Abstract

This content analysis was undertaken to examine whether award-winning, middle school, fiction tradebooks provide depictions of characters who engage in writing. Once identified, writing episodes were analyzed to determine if the writing was implicitly or explicitly depicted. Additional questions queried who wrote, what was written, and what stage of the writing process was represented. A final question asked what additional information and aesthetic responses were recorded in the Researcher's Journal.

Two tools, a Content Analysis Instrument and a Researcher's Journal, guided the collection of data from 43 books appearing on three awards lists. Forty-two of the books included at least one character who engaged in writing. Overall, 615 episodes of writing were recorded. Thirty-six percent of the episodes showed the characters explicitly engaged in the act of writing. Thirty-nine percent of the characters were young teens; 51.5% were female. European Americans accounted for the highest percentage (46%) of ethnicities represented. A character's religion was not found to be a significant element in the books sampled, and few of the characters represented imaginary creatures. A variety of types of artifacts were penned, including letters, journals, and poems; digital literacies were not represented. Adults provided the target audience for most of the writings. Communication provided the impetus for most of the writing episodes. No particular stage of writing process could be determined for 66% of the episodes. Finally, two categories directly related to writing emerged from the Researcher's Journal: teaching examples and writing process. Aesthetic responses also detailed believability issues, important messages, highly attractive books, and other creative endeavors.

The results suggest research needs to be conducted in three areas: to determine middle school readers' responses to character writers, to determine to what extent character writers of multiple diverse backgrounds are represented in award-winning multicultural books, and to determine middle school readers' responses to character writers of indeterminate ethnicity. Separate booklists are identified for researchers and teachers. Action research conducted by teachers utilizing the identified episodes could be undertaken to study middle school students' responses to characters who write.