

WRITING DIVERSE CHARACTERS



Toni Shiloh
Author/Speaker

My Books

- Writing since 2014
- Indie Published 2015 and ongoing
- Celebrate Lit: 2016
- Love Inspired: February 2021
- Barbour: Summer 2021



Overview



Source: pixabay.com

- What is diversity?
- Why do we need diversity?
- Why is diversity reading so important?
- Eradicate the fear
- Avoiding the caricature
- Describing skin tone
- What not to do
- What to do
- What readers want
- Diverse fiction recommendations

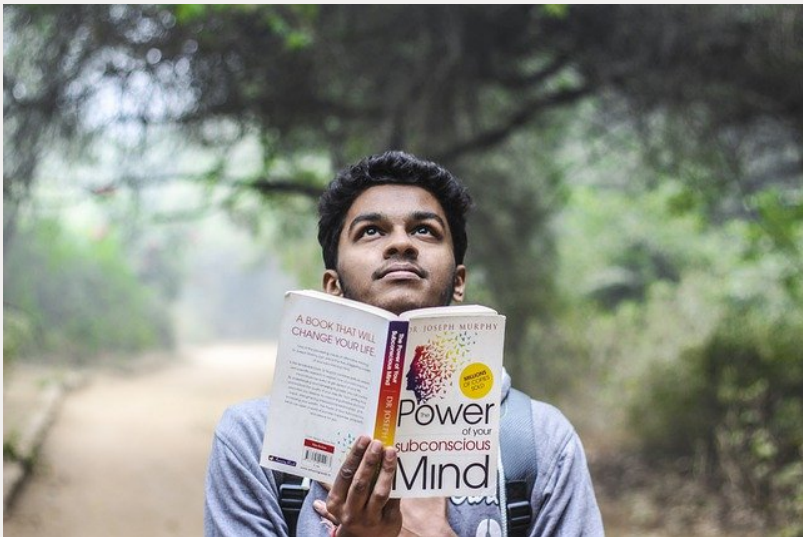
What is Diversity?



Source: pixabay.com

- Can refer to
 - Nationality
 - Gender
 - Disabilities
 - Sexuality
- Specifically targeting books where minority ethnic characters are main characters
 - #Ownvoices #diversefiction #diversebooks #diversereads

Why do we need diversity?



Source: pixabay.com

- Our world is not one color and writing should reflect that
- Representation matters
- Bridges the gap between us vs them until it becomes humanity first
- Radical change won't happen until we all contribute
- As believers, we need to be able to reach all nations, and we cannot do so if we don't expand our knowledge

Why is diversity reading so important?

- Fiction softens the heart: building empathy and compassion
 - Public Library of Science, The European Journal of Communication Research
- Wider perspective
- Convicts and identifies in prejudices/biases we may have



Source: pixabay.com

Eradicate the Fear



Source: Pixabay

- Reasons for fear
 - Cultural appropriation
 - Lack of personal experience
 - *Possible* reader reactions
- Eradicate the fear
 - Pray
 - Use sensitivity readers
 - Do your research
 - Focus on the characters

Cultural – Appropriation Avoid the Caricature

- Stereotypes can lead a writer to create a character that is more caricature than authentic
- The media shows the worst of us, so don't let that be your resource



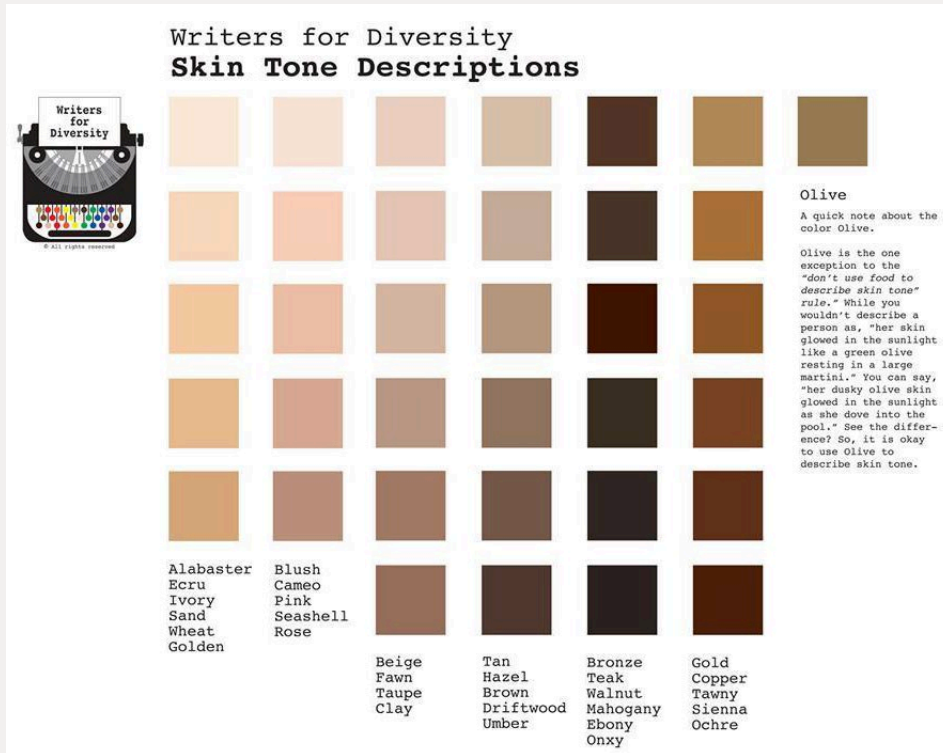
Source: Amazon



Source: IMDB

Describing skin tone

- Food descriptions: yay or nay?
- Nature
 - Plants, Flowers, Wood, etc
- Metals
- Gemstones and minerals
- [Color Thesaurus](#)



Source: Amazon



WHAT NOT TO DO...

Stereotypes to Avoid – African Americans



Source: Pixabay

- Negative words associated with shade of skin
- Backhanded compliments
 - “Pretty for a Black girl”
- Contrast teeth in relation to skin tone
- Avoid NAPPY and KINKY
- Avoid Black face, tribal features
- African American vs Black

Stereotypes to Avoid – Asians



Lucy Liu

Source: snailgore, via jadepencils)

- Don't assume
 - Pale, short, skinny, studious math nerd
- Avoid depicting shape of eyes as slanted or anything else derogatory
- Asian vs. Oriental
 - Items from Asia are oriental. People are Asian

Stereotypes to Avoid – Biracial and Multiracial

- Assuming they're "cuter" because they're "mixed"
- Try to avoid stereotypes of their races
 - Ex: half-Black, avoid African American stereotypes



Meghan Markle
Photo courtesy of IMDB

Stereotypes to Avoid – Latinos



Alexa Vega
Source: IMDB

- Don't assume all dark skin, dark hair
- Avoid the “exotic” description
- Don't describe as brown
- Mexican ≠ Honduran ≠ Venezuelan
- Speech
 - Not all speak Spanish or have Spanish accent

Stereotypes to Avoid – First Nations & Indigenous



Ashley Callinbull
Source: IMDB

- Don't assume all live on reservations
- Avoid drunken stereotypes
- Don't assume uneducated
- Avoid "Native American" or "American Indian" when possible and list specific tribe
- Don't assume all tribes do beadwork, powwows
 - Research, research, research!
- Don't assume pitying nature
 - Celebrate their culture

Universal Stereotypes to Avoid –

- Slurs and derogatory racial terms especially in Christian writing.
- Don't assume all subset cultures are the same



Source: pixabay.com



WHAT TO DO...

Do...



Source: Pixabay

- Do your research
- Create authentic speech
 - Depends on...
 - Location
 - Education
 - Culture
 - Codeswitching
- Use your resources
 - Friends, life experiences, sensitivity readers
- Internet resources
 - DiversifYa.com, WNDB (diversebooks.org)

Sensitivity Readers



Source: Pixabay

- Definition
- Where to find them
 - Call to action on website/blog/social media
 - Facebook review groups
 - Christian Reviewers
 - Christian Readers and Reviewers
 - Authors of color
 - Readers of color



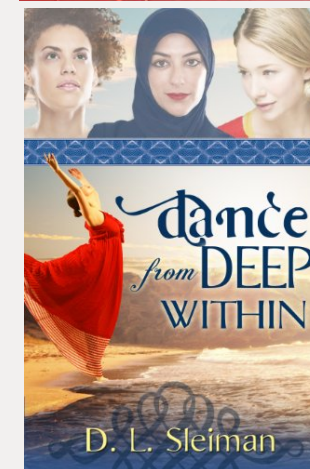
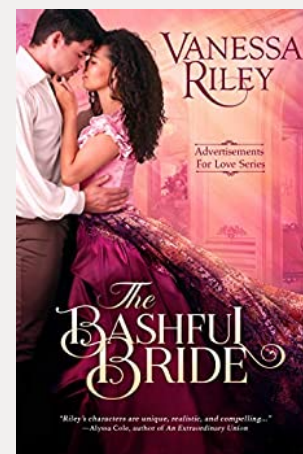
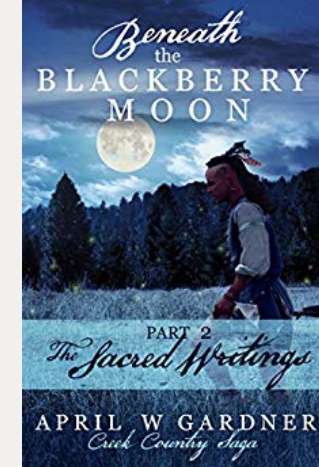
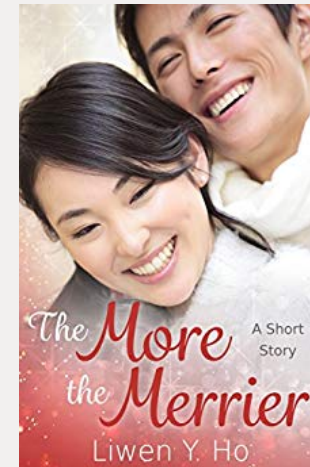
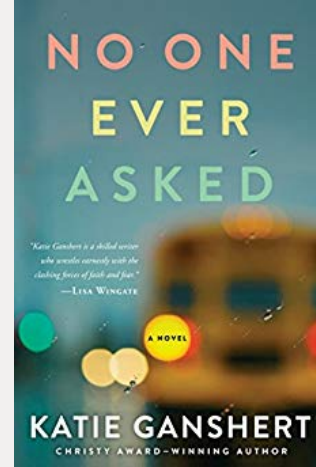
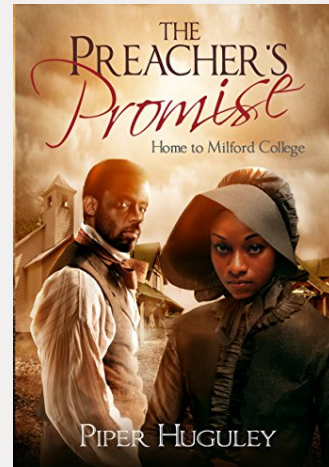
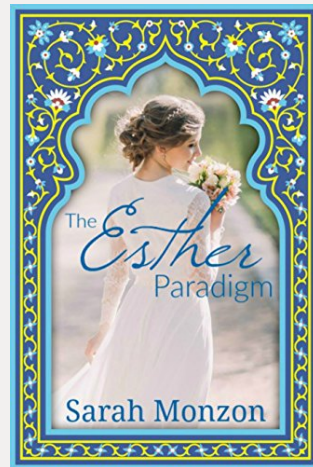
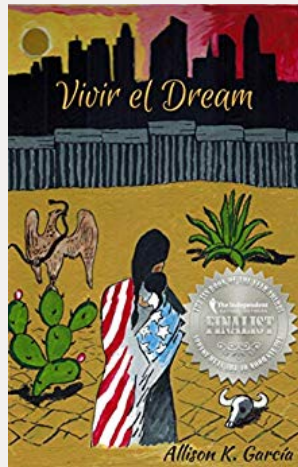
What Readers Want



Source: Pixabay

- Real characters
 - Personality over looks
 - Physical imperfections
 - Imperfect body shapes
 - Average looks
- Diversity
 - And please stop with the cookie cutter descriptions
- Culture & Traditions
 - They're what make a person not their skin color

Diverse Book Recommendations



Resources



- We Need Diverse Books <https://diversebooks.org/>
- Girl, Have You Read? <http://girlhaveyouread.com>
- Goodreads www.goodreads.com
- DiversifYa www.DiversifYa.com
- Diversity Between the Pages
<http://diversitybetweenthepages.wordpress.com>
- Writing with color:
<https://writingwithcolor.tumblr.com/post/96830966357/writing-with-color-description-guide-words-for>



Questions?