

Diverse Storybooks: Inclusive Practices to Grow Children's Book Collections

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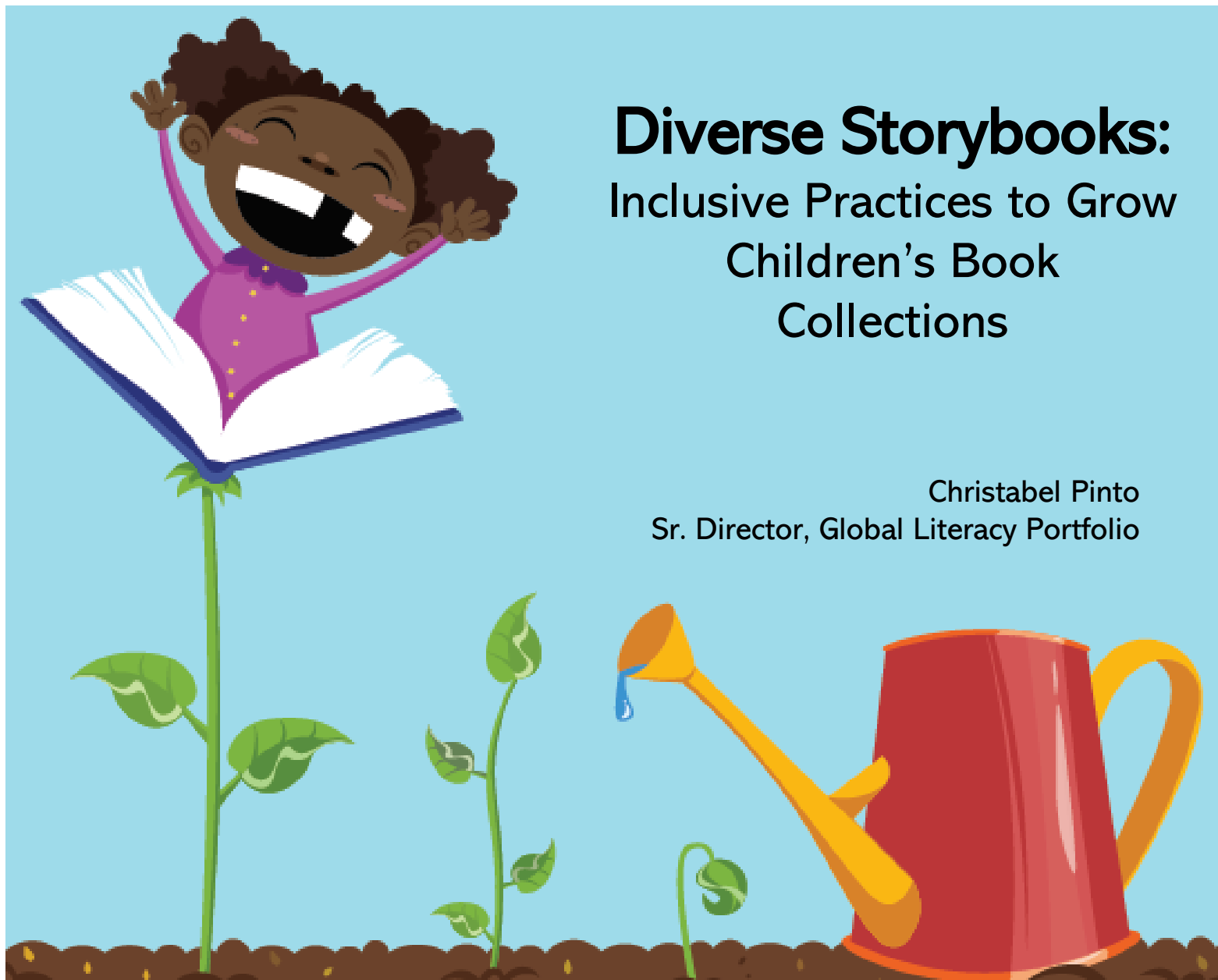


Illustration by Janet Pagliuca

Presentation Outline

Diversity and inclusion in children's literature

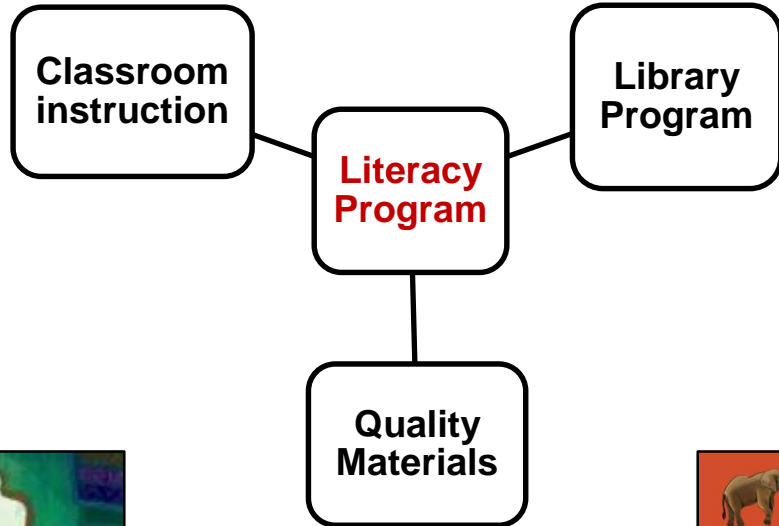
1. What does it mean?
2. Why does this matter?
3. Best practices
4. Conclusion



Source: *Wow, a Ribbon* (RtR Nepal); 2017 Nepalese Society for Children's Literature Award

Context: RtR Literacy Program

Bringing together the science and **Magic** of reading!



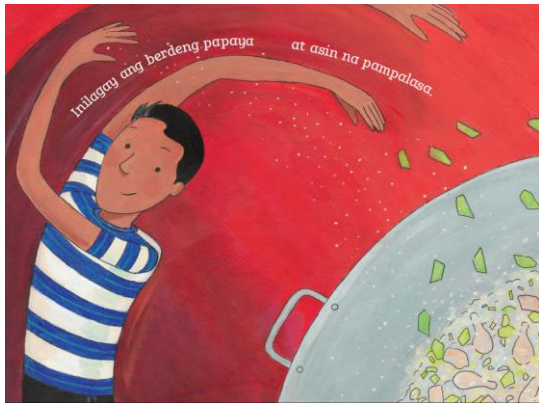
Diversity and Inclusion in Children's Literature



Diversity and inclusion...

...in terms of **representation** in story books.

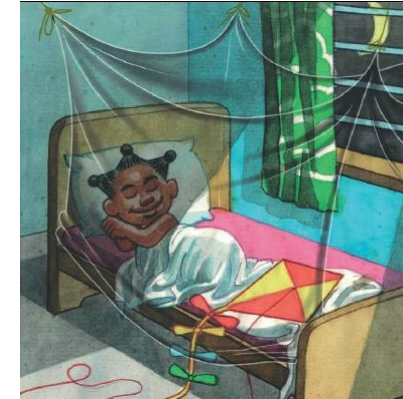
Who shows up within the pages of a book and how?



Source: *Mother's Chicken Soup*
(RtR co-published, Philippines)



Source: *A Plane that Brings Love*
(RtR co-published, Jordan)

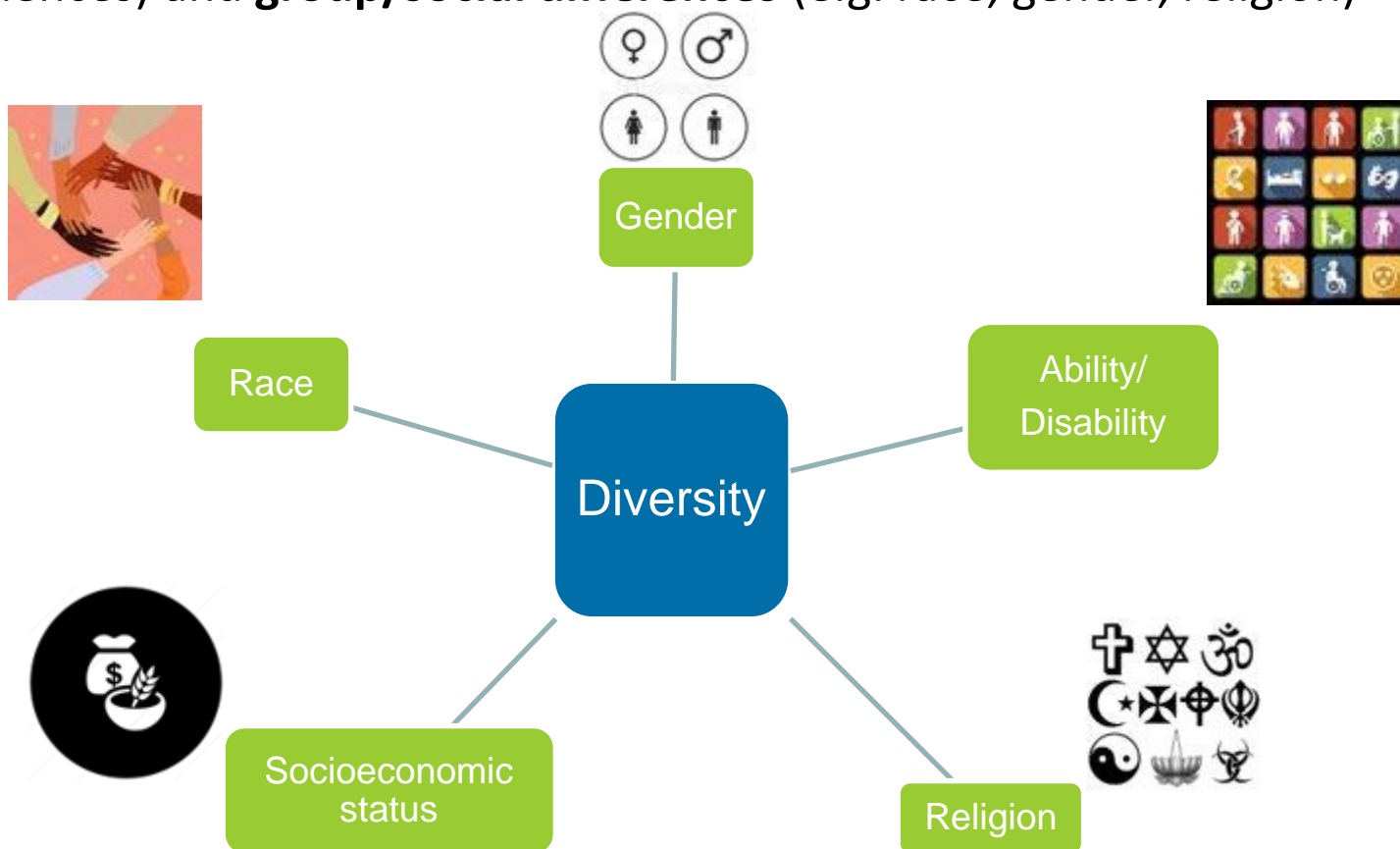


Source: *Tara's Kite*
(RtR Tanzania)

In children's literature, diversity is ***“the celebration of unique characters, a celebration of their heritage and culture, and their exterior and interior selves with the deepest sense of empathy and humanity.”*** (Jewell Rhodes at Children's Institute, 2015)

Elements of Diversity in Children's Literature

Diversity encompasses **individual differences** (e.g. temperament, life experiences) and **group/social differences** (e.g. race, gender, religion)



Book collections: Mirrors and Windows

*“Books are sometimes **windows**, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange....When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a **mirror**. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience.” (1990, p. ix)*

-Rudine Sims Bishop, Professor Emerita of Education at Ohio State University



Source: *The Magic Mirror* (RtR co-published, Indonesia)



Source: *Through my Window* (RtR co-published, Jordan)

Why does this matter?



Why does this matter?

1. Learning

- Motivation matters!
- Emotional connection to a book can motivate (reluctant) readers
- Reading skills + Purpose + **Wonder!**



*“...I sometimes felt that school didn't want us to read, because there were long questions after everything we read, and we had to write book reviews and give the theme of the book.I just wanted to read a book and **enjoy** it.”*

-Beverly Cleary, Children's book author

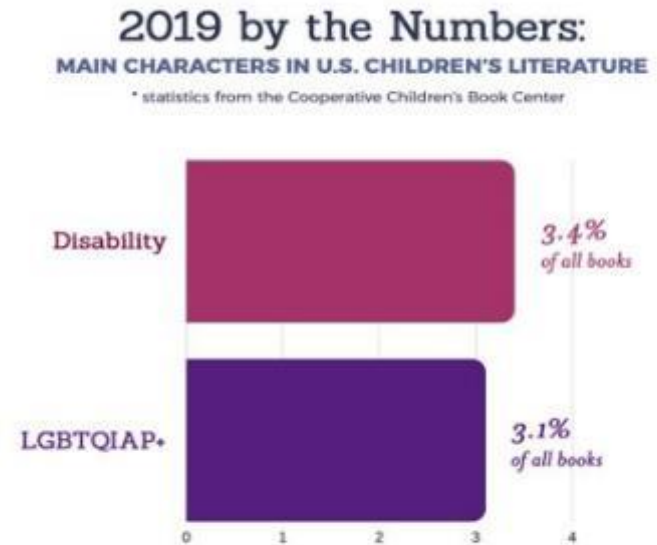
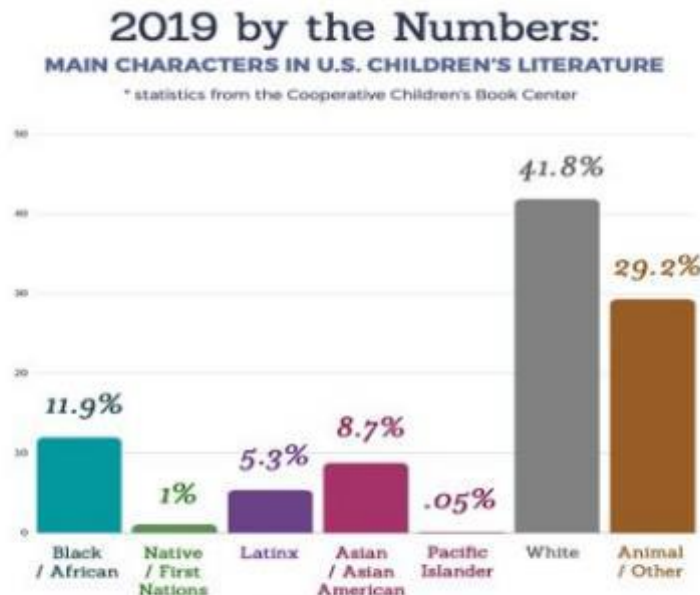


Source: *Bounty's Singing Bird* (RtR Laos)

Why does this matter?

2. **Child rights:** Every child should be able to see themselves in a book

- Systemic structures privilege some voices over others
- Literature should not be an exclusive club for the powerful and/or privileged in society



Why does this matter?

3. Builds global citizenship and fosters empathy

- Books are a gateway to the world. How wide can we open the gate?
- Prejudice can be rooted in a lack of understanding/exposure to those who are different

“Empathy during plot-driven conflict, struggle, and resolution can affirm and help break perceived barriers of race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.” (Jewell Rhodes at Children’s Institute, 2015)



Source: *Kim Descrube el Rio* (RtR, Honduras)



Source: *Everyone Sees* (RtR Bangladesh)

Best practices



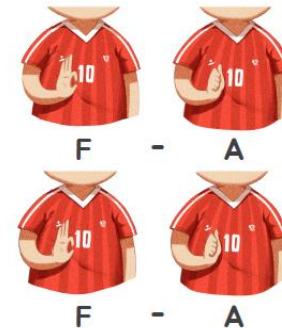
1. Avoid Tokenism

- Diverse characters should have meaningful roles—minimize inactive observer
- Focus *less* on difference and *more* on our shared humanity

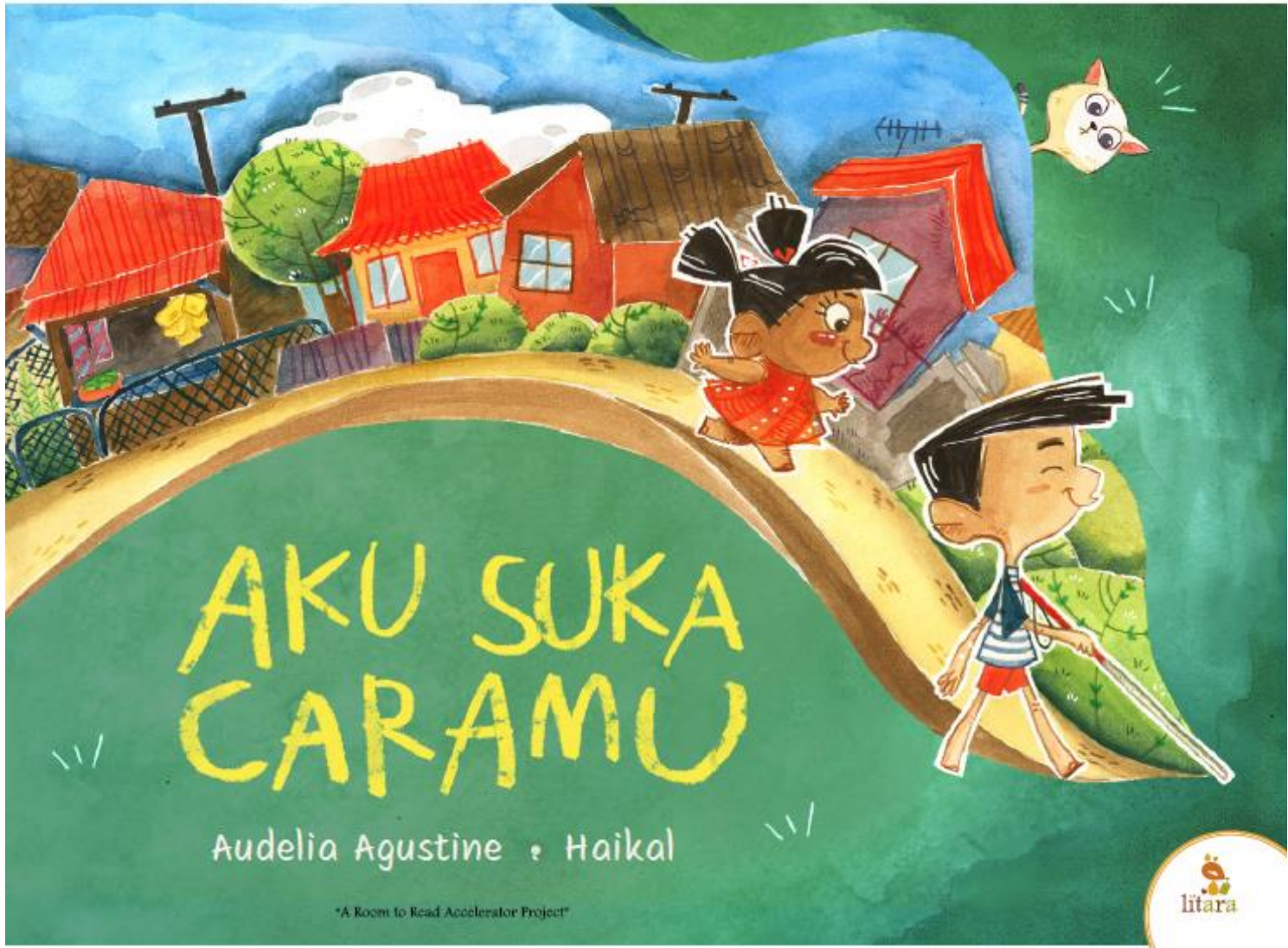


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Jojo menanyakan siapa namanya.
Ia pun menunjuk nama di punggungnya.



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Source: *I Like Your Way* (RtR co-published, Indonesia)

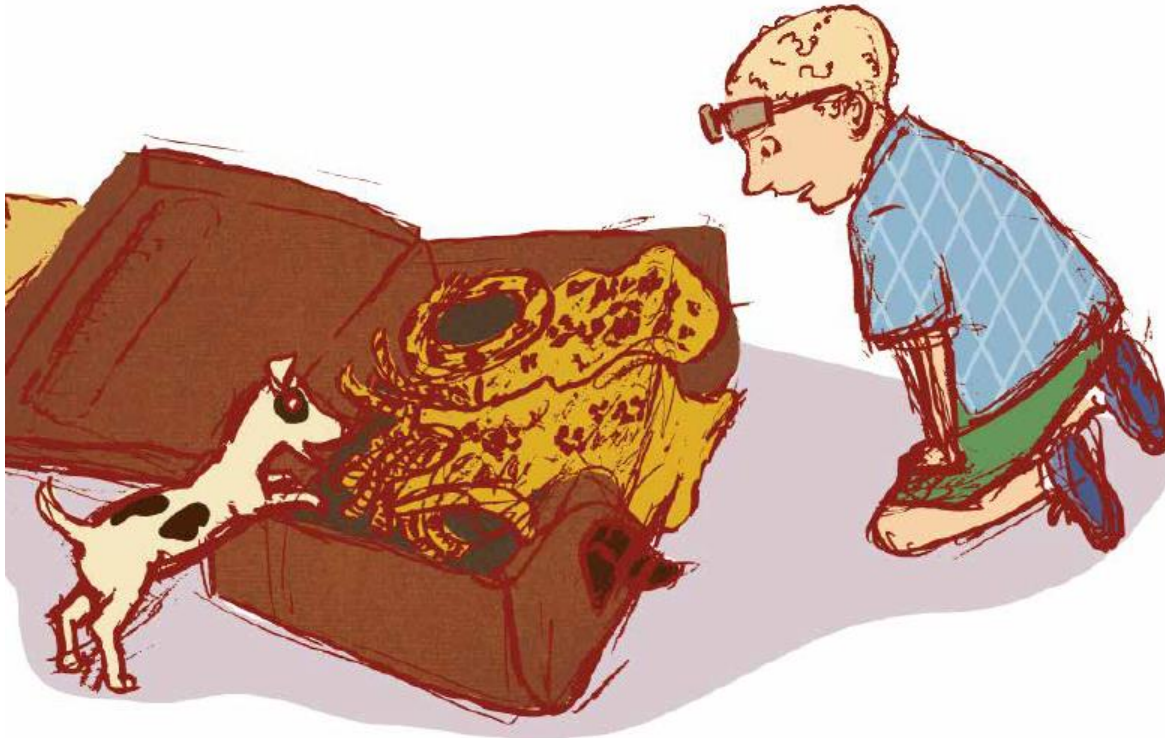


Tak usah, Wuri.
Aku bisa sendiri.

Coba kutebak!
Gemplong, kue cucur,
kembang goyang...

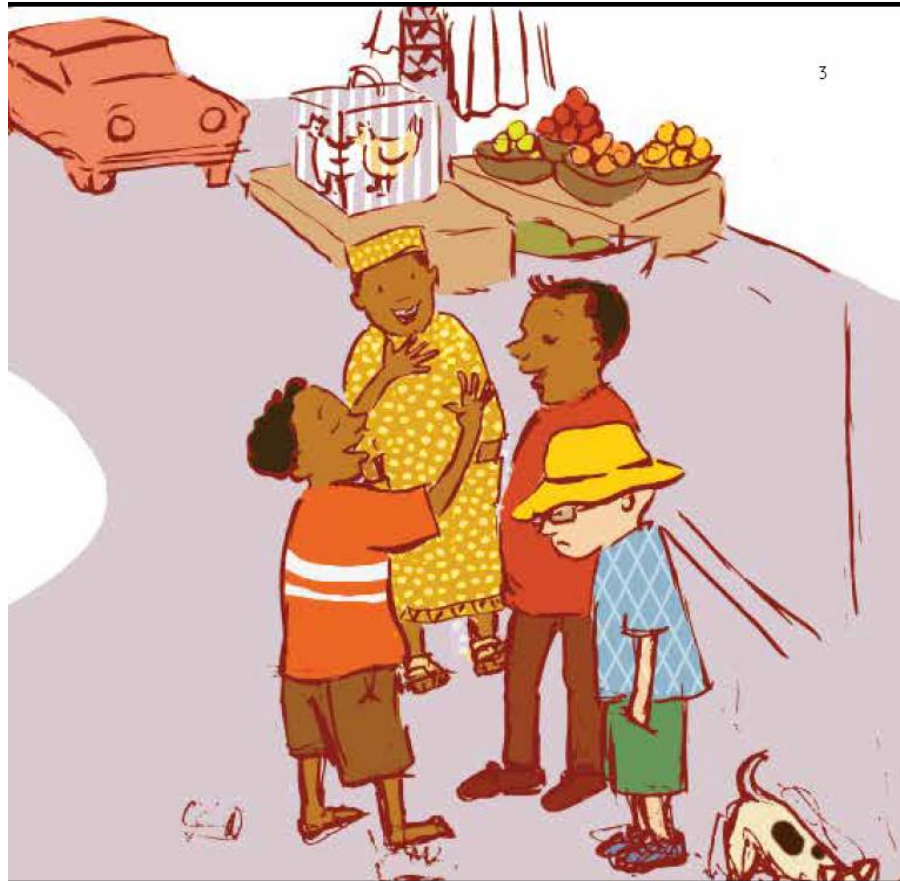


The Suitcase



Mbongeni Nzimande Elizabeth Pulles Leona Ingram

Source: RtR co-published, South Africa





2. Be aware of Intersectionality

- Create complex characters
- Appreciate individuality of experience
- Avoid over-generalization



Source: *Epi's new friend*
(RtR co-published,
Indonesia)



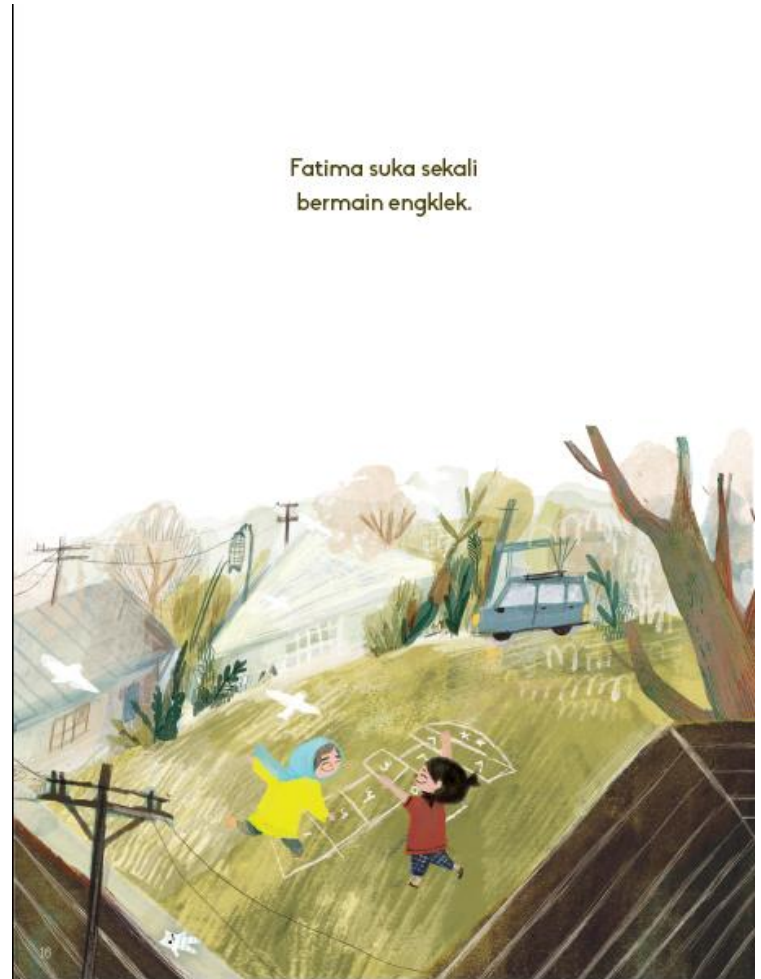
Ini puasa pertama Epi. Selamat berbuka puasa!





dan keesokan
harinya.

dan keesokan
harinya.



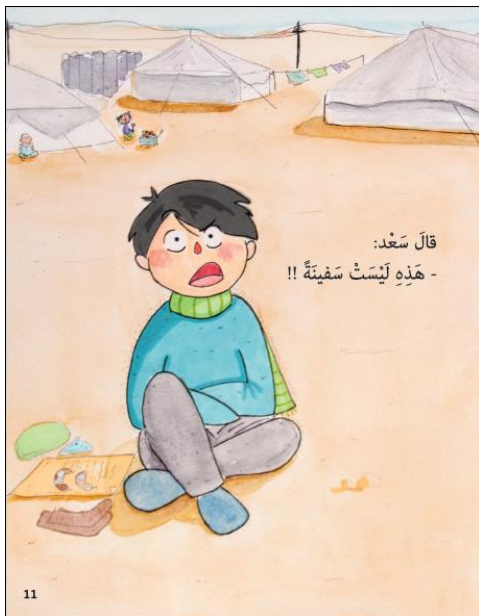
Fatima suka sekali
bermain engklek.

Ini malam terakhir
di bulan puasa.



3. Aspire for “Own Voices” stories

- #OwnVoices *—author from a marginalized/under-represented group writing about their **own** experiences
- Identities intersect, so this categorization is nuanced

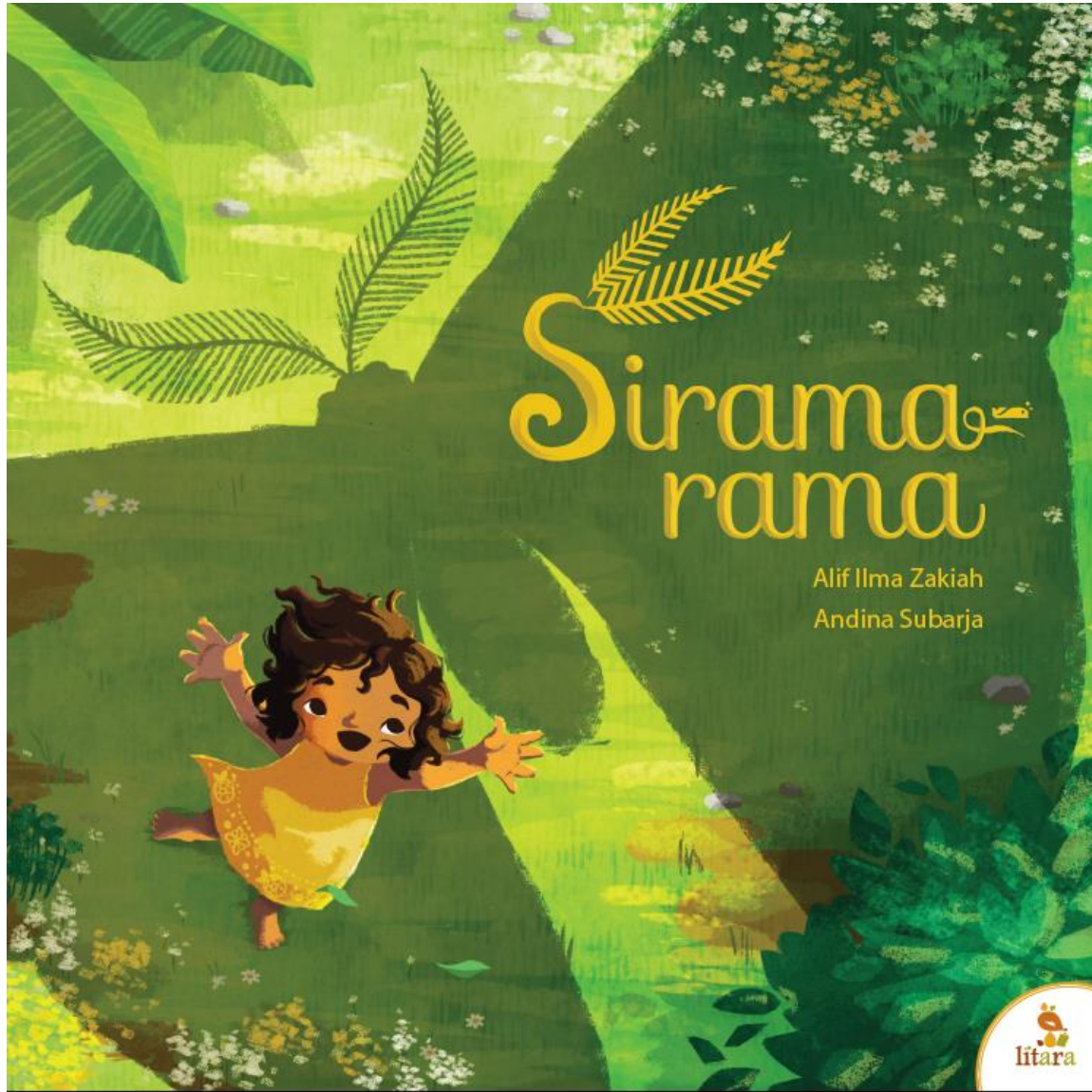


Source: *Play with Me*
(RtR co-published, Jordan)



Source: *When I Am Happy* (RtR co-published, Jordan)

*term coined by author, Corinne Duyvis



Source: *Sirama rama* (RtR co-published, Indonesia)



Apa Ayah sudah di angkot?

Mungkin.



Sudah di kapal?

Bisa jadi.

Sudah
di kereta?

Pesawat?



04



Aduh, Ara.
Tanya sirama-rama saja.

Sirama-rama!



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Di mana sirama-rama?



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Turun! Turun!
Terbang lebih rendah, sirama-rama.

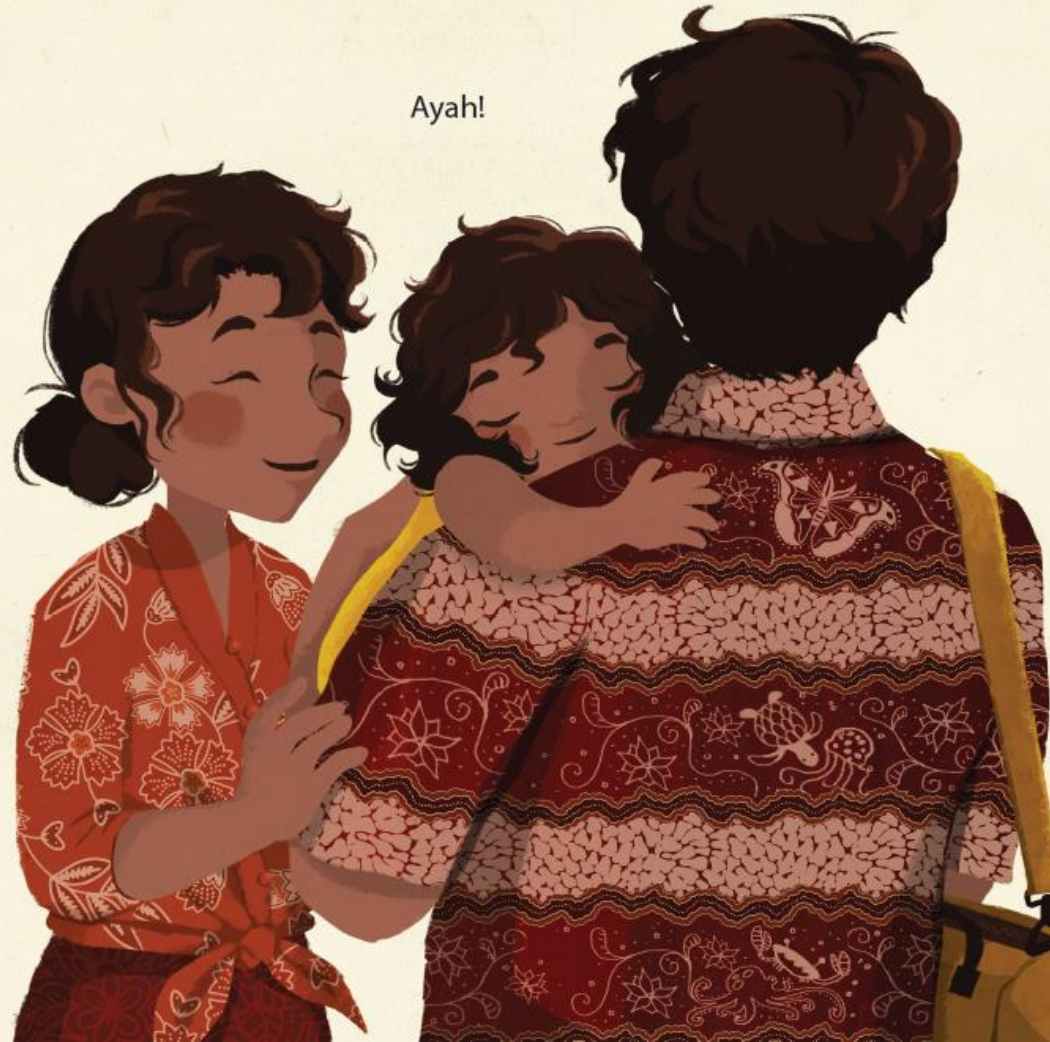
Kita cari Ayah di kapal.
Apa Ayah sudah di sini?

Ayah juga tidak ada.





Ayah!



4. Challenge stereotypes



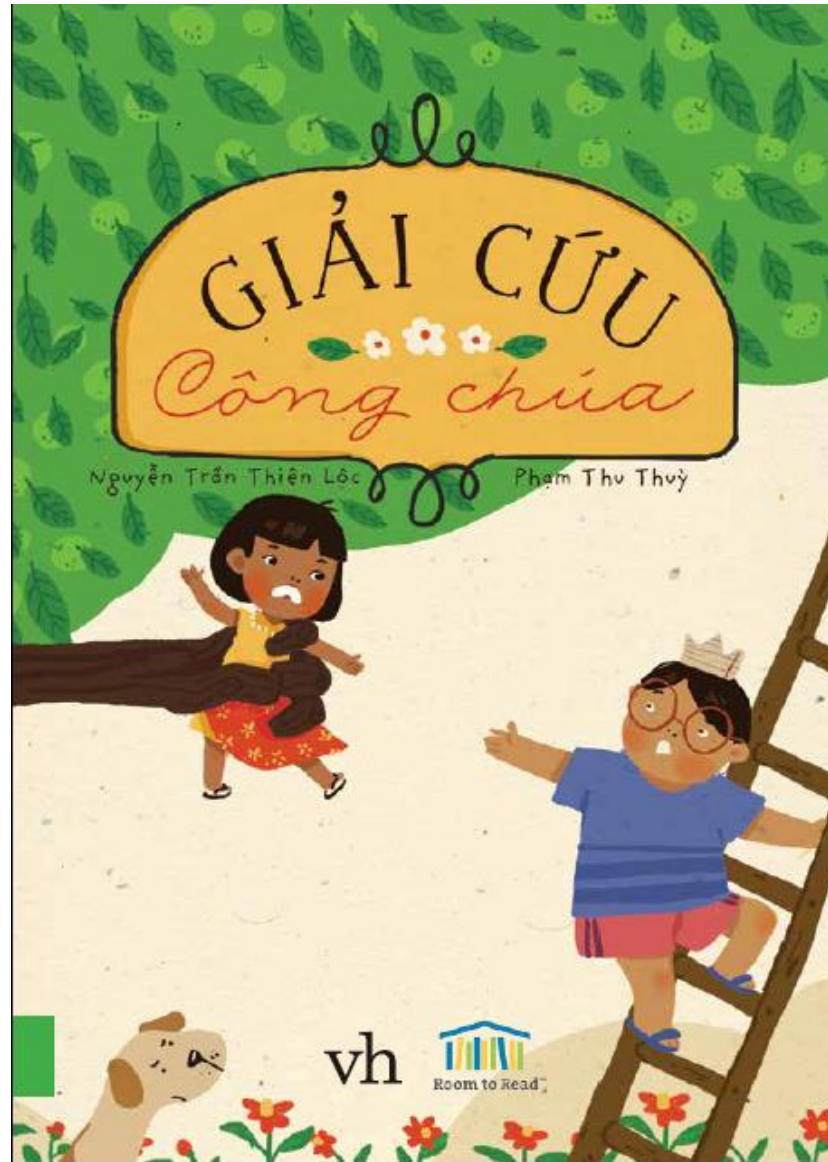
Source: *My Mom, The Driver* (RtR co-published, Philippines)

Billy joins his mother at work. His mother is a jeepney driver, a job usually associated with men.



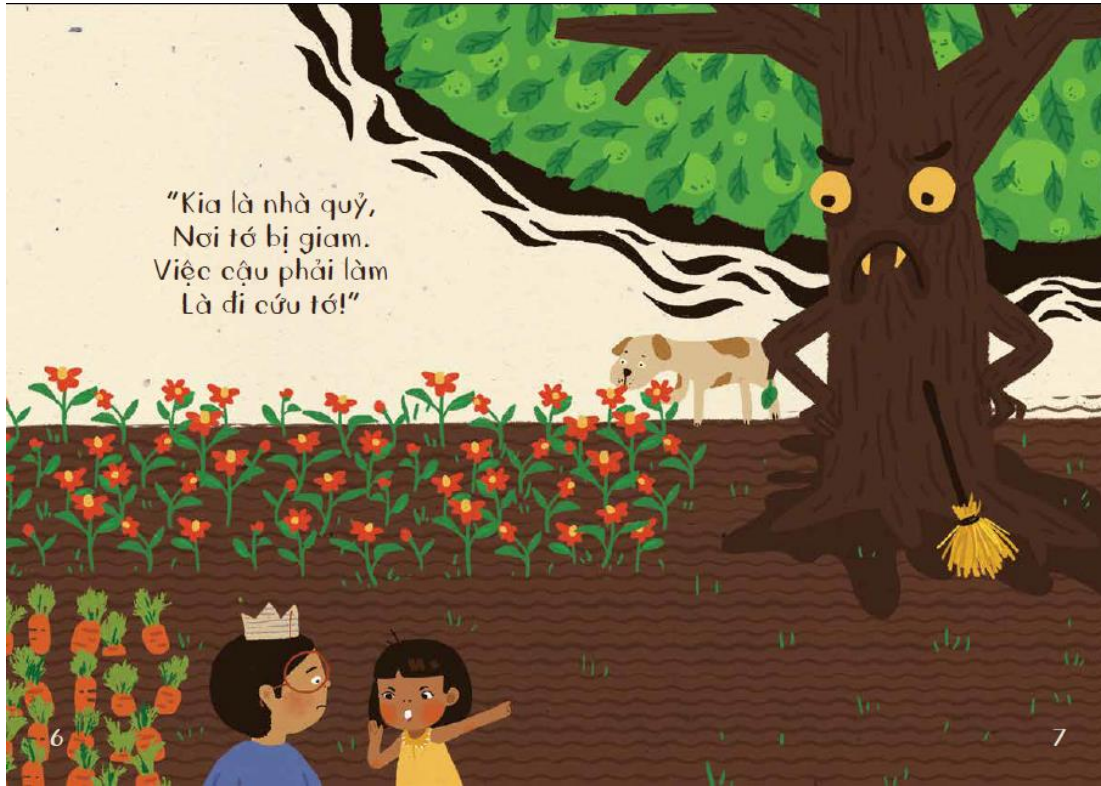
Source: *The Little Friend of Princess Pandan Berduri* (RtR co-published, Indonesia), 2018 Islamic Book Award

- Reimagining a folktale with an inclusion lens
 - focus on the cultural (rather than faith-based) aspects of the narrative
 - diminish patriarchal bias of original story
- A balancing act:
 - How far can a folktale be revised and still be culturally acceptable and keep original “flavor”, intent and integrity of the narrative intact?

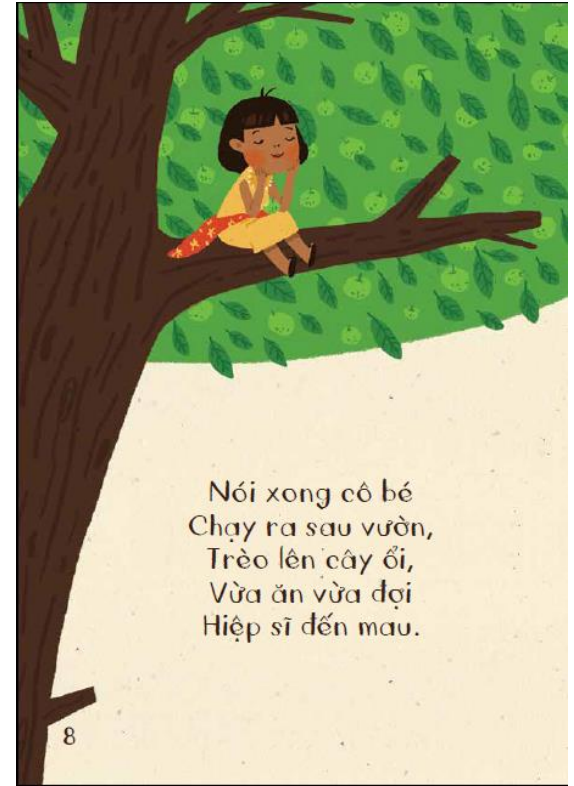


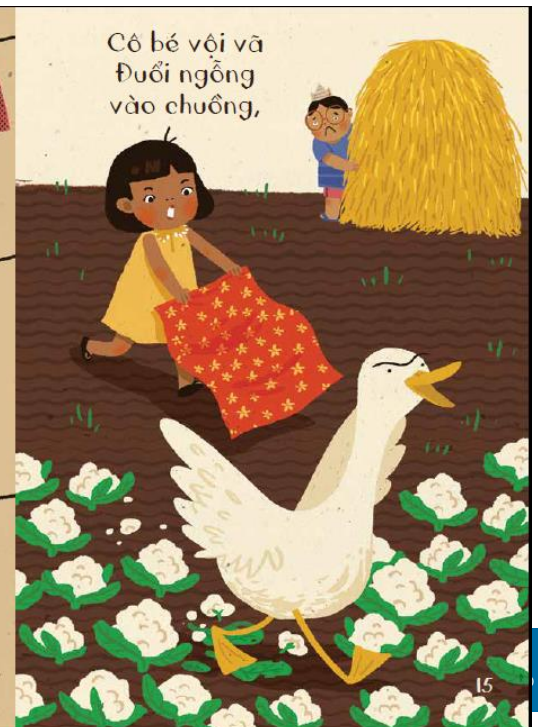
Source: *Rescue the Princess* (RtR Vietnam)

"Kia là nhà quý,
Nơi tớ bị giam.
Việc cậu phải làm
Là đi cứu tớ!"



Nói xong cô bé
Chạy ra sau vườn,
Trèo lên cây ổi,
Vừa ăn vừa đợi
Hiệp sĩ đến mau.







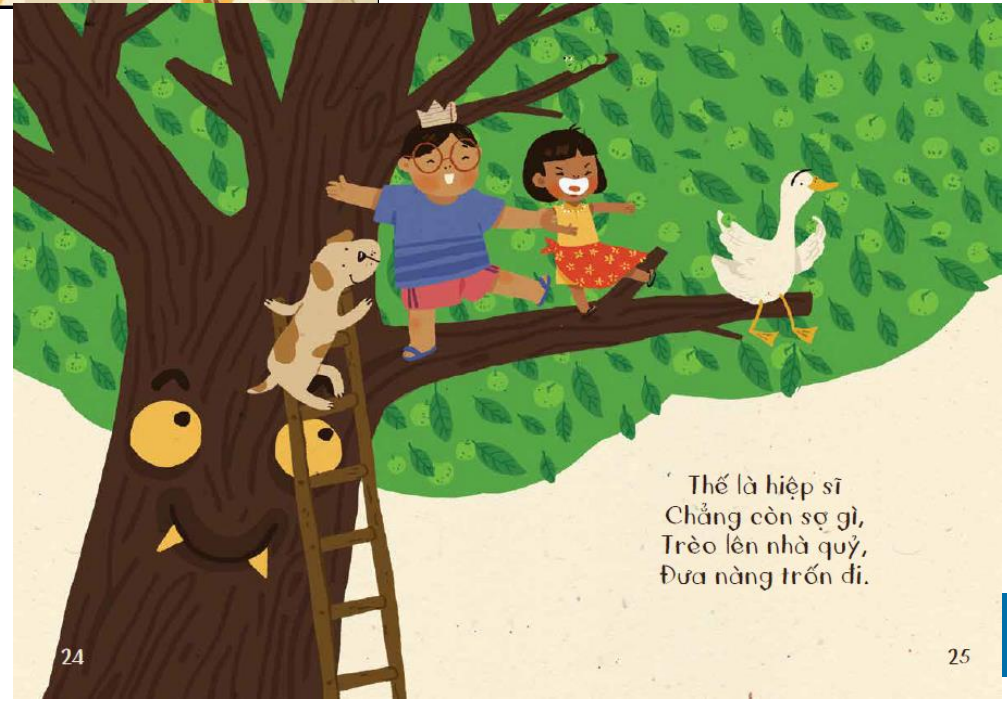
Lại nghe âm i:
"Tôi không biết trèo
Cây ổi quá cao
Lỡ té thì khổ!"

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Cô bé hăm hờ
Chạy đi lấy thang.



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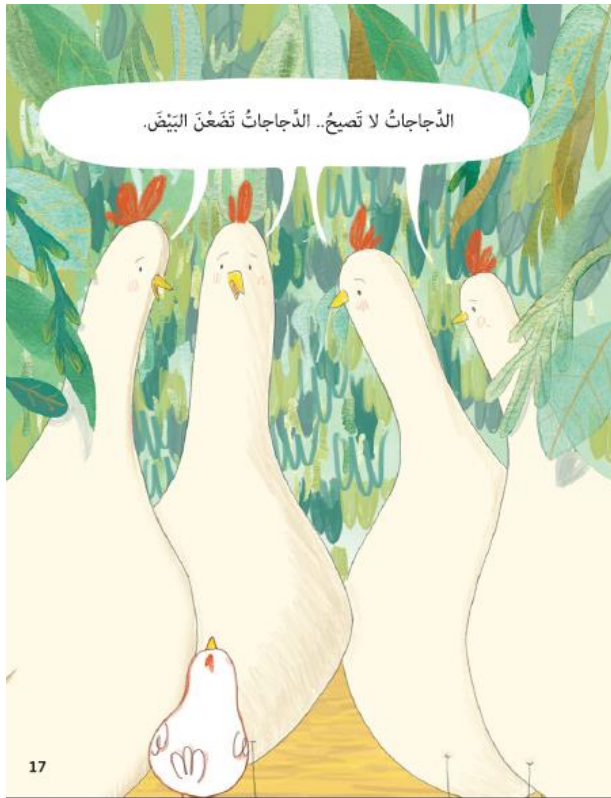


Thế là hiệp sĩ
Chẳng còn sợ gì,
Trèo lên nhà quý,
Đưa nàng trốn đi.

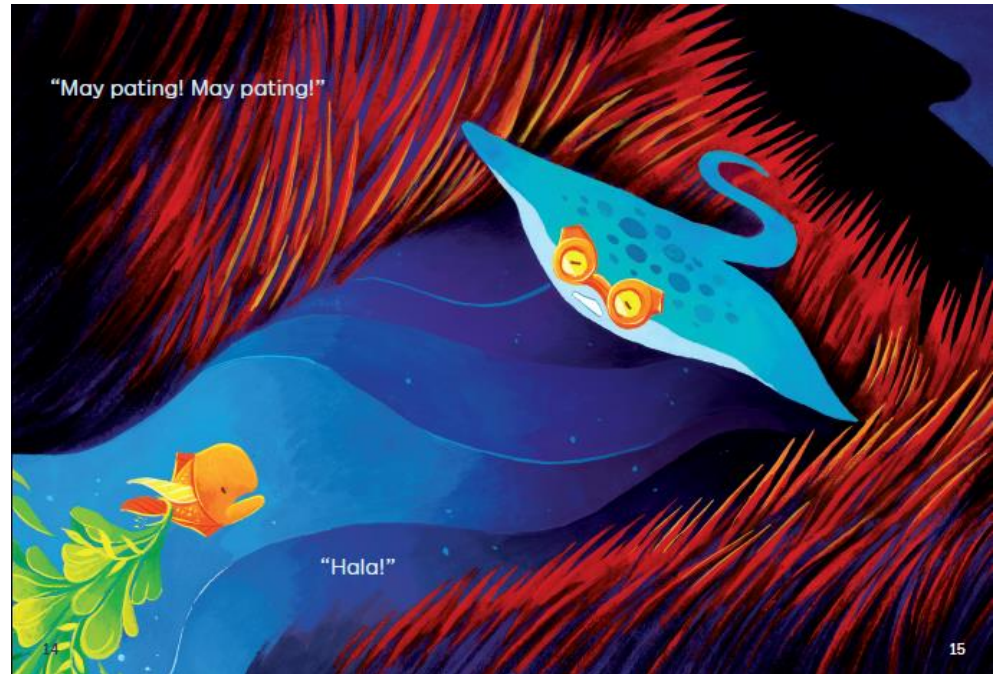
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5. Inclusion with Animal Fiction



Source: *The Hen Farida* (RtR co-published, Jordan). Etisalat Award for Children's Literature nominee



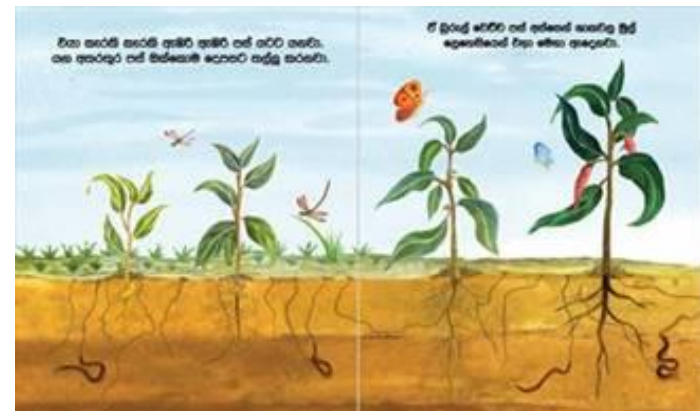
Source: *Let's Go, Itok!* (RtR co-published, Philippines)

Conclusion



Final Thoughts

1. Assess diversity of book collection
2. Further examine who the book creators are
3. Continue to include marginalized communities. Note gaps (e.g. LGBTQIAP, gender identity).
4. Inclusion is also about access (eg. children who are blind or deaf)
5. Diversify genres



Source: Wel & Gadawila (RtR Sri Lanka Narrative nonfiction titles)

Literacycloud.org

- Digitized Room to Read books (1100+ titles so far), videos & resources



Recommended Books

[See More Books >](#)



♡ 0 📖 19

Level 1

A Bike for Mom

Author Nurhayati Pujastuti
Illustrator Adimalia Nila

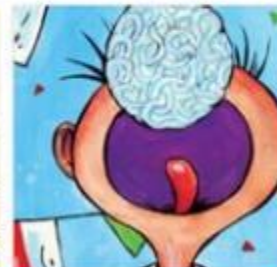


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Level 3

The Giant's New Friends

Author Nancy Sitohang
Illustrator Gufroni Vedian



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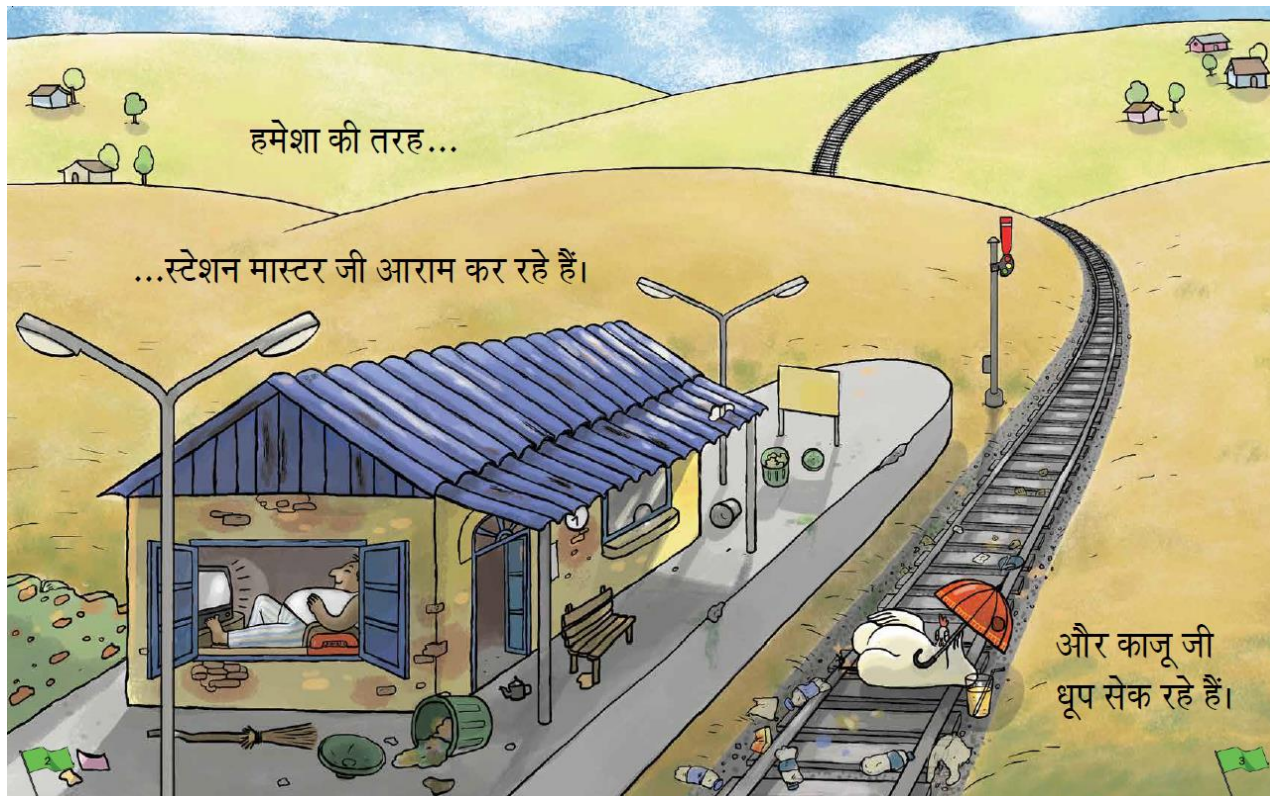
Level 1

Crunch! Crunch!

Author Dian Kristiani
Illustrator Ella Elyiana

Acknowledgments

Book Creators, Publishing partners, and Room to Read staff worldwide.



Source: *Kaju's Train* (RtR India)

Questions?



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