

## **The Importance of Understanding Diversity and Sensitivity in Your Manuscript**

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Over the last few years, our nation has faced heightened awareness with health issues caused by COVID and isolating in ways we never imagined. We're faced with racial tension that's continuing to grow and creating a chasm between nonethnic and ethnic communities. Outside of divine intervention this chasm will continue to grow.

As writers in the publishing industry, God has given us a powerful tool to use—our words. Writers may not have the whole solution, but we can make an impact on the world we leave in if we learn how to use what God has given us.

With the 2020 census our nation has entered a first where we have a **Minority Majority**, yet in roles where individuals make decisions that impact others, the scale is still unbalanced.

In 2018, U.S. publishing statistics stated there were more children's books featuring animals and other non-human characters (27 per cent) than all types of visible minorities combined (23 per cent). Meanwhile, half of all the children's books reviewed featured white kids. Over the last 24 years only 13% of children's literature contain multicultural content according to book publisher Lee & Low.

In the overall industry and editorial departments, all ethnic individuals combined make up 21% in the publishing industry and only 18% in the editorial department.

Our American literature, which is heavily influenced by a European culture, has largely impacted the books produced in our nation, but with the growth of diversity in

our nation, representation of marginalized communities needs to change in publishing as well.

**There are three questions I'm frequently asked by white authors:**

1. Can white authors write characters of color?
2. Should white authors be afraid to write about Black, Indigenous, and People of Colors?
3. What are some suggestions to help white authors write about marginalized communities?

**Can White authors write characters of color?** Here are six suggestions addressing ways to write characters who don't look like you.

- 1. Read, Read, Read! Fiction as well as nonfiction.**
- 2. Think From Their Perspective:**
- 3. Don't limit your character:**
- 4. Know Your Limits:**
- 5. Include Different Types of Diversity:**
- 6. Show Empathy:**

**Remember:** Show don't tell. If you need to tell me your character is ethnic, then the steps above have not been applied.

**Should white authors be afraid to write about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color?**

I think the answer to *that* question is for you the writer to answer *these* questions:

1. Why do you want to write from this character's point of view?

2. Do you read writers from this community?
3. Why do you want to tell this story?
4. Does this story contain a damaging stereotype of a marginalized group?
5. Does the story need this stereotype to exist?
6. If not, does the story need to exist?

These questions aren't really meant to make white writers afraid, but rather aware.

### **What suggestions can help a white author who writes about ethnic characters?**

Here are six suggestions to help your writing be more than just your opinion when writing about another culture:

1. I mentioned the importance of reading above, but here are a couple of sites that may help. <https://diversebooks.org/>
2. Research before you start.
3. Describe and carefully name your characters. Below is the Writing with Color Description Post  
[https://letswritesomenovels.tumblr.com/post/170955400315/writingwithcolor-writing-with-color-featured?is\\_related\\_post=1](https://letswritesomenovels.tumblr.com/post/170955400315/writingwithcolor-writing-with-color-featured?is_related_post=1)
4. Skin tones should not be described as food items. No chocolate, mochas, toffee, etc. Use different shades of color, not food.
5. Hire a Sensitivity reader. When writing about diverse minority groups, having a sensitivity reader is an absolute must. Realize Google isn't the answer to everything.

6. What is Sensitivity Between the Lines? A service that is offered through BRMCWC. Sensitivity BTL connects writers with readers who specializes in a specific niche and is a part of the marginalized community the author is writing about. For more information:

<https://www.blueridgeconference.com/sensitivitybtl/>

**In conclusion:**

Don't write about a marginalized community because it's what's selling or what the publishing houses want. Writing about marginalized communities is a calling, just like you were called to write. Trust God for giving you direction on what to write. Never include a character because "it's what's selling" or because you believe you should. Diverse characters don't need a reason to exist, they just do

**One final thought:**

If your story were the only one people read about a marginalized community, what kind of impact would you leave as your legacy?