Swartz, 2016), Molly Nathans, who is twelve years old, endures feelings of abandonment by her mother, who bails on the family to pursue a job opportunity in Toronto that should supposedly only last “for a year;” however, signs point to her never returning. Molly communicates that her “[Dad] doesn’t need to know that we miss Mom’s laugh, her bad sense of direction, her lasagna. It’s already too hard for him. It’s been three weeks since she drove out of the driveway in the back of a cab and he still can’t sleep at night” (p.15). Between coping with her own feelings of loss, Molly must also attempt to manage the feelings experienced by the rest of her family, including her younger brother, due to her mother’s extended absence and its impact on them all.

In *Restart* (Korman, 2017), eighth grader Chase desperately wants his memory back after an accidental fall from a roof, but he doesn’t want to sacrifice the new version of himself that he feels is better; however, this is also slipping away from him. He reflects upon the fact that his, “Dad says the old Chase is back. I wanted that once. But right now the new Chase is the life I’d rather have. And I’ve lost that too” (p. 178). As he attempts to piece his emerging memories back together, he finds himself struggling with both his new and old identity, and can never seem to stay one step ahead of - nor dodge - both the self-doubt and guilt that constantly weigh on him.

Finally, in *Upside-Down Magic* (Mlynowski, 2015), Nory is sent off to live with her aunt when her widower and neglectful father is disappointed with the results of her most recent magic test. As she adjusts to her new living arrangement, she is confronted by questions that add to her feelings of inadequacy and feeling different. When asked about her heritage, it opens up another sadness spiral for her. She responds with “‘My dad’s black. My mom was white.’

‘Do you want to tell me about your mom?’

‘No, thanks,’ she said to Elliott. What could she tell him? What did she really know? She didn’t remember much. But he wouldn’t stop.

‘Is she dead? I heard she was dead.’

‘Sounds like you already know.’

‘Want to tell me about your dad?’

‘No.’ ‘Want to tell me about *anything*?’

Sheesh. Nory was at a loss. She wasn’t sure she wanted to open up yet. Or ever” (p. 51).

Nory’s magical predicament has left her guarded and suspicious of the intentions of others, as she copes with feelings of failure toward and abandonment by her family.

Personal Challenges Originating Outside of the Family Structure

A second theme emerged throughout the researchers’ reading of the texts. Five out of the fifteen titles contained examples of personal challenges faced by the protagonist that originated in other aspects of their lives, outside of family structure - specifically health conditions. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that provided contextual evidence of these challenge(s) and an extensive list may also be found in Appendix C.

Bixby Alexander Tam (Bat) is a third-grader with autism in *A Boy Called Bat* (Arnold, 2017) who struggles with avoidance and adjusting to his custody arrangement and school. When an opportunity to foster a skunk is presented to him, he wants to spend every free moment he has with his new “pet” instead of tending to his other responsibilities. His mother, who is his primary caretaker in this arrangement, lays the expectation that they can help raise the skunk as long as Bat continues keeping up with everything else. She reiterates to Bat that he must attend to “school and Dad’s and homework and everything. If the kit is too big of a distraction, I can get

Laurence to take him home in the evenings” (p. 37). He becomes so fixated on his new pet that he loses the drive to engage in the necessary and everyday responsibilities of his life, despite his mother’s attempts to help him identify and prevent this unhealthy spiral.

Molly Nathans from *Finding Perfect* (Swartz, 2016) faces inhibiting challenges due to suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. It is not until she makes the realization that she must ask for help that she’s able to find a way to get a proper handle on it. After taking a deep breath and allowing herself even just five minutes to brush her teeth, it takes great concentration for her to put the toothpaste on the brush just right. She tells herself to “*get it straight and you won’t have to do it again*. I slowly squirt the paste along the bristles. Nice and perfectly aligned. My stomach grumbles. My hand starts to shake. *No. Concentrate. Slosh!* The toothpaste falls off my toothbrush and into the sink. *Again*. Four times and I finally get my flawless line. *Exhale*. When I get to my room, I stand in the middle and stare at my perfectly-aligned glass menagerie, my wrinkle-free bed, my neatly folded clothing, and realize that I can't keep doing this. Things are getting worse. I’m losing control. I have to tell someone. Today” (pp. 115-116). The greater the levels of stress become for Molly, the harder it is for her to function on an everyday basis, which causes her to need the support of her family more than ever.

In *Soar* (Bauer, 2016), Landon Dorch’s heart condition prevents him from participating in baseball at the level he desires to, which causes him feelings of helplessness and frustration, as well as presents risks to his health. When he explains an incident of overexertion in a forbidden ball game, he describes how he starts to run after the ball and becomes sick. He relates that he “missed it. It [the ball] rolled all the way back to this tree and I ran to get it, then I threw it to third base. And my heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest. I got sick.’ I’m beginning

to feel that way now. ‘I shouldn’t have played, I know! I just wanted to be out there! I wanted to run!’” (p. 81). Landon’s heart is and always will be in the game, but the dangers of exerting himself are a far greater risk to him, yet he refuses to allow his condition to alter his love of the game.

Chase Ambrose from *Restart* (Korman, 2017) suffers from amnesia after a fall from a rooftop, and he doesn’t remember anything - his family, friends, or even the accident itself. Chase struggles with self-doubt and anger, which causes him to lash out on those who love him. He goes so far as to ambush his mother when she returns from work by blowing up at her, “‘Where do you get off?’ She looks totally bewildered. I forge on. ‘You were so devastated when I got amnesia - but not too devastated to pass up a little editing job on my life!’

‘Editing job?’

‘Don’t you think I have the right to know that Aaron, Bear, and I were arrested and sentenced to community service?’

She doesn’t answer right away. She sets down her bag, shrugs out of her jacket, walks to the living room, and collapses wearily into a chair. At last, she says, “‘You’ve just been through an awful ordeal. How can it help your recovery if I tell you a lot of things that are just going to upset you?’

‘Things?’ I echo. ‘You mean there are more? How many other nice little stories have you been keeping away from me?’

She seems genuinely sad. ‘I’ll love you and support you through the end of the world - you know that. I’ve always seen the good in you, Chase, and I believe that’s the person you really are, deep down. But, you’ve had your moments’” (p. 41).

Not only is Chase recovering from this debilitating fall, but he is also attempting to merge two polar opposite and battling identities, which leaves him lost, confused, angry, and distant.

Finally, Nory in *Upside-Down Magic* (Mlynowski, 2015) battles with the inability to control her emotions which manifests in her being unable to manage magic in general. This difficulty results in her father shipping her off to live with her aunt and enrolling her in a school of “Magical Misfits.” However, it isn’t until she realizes that controlling her emotions is only part of the equation for her to overcome her challenges. This discovery is made when she is told that, “part of developing [her] Upside-Down Magic is getting in touch with [her] emotions. [She will] want to understand [her] feelings so [she doesn’t] - well, you know, turn into a bitten. Or a rock. Or cause a rainstorm when [she doesn’t] want one. UDM is not about controlling [her] feelings, it’s about understanding them” (p. 107). It is understandable that Nory might struggle in this area, as she lost her mother, and her father is an emotionally absent presence from whom she is continually seeking approval.

Gender Trends Within the Single Parental/Guardian Roles

A third theme that emerged during the analysis involved gender trends for single parents. Four out of the fifteen titles contained examples of strong, single, independent, biological parents, with three out of these four individuals being female. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that provided contextual evidence to demonstrate the strength of each character and the extensive list of these may also be found in Appendix C.

In *A Boy Called Bat* (Arnold, 2017), Dr. Bixby not only manages a veterinary business, but she's a single mom to two children - one being her son, Bat, who has autism. In an effort to instill responsibility in her children, she brings home an orphaned kit, and Bat becomes its primary caretaker. Despite her marital status, she manages to garner respect toward her ex-husband by diverting responsibility for the pet away from him and into their hands by telling her children that "the baby skunk needs to be with me . . . I'll take him to work and the vet techs can watch him while I'm with patients. Besides, I don't think your dad is a fan of skunks" (p.36). Her commitment to both her family and profession is evident by how she models responsibility to her children.

Lesley Irving, Mason's mother in *A Whole New Ballgame* (Bildner, 2016), is a middle school principal at River West Middle School, and is presumably raising Mason on her own, as there is no mention whatsoever of a father figure anywhere in the text. Because it's just the two of them, she takes on both parental roles and holds Mason to high standards. He often complains that "Mom's always telling me to put clothes on around the house. Just like she's always telling me to pick up the clothes from my bedroom floor. Just like she's always telling me not to dribble in the kitchen. Just like..." (pp. 116-117). It's a tough enough job being a middle school principal, but when raising an adolescent boy on one's own is thrown into the mix, life is surely never dull. Yet, Lesley Irving maintains a solid foundation at home by reinforcing responsibility.

While Perry Cook's mother, Jessica, in *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* (Connor, 2017) may be more of a nontraditional mother figure in that she is incarcerated throughout the majority of the story, she still possesses great strength of character despite her situation. When she receives word from Warden Daughterty that the new DA wants to swoop in

and cause issues with Perry's living arrangement at Blue River, she must remain calm, cool, and collected for the sake of her son. She reminds herself to "*Shake.It.Off. Eat supper with your beautiful kid.* Jessica [then] ran her hand along Perry's back when he sat beside her. He was wearing one of the new back-to-school shirts she'd sent Maya Rubin to buy. It'd taken the better part of two prison paychecks, but oh, nice knit, nice fit. At least something was in place" (pp. 36-37). With her limited means, Jessica does the best she can to provide for her son until she is able to do so without the confines of her jail cell.

Finding Perfect (Swartz, 2016) contains a father figure who adjusts to estrangement from his wife and is tasked with juggling a household of three children and his job all on his own. When his daughter, Molly, reveals she is struggling with signs of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, he does all he can to find her help. This is where his strength and compassion shine through, as he tells her in "a soft but firm voice, "Mol, you need to get up now and come with me . . . I love you, but I can't do this alone. We need to do this together.' Pause. 'Please. We have to go" (p. 256). While Molly's ability to manage her stress unravels, her father masterfully attempts to weave everything back together through his resolve to help her.

Another three out of the fifteen titles that displayed single parents portrayed weak, single, biological parents, with two out of the three being male. The researcher looked for examples in the texts that provided contextual evidence for determinations about the character of each character and the extensive list may also be found in Appendix C.

In *Restart* (Korman, 2017), Chase Ambrose's arrogant, divorced father causes rifts between Chase's mother and whom? due to the disrespectful tone he demonstrates toward her throughout the story.

When Chase returns home after his accident, his “father seem[ed] to be settling in for a long visit, but [his mom was] having none of that. ‘He has to rest, Frank,’ she says.

‘Doctor’s orders.’

‘What - he’s chopping wood? He’s resting.’

‘Alone,’ she insists. ‘In his room. Where it’s quiet.’

He sighs. ‘Ants at a picnic, that’s what you are.’ He hugs me again, squeezing less tightly this time. ‘Great to have you back, Champ. Sorry it couldn’t be more of a celebration, but Nurse Killjoy over there -.’ He inclines his head in my mother’s direction” (p. 10).

When these kinds of remarks are made in the presence of children, it does not provide a solid or respectful model for how to communicate well with either a current or former partner or spouse.

Nory’s neglectful, aloof, and widower father in *Upside-Down Magic* (Mlynowski, 2015) ships his daughter off to live with her aunt almost immediately after receiving the results of her failed magic test. While it could be interpreted that he holds her best interests at heart by sending her to an alternative school, his communication, or lack thereof, combined with the disconnection Nory feels from her siblings due to his instruction to withhold contact demonstrates deficits as a father.

One instance depicts Nory and Aunt Margo traveling home when “Aunt Margo’s cell rang. She looked at it, raised her eyebrows, and handed it to Nory. Nory’s heart jumped.

She put the phone to her ear. ‘Hello?’

‘Nory!’ We’re on speakerphone!’ Dalia said.

‘Who's on speakerphone?’ Nory asked.

‘Me and Hawthorn.’

‘What about Father?’

‘At a meeting,’ Dalia said. ‘You know Father. Always working, even on the weekends.’

‘Hi, Nory,’ Hawthorn said. ‘Sorry it’s taken us so long to call you back. Father wanted to let you get settled first. But after Aunt Margo’s message, we decided we should sneak a call.’

Well it’s about time, Nory almost said. But she didn’t. What if they hung up?’ (p. 117).

It seems as if it’s easier for Nory’s father to pass her along to someone else to “solve the problem” than it is to offer support and guidance to help her move past this speed bump in her growth as a magic practitioner.

In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonneblich, 2019), Maverick’s mother struggles with alcoholism and falling victim to emotional and physical abuse from those with whom she engages in romantic relationships. It isn’t until her drinking finally reaches the point of endangering both her and Maverick that action is taken. Specifically, it’s when Maverick admits that his mom “got in a big fight with Johnny, and I dared him to hit me. So my mom kicked him out. And I thought everything was great for a little while. But then she said this called for a celebration. And she started drinking. And drinking. And then she stumbled into her bedroom and passed out. I checked in on her in the morning, and everything looked fine. She didn’t have any cigarettes or matches near her or anything. . .” (p. 176). This unhealthy home environment

for the two of them is created through his mother's weakness for alcohol and penchant for abusive relationships.

Three out of the fifteen titles contained a strong, single, and supportive family member/guardian who provided a strong sense of stability for the protagonist, among other positive attributes. Interestingly, all three of these characters were aunts. The researcher identified the following examples within the texts of the strength of character of these women and an extensive list may be found in Appendix C.

In *Upside-Down Magic* (Mlynowski, 2015), Nory is sent away to live with her single aunt, Margo, who adjusts to hosting her niece. Despite her poverty, Margo strives to offer Nory the best of what she is able. For example, when "Aunt Margo got home from work just before dinnertime, 'Let's call for pizza,' she said to Nory. 'Should we get olives on it? Or pepperoni?'

Nory was surprised. . . . 'Pizza again?' she said.

'Do you eat meat?' asked Margo, looking at the takeout menu. 'I realized I don't even know if you eat meat.' She opened the fridge. It had some fruit and milk in it, but nothing that could be made into dinner. 'Yes, pizza again. Definitely. The only other place that delivers is the fancy Japanese place and it's - well, it's not in the budget'" (pp. 99-100).

While Nory's aunt is not accustomed to providing for the needs of children, she certainly does her best to try to make her niece as comfortable as she can within the constraints of her limited finances.

In *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* (Sonneblick, 2019), Maverick's Aunt Cat comes to his rescue and offers him a stable home when his mom breaks down and is sent off to rehab. Just

before this occurs, though, his mother trashes their shared apartment and Aunt Cat tells her nephew, “Mav, listen. I grew up like this. So did your father. I know what it does to a child. I want you to know that if things get too rough here, you will always have a home with me. Do you understand?”” (pp. 123-124). Aunt Cat is a solid, supportive, and protective presence in Maverick’s life and offers assistance when he is in need of guidance.

Fizzy, in *The Thing About Leftovers* (Payne, 2017), is fortunate to have a strong and committed role model in her Aunt Liz. When she comes to her aunt with problems at school, Aunt Liz says, “Fizzy, sometimes it’s very helpful to discuss family and feelings. Believe me, people do it every day” and when Fizzy acknowledges that she does have a confidante in Aunt Liz, she responds with, “You do. Always. Please remember that, Fizzy. But if you ever want to talk things over with your guidance counselor, I think that’s okay, too” (p. 24). Her aunt offers herself as an ear, but also understands and expresses that she will not be offended if Fizzy chooses not to confide in her. Her focus is on the fact that Fizzy communicates with someone she trusts, whomever that may be.

Three out of the fifteen titles contained strong, single, and supportive non-biological caregivers, with two out of the three being male, as well as also being legally bound to the protagonist. The researcher found examples within the texts that demonstrate these supportive relationships between characters and the extensive list may be found in Appendix C.

In *Walking with Miss Millie* (Bundy, 2017), Alice finds strength, support, and friendship in the most unexpected place: with her grandmother’s elderly neighbor, Miss Millie, as they walk her dog, Clarence. As time passes and Alice grows more trusting of her newly-found friendship, it’s the comforting words from Miss Millie that provide her with confidence, as she’s told,

“You're a rainbow in a sometimes dark world. Keep shining, my Alice-girl. Keep shining” (p. 185). Miss Millie is a solid and compassionate role model who offers Alice unconditional support, which helps her maneuver through her many struggles.

In *Moving Target* (Gonzalez, 2016), Cassie's (soon-to-be-discovered-foster-father) derives great comfort and strength from the regular and inspirational advice originating from her mother, relayed to her by him, as she faces dilemmas that necessitate courage. She is reminded specifically of these wise words when she reflects upon a conversation that conveys that “*Choices determine destiny.*” It was similar to something my dad used to tell me when I was little. He'd remind me of how my mother would always say that the beauty of life was its uncertainty. How could you choose your own future and nothing was preordained. It had never been more true. I had to choose to be brave” (p. 38). Cassie's unique situation of growing up without a mother, as well as with a foster father she is recently made aware of, further serves to strengthen her, as she processes these words of wisdom along with the many other discoveries she is making.

In *Soar* (Bauer, 2016), Walt Lopper, Jeremiah's adoptive father, is nothing but supportive throughout the novel, despite parenthood essentially being thrust upon him from the very start. He's a natural when it comes to nurturing Jeremiah - so much so that Jeremiah often reflects upon Walt's unwavering support and muses that, “It's interesting what happens when people get encouraged. Walt taught me that when someone decides not to give up on you, it's proof positive that you better not give up on yourself” (p. 215). Jeremiah derives much of his strength and positivity from Walt, who always offers him unconditional love and support, no matter the situation.

The emerging themes discovered within these texts support the concept that not all home lives are the same, as they also would not be for young readers. Additionally, individuals may gather strength from many different sources, whether it be a single parent, another family member, or an adult role model, to overcome personal challenges these varying situations may either cause or contribute to. A common phrase, which has morphed into many different variations over time, conveys that those who some consider family are individuals one chooses to include in his or her life of their own volition. This proves true for many home lives within these selected texts, as the traditional family unit is not as prevalent as one-parent or combination situations in this sampling, opening up opportunities for other family members and/or mentor figures to step up and offer support to the protagonists.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout their daily lives, students continuously make connections between themselves and their world, which aids in constructing meaning, strengthening understanding, and facilitating empathy toward others. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis is to ascertain the level of representation regarding diverse family dynamics within books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award. This study addressed the following questions: What is the level of representation regarding diverse family dynamics in books nominated by students for consideration of the 2019-2020 Iowa Children's Choice Award book award, and how are human families portrayed? All fifteen novels containing human families were analyzed using a chart developed and adapted from studies by Despain, 2012; Goddard & Grant, 2009; and Randolph, 2013, which focused on first identifying what type of family unit was present in each novel, and then to what extent these family relationships are portrayed. This study utilized qualitative content analysis to identify the type of family unit portrayed in each text resulting in the discovery of emergent themes pertaining to personal challenges originating within the family structure, personal challenges originating outside of the family structure, and gender trends of single parental figures within the text. The researcher concluded that (1) given the source of this sampling of books, an adequate amount of diverse family units were demonstrated, and (2) the majority of strong, supportive, and independent adult figures within these family units were female.

Conclusions

The following conclusions provide key overarching concepts based on the findings of this study. While there is a reasonable amount of diversity in terms of personal challenges unrelated to the structure of families described in the literature for children (i.e. dealing with hearing impairment, autism, and OCD), there is a clear lack of adoptive, foster, and same-sex marriage family unit representation. With only two titles highlighting lives in foster care, one title displaying an adoptive situation, and no representation at all of same-sex families, it is clear that authors must do more to compose literature that represents these familial situations and librarians must be vigilant in purchasing and recommending these titles. The inclusion of these family unit types in children's literature is crucial so that young readers may either see themselves in what they are reading, much like a mirror reflecting their lives, or see through a window or lens allowing them to peek into the world of others to facilitate empathy and understanding of others (Bishop, 1990). A second conclusion that may be drawn from this study is that an overwhelming majority of strong, supportive, and independent adult figures represented in the books are female, which indicates a larger number of weaker, male characters. This tendency may affect a young, male reader's ability to connect with a text, if the majority of male figures within books is presented as weak or flawed, creating a disconnect and lack of interest.

Recommendations

Throughout this study, the intent of this researcher was to determine to what degree diverse family units are represented in books selected by students as recommendations for their peers. While this study has made it clearly evident that no two families are alike and that families "may encompass individuals of different races, countries of origin, genders, sexual orientations,

ages, abilities and disabilities, employment statuses, marital statuses, religious affiliations, as well as biological and non-biological relationships” (Waters, 2017, p. 127), one thing remains certain. Children must see, hear, and read positive aspects about their identity group (i.e. a family group defined differently as single parent, foster families, etc.) in order to develop self esteem, and one of the best ways educators and librarians can do this is by offering them more authentic experiences through literature (Morgan, 2009; Morgan & Forest, 2012). As such, it is the role of the librarian to provide access to these books that are desired and recommended by students, while not solely relying on these titles to provide diversity amid the shelves. While it’s certainly acceptable to elicit requests from students as to what their book preferences might be, it’s also imperative to make a concerted effort to populate the shelves with literature that offers its readers more opportunities for diversity, which includes seeking titles that represent the underserved categories described in this study.

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APPENDIX A

15 BOOKS ANALYZED: PRESENCE IN THE H.W. WILSON CORE COLLECTIONS

Title & Author	Title is present in the H.W. Wilson's <i>Children's Core Collection</i>	Title is present in the H.W. Wilson's <i>Middle and Junior High School Core Collection</i>
<i>A Boy Called Bat</i> Elana Arnold	YES	NO
<i>Soar</i> Joan Bauer	YES	YES
<i>A Whole New Ballgame</i> Phil Bildner	NO	NO
<i>Walking With Miss Millie</i> Tamara Bundy	NO	NO
<i>All Rise for the Honorable Perry T Cook</i> Leslie Connor	YES	YES
<i>The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street</i> Lindsay Currie	YES	NO
<i>Space Case</i> Stuart Gibbs	YES	YES
<i>Moving Target</i> Christina Diaz Gonzalez	YES	NO
<i>Left Out</i> Tim Green	NO	NO
<i>Restart</i> Gordan Korman	NO	YES
<i>The Mysterious Moonstone</i> Eric Luper	NO	NO
<i>The Bicycle Spy</i> Yona Zeldis McDonough	YES	NO

<i>Upside-Down Magic</i> Sarah Mlynowski	YES	NO
<i>The Thing About Leftovers</i> C.C. Payne	YES	NO
<i>The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade</i> Jordan Sonneblick	YES	NO
<i>Finding Perfect</i> Ely Swartz	YES	NO

APPENDIX B

TYPE OF FAMILY UNIT

(Adapted from Goddard & Grant, 2009; Randolph, 2013)

Title of Book	Two parents	One parent Mother-led (ML) Father-led (FL)	Parental Death	Blended family (stepmother or stepfather)	Same sex parents	Foster	Adopted	Family member serving as guardian
1. Elana Arnold - <i>A Boy Called Bat</i> (2017)		Divorced - ML Mother is a focal character who receives regular interaction						
2. Joan Bauer - <i>Soar</i> (2016)							Abandoned by mother - adopted by Walt Lopper (p.3) who is a focal character who receives regular interaction	
3. Phil Bildner - <i>A Whole New Ballgame</i> (2016)		ML - No mention of divorce or death of father - not a prevalent character	Unclear					
4. Tamara Bundy - <i>Walking</i>		Separated - ML Mother is a						

<i>With Miss Millie</i> (2017)		focal character who receives regular interaction						
5. Leslie Connor - <i>All Rise for the Honorable Perry T Cook</i> (2017)		Initially begins with <u>one-parent/ML</u> - she is incarcerated - Flip is father - never married				Shifts to <u>foster situation</u> with the new DA: Thomas Vanleer		
6. Lindsay Currie - <i>The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street</i> (2017)	<u>Two parents</u> are supportive, but not overly major contributors to the plot.							
7. Stuart Gibbs - <i>Space Case</i> (2014)	<u>Two parents</u> receive mention, but are not overly focal characters							
8. Christina Diaz Gonzolez - <i>Moving Target</i> (2016)			Mother dies			<u>Foster</u> - revealed that protagonist was not		

						living with real father - impactful character ; however, there is not a lot of interaction		
9. Tim Green - <i>Left Out</i> (2017)	Two parents - protagonist has stronger relationship with dad							
10. Gordon Korman - <i>Restart</i> (2017)		Divorced - ML - protagonist lives with mother		Father remarries				
11. Yona Zeldis McDonough - <i>The Bicycle Spy</i> (2016)	Two parents are focal characters who receive regular interaction							
12. Sarah Mlynowski		Widower - FL father is often	Mother dies					Protagonist

- <i>Upside-Down Magic</i> (2015)		referenced, but not a prevalent presence						goes to live with aunt
13. C.C. Payne - <i>The Thing About Leftovers</i> (2017)		Divorced - ML - protagonist lives with mother and boyfriend and visits father and stepmother		Mother remarries				
14. Jordan Sonneblick - <i>The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade</i> (2019)		Widowed - ML - Mother is relatively impactful to protagonist and receives intermediate interaction	Father dies					
15. Ely Swartz - <i>Finding Perfect</i> (2016)		Separated - FL , mother lives in Toronto, father is not a prevalent character						

APPENDIX C

EVIDENCE OF FAMILY FUNCTION IN PLOT AND IMPACT OF FAMILY
RELATIONSHIPS (Adapted from Despain, 2012)

<p>Author, Title, Publication Date and Coding</p>	<p>Coding and Evidence</p>
<p>1. Elana Arnold - <i>A Boy Called Bat</i> (2017)</p>	<p>1. The following quotation demonstrates Bat’s mom, Dr. Tam’s, compassion when it comes to serving the animals she tends to, which connects with the aspect of responsibility she wishes to instill into her children by offering this opportunity to foster an orphaned skunk: “There’s a wild animal rescue center what we can give him to in about a month, but they’re too busy to take him just yet. So we can help him get bigger and stronger before we hand him over to the experts. They’ll raise him until he’s ready to be released into the ile, when he’s about five months old” (p.27).</p> <p>2. The following quotation demonstrates Dr. Tam’s consideration of her ex-husband’s preferences: “The baby skunk needs to be with me . . . I’ll take him to work and the vet techs can watch him while I’m with patients. Besides, I don’t think your dad is a fan of skunks” (p.36).</p> <p>3. The following quotation demonstrates Dr. Tam’s desire to work together a family toward a common goal, while also maintaining reasonable expectations: “We can help raise the kit this month as a family , as long as you keep doing the regular stuff, too. School and Dad’s and homework and everything. If the kit is too big of a distraction, I can get Laurence to take him home in the evenings” (p. 37).</p> <p>4. The following quotation demonstrates Dr. Tam’s willingness to compromise, while also enlisting assistance and encouraging responsibility from her children: “ I’ll tell you what, little Bat. . . Thor has to sleep in his enclosure. And I’m going to take care of him during the night. But you can be in charge of his daytime feedings when we are home. And tomorrow</p>

	<p>after school, instead of staying home with Janie, how about you come by the clinic? I'm going to weigh and measure Thor to make sure he's getting enough to eat and you can help" (pp. 89-90).</p>
<p>2. Joan Bauer - <i>Soar</i> (2016)</p>	<p>1. This passage depicts Walt, Jeremiah's adoptive father, as a caring and supportive figure: "I look at Walt, who sat with me every day I was in the hospital, who never once made me feel like I wasn't his kid or was any kind of disappointment or a drain on his life" (p.8).</p> <p>2. The following quotation demonstrates Jeremiah's perception of the unwavering support and protection Walt offers him: "Walt and I changed places on the pew. He's like that, my dad, always protecting me" (p. 91).</p> <p>3. This observation by the protagonist demonstrates the source of the support he receives from Walt: "It's interesting what happens when people get encouraged. Walt taught me that when someone decides not to give up on you, it's proof positive that you better not give up on yourself" (p. 215).</p> <p>4. This quote demonstrates the strain he experiences when he physically exerts himself: "'I was playing baseball. These kids asked if I could play in the outfield. They said no one in the league was good enough to hit out there, so I was standing - I swear! Just trying to keep my head in the game, and this big kid cracks one and it's coming to me, but actually it's over my head, and I start running to catch it. I missed it. It rolled all the way back to this tree and I ran to get it, then I threw it to third base. And my heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest. I got sick.' I'm beginning to feel that way now. 'I shouldn't have played, I know! I just wanted to be out there! I wanted to run!'" (p.81).</p>
<p>3. Phil Bildner - <i>A Whole New Ballgame</i> (2016)</p>	<p>1. The following quotation demonstrates Lesley's expectations regarding reciprocity with responsibility: "Work a little harder. . . I'm not entertaining the</p>

	<p>thought of a dog around here until you learn to pick up after yourself” (p.48).</p> <p>2. The following quotation demonstrates Lesley’s supportive nature in regards to Mason’s friend: “Red, you may not be playing in games, but I know you. I’m sure you’re contributing. That’s worth coming to see” (p.104).</p> <p>3. The following quotation demonstrates Lesley’s standards in regards to Mason’s expected responsibilities: “Mom’s always telling me to put clothes on around the house. Just like she’s always telling me to pick up the clothes from my bedroom floor. Just like she’s always telling me not to dribble in the kitchen. Just like...” (pp. 116-117).</p> <p>4. The following quotation is an example of Lesley’s interactions with Mason in terms of dispensing advice: “Honey, you help bring out the best in Red. Help bring out the best in Avery. . . That’s just my two cents. Take it or leave it” (p.120).</p>
<p>4. Tamara Bundy - <i>Walking With Miss Millie</i> (2017)</p>	<p>1. This quote demonstrates the devastation felt by Alice due to her father’s absence from the family: “I remembered Daddy saying that the only good day in Rainbow, Georgia, is the day you leave. I used to laugh real hard when he said stuff like that. Then Daddy left us - even though we weren’t even living in Rainbow - and I didn’t think that joke was funny anymore” (pp. 1-2).</p> <p>2. This quotation illustrates the complications brought onto the family due to Alice’s grandmother’s condition and why they moved: “When Grandma came to visit us last Easter, she got lost. She was driving to Columbus the same way she always did for every holiday. But this year she called from some diner way out in Pennsylvania. She shouldn’t even have been in Pennsylvania. Even I knew that. I thought it was funny, but I remember Mama didn’t laugh. She had this look on her face like a diner in Pennsylvania was the absolute worst place Grandma</p>

	<p>could ever end up. . . and I didn't think anything else about it. Till Mama called the family meeting. Mama told us Grandma's memory was getting worse and it wasn't a good idea for her to live by herself anymore" (pp. 3-4).</p> <p>3. This quotation further demonstrates the anger felt by Alice due to her father's absence: "I don't like the fact Daddy has been gone that long. And I like it less when I hear Mama talking about him to her friends when she doesn't know I'm listening. But I like it least of all when a lady who has no idea who my daddy is says <i>shame on him</i>" (p.46).</p> <p>4. This quote illustrates how tumultuous it is for Alice and her family to care for her grandmother: "Everything okay at your grammy's house?' Miss Millie asked. 'I guess.' I tried to sound happy, but I think she could hear the sad sticking to my voice like my hair was already sticking to my neck. The day before, I made it through talking to Mama about Grandma thinking Grandpa had just died without me crying. I made it through hearing the doctor say there's not a dang thing he can do for Grandma without me crying. And the hardest of all - I even made it through hearing Mama cry last night when she thought I was asleep, without me crying" (p. 71).</p>
<p>5. Leslie Connor - <i>All Rise for the Honorable Perry T Cook</i> (2017)</p>	<p>1. This quotation demonstrates Jessica's strength of character when she receives word from Warden Daughterty that the new DA wants to swoop in and cause issues with Perry's living arrangement at the prison; she must remain calm, cool, and collected for the sake of her son. She reminds herself to "<i>Shake.It.Off. Eat supper with your beautiful kid.</i> Jessica [then] ran her hand along Perry's back when he sat beside her. He was wearing one of the new back-to-school shirts she'd sent Maya Rubin to buy. It'd taken the better part of two prison paychecks, but oh, nice knit, nice fit. At least something was in place" (pp. 36-37).</p>

	<p>2. This quotation recognizes the oddity of Perry living in a prison: ““You know that it’s always been a little unusual that you live at Blue River. . . We’ve been so lucky for that, Perry. But now...there’s someone making trouble over it” (p. 49).</p> <p>3. This quotation illustrates the difficulty and complexity of the living situation: “ We aren’t going to like this. But we will be fine. We are a family. We are a team. We are together even when we cannot see each other. . . None of this seems real. Something will happen. A call will come. An order will arrive. An indestructible dome will drop over the Blue River campus to keep me in and keep the thing that is coming to get me out” (p.51).</p> <p>3. This quotation illustrates Perry’s devastation of being separated from his mother and the prison: “Here comes a wicked wash of homesickness. It’s been like this the two whole weeks. I’m fine, and then suddenly there’s an ache in my face, and I know the corners of my face are turning downward. My eyes start to tear. It takes me a few seconds to get rid of that” (p. 169).</p> <p>4. This quotation illustrates Perry’s heartache in regards to his mother’s situation: “How can I not look back when the truth might change history? . . . <i>We were just kidding you, Perry. Just kidding that your mom is a convict! We were just kidding about your whole life! That.</i> That’s what feels so bad. My eyes burn. The fields begin to blue into stripes and patches. Then huge sobs come up. I keep them silent, force them back, and it makes my jaw ache. I slide down into my jacket until only my eyes stick out of my collar. I do not want Mr. VanLeer to hear me choking. I have to get it together before we get back to Rising City” (p.230).</p>
<p>6. Lindsay Currie - <i>The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street</i> (2017)</p>	<p>1. This excerpt demonstrates Tessa’s uncertainty of her new surroundings and lack of confidence that everything will be okay: ““This is going to get easier, honey. I promise. I’ll make a space for myself to paint here, and you’ll keep drawing. We’re artists. Creators</p>

	<p>of our own destiny!’ Brushing the hair off my forehead, she kisses the top of my head. I wish I could believe all that, but I don’t” (p.11).</p> <p>2. This excerpt shows how this move has impacted Tessa: “I shrug. I want to be happy with him. I <i>really</i> do. Dad is awesome and I know how hard he’s worked for this. Mom, too. But right now, nothing sounds better than crawling back into bed, burying myself under the covers and pretending none of this ever happened” (pp. 22-23).</p> <p>3. This depiction demonstrates the creativity of Tessa’s parents in regards to creating memories that strengthen their familial bond: “ <i>The adventure jar</i>. Mom and Dad came up with this idea two years ago. They both write up ‘adventures’ and drop them into the jar, then wait for the perfect moment to spring them on either Jonah [her brother] or me” (p. 23).</p> <p>4. This excerpt communicates Tessa’s hatred of her new home to her parents, who try to convey their support of her: “‘Our new house is horrible! I hate it!’ Mom and Dad ease down onto my bed. Their faces are full of something I don’t like. I think it’s sadness. Maybe pity. I cry harder because I don’t think they believe me. . . ‘There there. Relax, honey. It’s going to be okay. No matter what happened, we’re all here together now.’ Mom pats my leg, a smile barely brightening her pink face” (p. 93).</p>
<p>7. Stuart Gibbs - <i>Space Case</i> (2014)</p>	<p>1. This excerpt displays the concern Dash’s parents have for him when they feel his imagination might be running away with him: “‘It’s only been an hour,’ I muttered. ‘I’m sure some will turn up.’ Mom and Dad exchanged one of their concerned looks. They’d been doing this a great deal that morning, like they were far more worried about me than they were about Dr. Holtz. Dad said, ‘Dash, you’re a smart kid. You’re very mature and precocious for your age and we love that about you. But sometimes that brain of yours works a little too hard to see patterns where there might not be any.’” Dealing with the death of someone close to you is always difficult,’ Mom added. ‘We all</p>

	<p>have our different mechanisms for confronting tragedy like this --” (pp.41-42).</p> <p>2. This quote illustrates how lonely and isolated Dash has become on the moon after the tragic event involving Dr. Holtz: “My parents looked around the room for someone else for me to hang out with. They weren’t trying to ditch me; I think they felt bad I had no one else to talk to but them” (p.79).</p> <p>3. This quote illustrates the protective nature of Dash’s mom over him when he gets in trouble for something where he wasn’t entirely to blame: “Mom, still angry at Nina herself, glared after the base commander as she headed back to get more burgers. ‘Look at her. Acting like she’s Mary Poppins after the way she treated Dash today. I ought to report her to NASA for overstepping her bounds - ‘Now, now,’ Dad cautioned, ‘This has been a rough day for all of us. And I’m sure Nina is under far more stress than everyone else put together.’ ‘She didn’t have to take it out on our son,’ Mom groused” (p. 151).</p>
<p>8. Christina Diaz Gonzalez - <i>Moving Target</i> (2016)</p>	<p>1.This excerpt provides elucidates Cassie’s familial background - or so she believes, until another reality is eventually revealed to her: “My fingers gripped the steering wheel. I had no idea where I was supposed to go. The nurses who had taken my father away had wanted me to follow them in, but I’d told them that I needed to wait for my mother outside. They seemed to buy the lie, giving me a few minutes to pull my thoughts together. I really did wish I was waiting for my mother - or any relative - to show up. But there was no one else to depend on; it was just my dad and me. The way it had always been” (p.19).</p> <p>2. This passage offers context regarding comforting and inspirational advice from her mother via her father, as she faced a dilemma that necessitated courage: “<i>Choices determine destiny.</i>” It was similar to something my dad used to tell me when I was little. He’d remind me of how my mother would always say that the beauty of life was its uncertainty. How could you choose your own future and nothing was</p>

	<p>preordained. It had never been more true. I had to choose to be brave” (p. 38).</p> <p>3. This excerpt confirms the familiar relationship Cassie has continued to believe is false: “ Someone with Type AB blood can’t be the parent of someone with Type O blood. It’s basic biology.’ [Asher] paused. ‘Cassie, this isn’t your father.’ . . . What he was saying was ludicrous. ‘Of course it’s him.’ I glanced down at my father’s familiar face. This was the man who had read me bedtime stories, who taught me all about art; he was the only family I’d ever known. ‘I know what my own father looks like. ‘No. I mean he’s not your biological father.’ What are you saying? You think I’m adopted?’ I threw aside the ridiculous notion. ‘No, you’re wrong. That’s crazy. I’ve seen pictures of my mom pregnant with me and the two of them holding me as a baby. That chart is wrong.’ I went back to coaxing my dad to wake up. ‘<i>Vamos, Papi. Despiertate.</i>’ My dad gave my hand a small squeeze. He could hear me! . . . My dad’s eyes fluttered open. ‘Papi!’ I threw my arms around his neck. He was back! My father slowly reached up for my hands. He gave each one a small kiss. His eyes were water. ‘<i>M’ija,</i>’ he said in a low, hoarse voice. ‘He’s right. I’m not your father’” (p. 243).</p>
<p>9. Tim Green - <i>Left Out</i> (2017)</p>	<p>1. This excerpt offers background regarding Landon’s mother’s overprotectiveness, as well as his experience suffering from hearing challenges that have delayed his education and placed him in the same grade as his younger sister: “‘Rules are made to be followed, Landon.’ His mother would pucker her lips in a prissy manner. ‘We don’t want anyone to think you need to be treated differently than anyone else. Asking for exceptions suggests ‘special needs,’ and you’re <i>not</i> that.’ The phrase ‘special needs’ was a red flag in Landon’s home, mostly because of his mother’s guilt. Because she had refused to have Landon tested for any problem when he was a baby, at age four he was diagnosed as a special needs child. People said he would not do well in school. But Landon’s mom insisted he was smart and that the doctors needed to figure out what was really wrong.</p>

They finally did, and discovered that Landon couldn't hear - he was deaf in both ears. After months, he was fitted with cochlear implants, devices that helped him to hear. But the training involved in using them forced him to begin school a year late. That's why he and his little sister were in the same class" (p.3).

2. This excerpt illustrates the fiercely protective nature of Landon's sister, Genevieve, when she blows up at peers who hassle him: "'Genevieve, you can't like this,' their father scolded as he guided her back to her seat. He kept his voice even and calm, though . . . London took a quick look around. Everyone was staring and whispering. He wanted to disappear. He wanted to die. He shook his head and tapped Genevieve to get her attention. 'You know I don't want people staring,' he scolded. 'You can't let people disrespect you - here or when you're on the football field, Landon,' Genevieve said. 'You need to learn that'" (p. 17).

3. This quote illustrates Landon's father's advocacy for him in regards to his involvement in football, which is pursued despite his mother's vehement opposition: "'Landon is deaf. When he was four, he got cochlear implants, so he hears sounds and he can read lips. But to really understand speech it's best if he hears and sees what's said. 'He reads lips?' The man shot what looked like a nervous glance at Landon. 'He uses a combination of sight and sound to understand,' Landon's dad said. 'But he can't wear those things with a football helmet,' the man said. Landon's dad nodded. 'Yes, he can. There's actually a company that makes custom helmets. Landon isn't the first, either, and we have a doctor's note.' 'Okay, okay. That's great. Really. The man with glasses threw his hands up in the air in total surrender. 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean any offense at all, and if he has special needs, we can work with that, but we just have to know. Landon's father gritted his teeth and shook his head. 'No, he isn't special needs. He just needs to see you speak'" (p.64).

10. Gordon Korman - *Restart* (2017)

1. This excerpt illustrates the perceived relationship Chase has with his family members, as he recovers from amnesia. It's evident that his parents do not get along, which does not alleviate the struggles he's enduring with his memory challenges: "I can't put my finger on it, but there's something about my dad that makes me nervous. It isn't physical. In fact, for a middle-aged guy, he's pretty energetic and spry, despite the paunch and the thinning hair. His smile is totally overpowering. To see him is to want to like him. Maybe that's the problem, I decide. He's too confident that he's welcome everywhere. And going by Mom, he isn't. Not here, anyway. He's brought his new family - a wife named Corinne, who doesn't look much older than Johnny, and Helene, my four-year-old half sister. Mom was right - Helene's definitely not the girl in the blue dress. It's no big deal, I guess, but I'm disappointed. I was kind of hoping for one thing in my life to be connected to reality. Although I'm meeting them for the first time, I have to remind myself they already know me. For some reason, they don't seem to like me very much. Corinne hangs back and the little kid stays firmly attached to her mom's skirt. They look at me like I'm a time bomb about to go off in their faces. What did I ever do to them? My father seems to be settling in for a long visit, but Mom's having none of that. 'He has to rest, Frank,' she says. 'Doctor's orders.' 'What - he's chopping wood? He's resting.' 'Alone,' she insists. 'In his room. Where it's quiet.' He sighs. 'Ants at a picnic, what's what you are.' He hugs me again, squeezing less tightly this time. 'Great to have you back, Champ. Sorry it couldn't be more of a celebration, but Nurse Killjoy over there -.' He inclines his head in my mother's direction' (p.10).

2. This excerpt provides context in regards to Chase's interaction with his dad's family and how its negative status affects him in his current state: "... she loses her grip and tumbles off the top of the twisty slide. I'm there like a shot, catching her and swinging her around like it's part of the game. She squeals in exhilaration, spreading her arms, and I get into the spirit, making airplane noises. She's loving it. I'm

doubly thrilled because my shoulder is holding up fine. The two of us are having a great time - until she looks down and sees who's got her. 'Mommy!' Her scream carries all around the park. 'It's okay, Helene!' It's me! 'Chase - your brother!' 'I want to go down!' Now she's red in the face and crying. I set her on the ground and watch as she runs off to join Corinne, who's hustling our way. Great. Dad's family already has a problem with me, and now they're going to think I've been terrorizing their daughter. 'Sorry,' I mumble. 'I didn't mean to scare her.' 'I saw what happened. Thanks for catching her.' There's nothing wrong with what she's saying. It's the way she says it - too polite, too distant, like I'm a stranger instead of her stepson. Helene has her face buried in her mother's sweater and refuses to look at me. 'I guess she doesn't like me very much,' I comment. Corinne softens. 'She's just a little afraid of you.' 'Afraid of me?' What could I have done that would make a four-year-old freak out every time I come near her? (p.34).

3. This excerpt displays the anger Chase feels because he believes he's been lied to and placated by his mom due to her withholding information he feels he deserves to know about himself: "When mom gets home from work that day, I'm there at the front door to throw it in her face. 'Where do you get off?' She looks totally bewildered. I forge on. 'You were so devastated when I got amnesia - but not too devastated to pass up a little editing job on my life!' 'Editing job?' 'Don't you think I have the right to know that Aaron, Bear, and I were arrested and sentenced to community service?' She doesn't answer right away. She sets down her bag, shrugs out of her jacket, walks to the living room, and collapses wearily into a chair. At last, she says, "You've just been through an awful ordeal. How can it help your recovery if I tell you a lot of things that are just going to upset you?" 'Things?' I echo. 'You mean there are more? How many other nice little stories have you been keeping away from me?' She seems genuinely sad. 'I'll love you and support you through the end of the world - you know that. I've always seen the good

	<p>in you, Chase, and I believe that's the person you really are, deep down. But, you've had your moments'" (p. 41).</p> <p>4. This quote illustrates the identity crisis Chase is enduring - he has desperately wanted his memory back, but he doesn't want to sacrifice the new version of himself that he feels is better; however, this is also slipping away from him: "Dad says the old Chase is back. I wanted that once. But right now the new Chase is the life I'd rather have. And I've lost that too" (p. 178).</p>
<p>11. Yona Zeldis McDonough - <i>The Bicycle Spy</i> (2016)</p>	<p>1. Marcel discovers his parents (and family) are part of the French Resistance and this quote illustrates the respect he has for their courage: "The rest of the ride was a blur. To think that his parents were secretly working against the Germans! They must be braver than he had thought! But if they were caught...he could not even let himself imagine it. As he pedaled furiously, adrenaline making him fly, his mind jumped back and forth between pride and terror. In the end, pride won out. His father and mother were doing the right thing. The noble, courageous, and yes, even heroic thing. And so were his aunt and uncle. He would not say a word about what he knew, but he would keep making the trips whenever his father or mother asked. That way, it was like he was part of the Resistance, too." (p.19).</p> <p>2. This excerpt depicts the strength and commitment of Marcel's family unity toward the right cause: "Delphine listened attentively, nodding as he spoke. Then she asked, 'Why is your family doing all this?' 'Because we have to,' he said. 'It's the right thing to do. We can't just give in to...them. We can't'" (p. 100).</p> <p>3. This excerpt demonstrates the unity of Marcel's family during such tumultuous times: "As he approached the bakery, he looked up to the window above the shop. The lights were on - there were his parents, huddled together. They must have been looking out for him, anxiously awaiting his return.</p>

	<p>He'd never been so glad to see them in his life. He was still shaken from the accident, but quietly triumphant, too. Like one of his cyclist heroes, he had made it to the finale. When his parents spotted him, they turned and rushed from the window. They were downstairs in the street in a matter of seconds.” (p.123).</p>
<p>12. Sarah Mlynowski - <i>Upside-Down Magic</i> (2015)</p>	<p>1. Nory demonstrates discomfort having questions asked about her family, which adds to her hardships in terms of moving to a new place with her aunt: “ ‘Why are you black when your aunt is white?’ My dad’s black. My mom was white.’ ‘Do you want to tell me about your mom?’ ‘No, thanks,’ she said to Elliott. What could she tell him? What did she really know? She didn’t remember much. But he wouldn’t stop. ‘Is she dead? I heard she was dead.’ ‘Sounds like you already know.’ ‘Want to tell me about your dad?’ ‘No.’ ‘Want to tell me about <i>anything</i>?’ Sheesh. Nory was at a loss. She wasn’t sure she wanted to open up yet. Or ever” (p.51).</p> <p>2. This excerpt describes the stark contrast between Nory’s living environments: “ Nory called home when she got to Aunt Margo’s. But no one answered. ‘Please call me back,’ she said to the voicemail. ‘I can’t stay here. I really can’t.’ She watched the phone. It didn’t ring. Aunt Margo got home from work just before dinnertime. ‘Let’s call for pizza,’ she said to Nory. ‘Should we get olives on it? Or pepperoni?’ Nory was surprised. Hawthorn cooked something nutritious involving vegetables every night and they all ate in the dining room with cloth napkins. Then Nory and Dalia did the dishes before anyone was allowed dessert. ‘Pizza again?’ she said. ‘Do you eat meat?’ asked Margo, looking at the takeout menu. ‘I realized I don’t even know if you eat meat.’ She opened the fridge. It had some fruit and milk in it, but nothing that could be made into dinner. ‘Yes, pizza again. Definitely. The only other place that delivers is the fancy Japanese place and it’s - well, it’s not in the budget”” (pp. 99-100).</p>

	<p>3. Nory’s struggles with magic is due mostly with her inability to control her emotions, but she learns this is not all of the process: ””Part of developing your Upside-Down Magic is getting in touch with your emotions. You want to understand your feelings so you don’t - well, you know, turn into a bitten. Or a rock. Or cause a rainstorm when you don’t want one. UDM is not about controlling your feelings, it’s about understanding them” (p. 107).</p> <p>4. This passage illustrates the neglect/indifference shown to Nory and her siblings by their father, as well as her longing to connect with her siblings: “On the way home in Fig’s van, Aunt Margo’s cell rang. She looked at it, raised her eyebrows, and handed it to Nory. Nory’s heart jumped. She put the phone to her ear. ‘Hello?’ ‘Nory!’ We’re on speakerphone!’ Dalia said. ‘Who’s on speakerphone?’ Nory asked. ‘Me and Hawthorn.’ ‘What about Father?’ ‘At a meeting,’ Dalia said. ‘You know Father. Always working, even on the weekends. ‘Hi, Nory,’ Hawthorn said. ‘Sorry it’s taken us so long to call you back. Father wanted to let you get settled first. But after Aunt Margo’s message, we decided we should sneak a call. <i>Well it’s about time</i>, Nory almost said. But she didn’t. What if they hung up?” (p. 117).</p>
<p>13. C.C. Payne - <i>The Thing About Leftovers</i> (2017)</p>	<p>1. This quote depicts Fizzy’s relationship with her Aunt Liz, as she is fortunate to have such a strong and committed role model: “‘Fizzy, sometimes it’s very helpful to discuss family and feelings. Believe me, people do it every day” and when Fizzy acknowledges that she does have a confidante in Aunt Liz, she responds with, “You do. Always. Please remember that, Fizzy. But if you ever want to talk things over with your guidance counselor, I think that’s okay, too” (p.24).</p> <p>2. This quote depicts Elizabeth’s (Fizzy’s) frustration about the relationship status of her parents: “I never get to choose, <i>never!</i> I didn’t choose you and I didn’t choose Dad. I didn’t choose for you to get divorced. I didn’t choose who I was going to live with. I didn’t</p>

	<p>choose Lush Valley or our town house or my school, or even piano lessons, and I surely didn't choose Keene Adams to be my new stepfather!" (p.83).</p> <p>3. This exchange between Elizabeth and her mother indicates the uncertainty she feels and the impact that her family life has on her identity: "...It would hurt Keene to see pictures of me as another man's wife--knowing and seeing are two different things.' Does it hurt him to see you as the mother of another man's child? I wondered. But I didn't ask. I figured I already knew the answer because I already knew that I wasn't a cherished member of the Adams family. I'd known that I was Russo leftovers long before now. What I hadn't known was that in addition to the fact that the Russos and I were officially no longer part of Mom's family, we were also going to pretend we'd <i>never</i> been a family - because that's why we were hiding the photo albums, right?" (p.142).</p> <p>4. This quotation from Elizabeth indicates the frustration she feels and further illustrates the impact of her split life on her identity: "I mean, ever since my parents' divorce, I felt like I'd lost a really important grocery bag, the one with all the important ingredients - for my life. Substitutions had then been made: new house, new neighborhood, new school, new friends, new stepmother, new stepfather, and now a new brother! These are all highly noticeable changes in the recipe of my life, which means they aren't good substitutions, because good substitutions aren't noticeable. But these were so noticeable, I felt like I'd been given someone else's ingredients, for someone else's life. But, I just had to keep living it - what else could I do?" (p.191).</p>
<p>14. Jordan Sonneblick - <i>The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade</i> (2019)</p>	<p>1. This quotation illustrates Maverick's frustration with his family status and the hardships that have stemmed from it: "Of course, if my father had been alive, I wouldn't have ever had to worry about my mom's long string of losers. Or my mom's drinking. Or our money issues. Or anything" (p.7).</p>

	<p>2. This quotation provides further context of Maverick’s fear of reaching out to others due to his dysfunctional home life: “I also started to make a friend, which hadn’t happened in a long time. It was just too tricky. What if I got invited to somebody’s birthday party? I would have to say no, because we couldn’t afford a gift. What if the kid wanted to come over to my house, but my mom happened to be drunk that day? Or worse, what if she had a boyfriend in the apartment?” (p. 59).</p> <p>3. This quote reveals the individual of whom Maverick can rely on in a crisis, which is his Aunt Catherine, his father’s sister: “The Bee sent me out into the main office to wait, which was a good thing because I hadn’t actually called my mother. Once, Aunt Cat had made me memorize her number in case of an emergency. But ever since the time my mom flipped out on her, I had never called my aunt in a crisis. Today, though, I had given in” (p. 46).</p> <p>4. This passage illustrates Aunt Cat’s responsibility in regards to looking out for Maverick’s well-being and safety after his mother has a bad evening and destroys the apartment: “Aunt Cat pulled me into my bedroom. ‘Maverick, you can’t stay here tonight,’ she said. ‘I have to. I have to take care of Freddy. And my mom needs me,’ I said. ‘Your mom needs help. But it doesn’t have to come from you. How long has this been going on?’ I looked away. ‘Maverick.’”Umm...I don’t know. She’s not always like this. She hasn’t had one of these bad days since the night before school started. Mostly, she holds it together. Until...’ ‘Until she doesn’t’ I nodded. ‘Mav, listen. I grew up like this. So did your father.I know what it does to a child. I want you to know that if things get too rough here, you will always have a home with me. Do you understand?’” (pp. 123-124).</p>
<p>15. Ely Swartz - <i>Finding Perfect</i> (2016)</p>	<p>1. This quote provides insight into the reaction of the current and dysfunctional home life status from the perspective of Molly, her brother, and her father: “He [Dad] doesn’t need to know that we miss Mom’s</p>

laugh, her bad sense of direction, her lasagna. It's already too hard for him. It's been three weeks since she drove out of the driveway in the back of a cab and he still can't sleep at night" (p. 15).

2. This quote from Molly's father indicates his awareness of the impact of her mother's absence on the family - especially Molly: "Dad drops his head into his big hands and is quiet for a very long minute. 'A while back, my wife left to live in Toronto for a year. I work a lot. It's been hard on Molly'" (p. 229).

3. This quotation illustrates how Molly's OCD is taking over and becoming more and more problematic: "I take a deep breath. I have five minutes to brush my teeth. I concentrate as I carefully spread the green-foam toothpaste across my toothbrush. *Get it straight and you won't have to do it again.* Slowly I squirt the paste along the bristles. Nice and perfectly aligned. My stomach grumbles. My hand starts to shake. *No. Concentrate. Slosh!* The toothpaste falls off my toothbrush and into the sink. *Again.* Four times and I finally get my flawless line. *Exhale.* When I get to my room, I stand in the middle and stare at my perfectly aligned glass menagerie, my wrinkle-free bed, my neatly folded clothing, and realize that I can't keep doing this. Things are getting worse. I'm losing control. I have to tell someone. Today" (pp. 115-116).

4. This quote demonstrates Molly's dad's strength and compassion that shines through, when he discovers she may be struggling with OCD, as he tells her in "a soft but firm voice, "Mol, you need to get up now and come with me . . . I love you, but I can't do this alone. We need to do this together.' Pause. 'Please. We have to go" (p. 256).