

#OwnVoices: Behind the Hashtag

Background: What is #OwnVoices?

The #OwnVoices movement was created with the goal of highlighting the importance and urgency of diversity in literature. The term #OwnVoices was coined by writer [Corinne Duyvis](#) to reflect marginalized characters written by marginalized writers.

It's important to keep in mind that #OwnVoices represents much more than ethnicity or gender. It spans any and every marginalized group. The movement outlines a clear need for diverse voices and narratives in literature; narratives that can only be told authentically through the lens of someone who has lived and breathed those experiences ([Washington Independent](#)).

Why is it important?

When marginalized characters are created by a writer who doesn't identify with that specific group or has not truly experienced what someone in that group might experience, even with the best intentions, they are at risk of creating stereotypical or cliché characters that don't truly represent or reflect that group.

There is significant market demand for stories with diverse characters. Audiences want to see and read about characters that reflect themselves and **real people**. The recent successes of [The Hate U Give](#), [To All The Boys I've Loved Before](#) and [Call Me By Your Name](#) are arguably attributable to that. However, diverse audiences want and deserve to see authentic characters and plot lines - not harmful or potentially offensive stereotypes.

Furthermore, there is a clear underrepresentation of diverse authors. The publishing industry, like so many others, is known for perpetuating a bias toward content written by white, cis, straight and/or able-bodied writers -- whether purposely or unconsciously, the bias exists ([The Guardian](#)).

According to a study run by the Cooperative Children's Book Centre at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, of 3,500 children's books published in the US and Canada in 2014, just 11 per cent were about non-white characters and only 8 per cent were written by non-white authors ([The Globe and Mail](#)). By driving forward the need for #OwnVoices content, the industry is creating increased demand and opportunities for authors of marginalized groups.

Writing an #OwnVoices story

A common misconception in the industry is that #OwnVoices stories need to be issue-based or revolve around heavy societal injustices. That isn't always the case. It's more about introducing authentic perspectives and characters, and finding that unique and relatable narrative based on your own personal experiences. We each have our own life lessons, experiences and/or hardships that are unique to us. These stories deserve to be held and unleashed into the world! We just need to make sure we are going about it thoughtfully and in a way that best reflects the communities we identify with.

For more advice on the topic, there are several resources online to help writers craft diverse characters as well (check out [this great list](#) for starters).