

Laurel Krapivkin

28 January 2019

A Space for Everybody?: The Politics of Picture Book Representations of Public Library Spaces

Many picture books have been written about public library spaces. However, these books often paint overly-simplistic and idealistic images of public library spaces. Representations of the library as a place where every child is welcome to read, write, and explore do not tell the complete story about the complexity of library space. Not every child has historically been welcomed in public libraries in the U.S., and even now, libraries are still not always safe spaces for all children. Clearly, the public library space has never been neutral; it is a space where “public” space is complicated to be “political” space.

Despite the tendency in children’s literature to simplify the politics of library spaces, there are authors and illustrators who have addressed these tensions by writing and illustrating picture books that encourage questions such as: Who is welcome in public library spaces? What activities are encouraged or forbidden? Who holds the power to encourage and support literacy in library spaces? How do individuals cope in the face of exclusion? In this paper, I will look at these tensions as illustrated through the interplay of text and pictures in Ann Malaspina’s *Finding Lincoln* (illustrated by Colin Bootman) and Pat Mora’s *Tomás and the Library Lady* (illustrated by Raul Colon). By examining paratextual elements, as well as patterns found in image and text (such as use of color and the Anglo-savior trope), we can see how these books reveal tensions around access, literacy, and race in library spaces.