

YA Diversity Panel at SCIBA

This isn't a review, but I also want to use this blog to share news on the subject of diversity in books, and today an [article](#) about the YA diversity panel at a recent Southern California Independent Booksellers Association event caught my eye.

The YA diversity panel, titled “Embracing the Other” featured four authors – three white, one Asian – and a white moderator. With that line-up the focus clearly wasn't targeted to racial diversity, but meant to cover a wide range of what the term encompasses, including diversity of gender, sexual orientation, and mental and physical able-bodiedness. Authors Elana K. Arnold (*Infamous*, Carolrhoda Lab), [Aaron] Hartzler, Yvonne Prinz (*If You're Lucky*, Algonquin), and Cindy Pon (*Serpentine*, Month9Books), discussed the diversity of the points of view represented in their YA books.

With diversity as a critical focal point in publishing at large, Pon spoke about the specific aspect of racial diversity in children's literature. “I never read a book with anyone that looked like me,” said Pon, adding that it wasn't until her 30s when she saw a book with an Asian female protagonist. She noted that there is still a huge dearth in inclusive speculative fiction, adding that “it's hard to be a trailblazer.” Pon added that the whiteness represented in literature is so pervasive that she had never even written a story with an Asian character in it until she penned *Silver Phoenix*, and she had been writing since her tween years.

It's a bit disappointing that this panel only featured one non-white author (although the article mentions that Hartzler is openly gay). What Pon says about the lack of inclusive speculative fiction is interesting. It's absurd to argue that it would be “unrealistic” for a story in any genre to include non-white characters, but it's especially baffling when people try to apply this to speculative fiction. If your story can include aliens, zombies, wizards, talking animals, and any number of elements that don't exist in the real world, it certainly can -- and should -- include characters of color. Yet sci-fi and fantasy are just as whitewashed as realistic fiction.

I wasn't familiar with any of these authors and was curious about the books mentioned, so I looked them up. As I'm an avid fantasy reader, *Serpentine* sounds right up my alley. *If You're Lucky*, which features a schizophrenic protagonist, sounds intriguing as well. As soon as I can acquire them, I'll be reading and reviewing them both for this blog.