GENDER, DIVERSITY, & CITIZENSHIP:
A NARRATIVE CRITICISM OF I AM JAZZ

Linfield College Student Symposium:
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ABSTRACT

A narrative analysis of the 2014 children’s picture book, *I am Jazz*, was conducted to uncover how young audiences are taught about diversity and inclusion through books. The setting, characters, narrator, and target audiences were evaluated to decipher how readers are educated about transgenderism and diversity in greater context. Specific rhetorical qualities in the visual and written elements emphasize the importance of diversity, individuality, and acceptance. This particular book has spurred a range of support and protest since its publication, and it is an important example of the emotional and political power of a story. An awareness of the messages sent to young learners is a critical part of fostering inclusivity and creating global citizens.

The paper upon which this poster was based was written for the Senior Seminar course in Communication Arts. The paper was competitively selected for presentation at the Northwest Communication Association Conference in April 2017.
PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify rhetorical ways in which young global citizens are being influenced and taught through literature about citizenship, diversity, and inclusion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

What rhetorical devices are used to define and express “good citizenship”?  
How are young readers taught the value of diversity and inclusion?  
How can picture books be used to foster a development and understanding of acceptance?
I AM JAZZ

- *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings
  Introduces transgenderism and the importance of diversity and inclusion
- Follows the grade-school transition of a transgender girl, Jazz
- Describes emotional ups and downs of seeking acceptance from her family and friends

Herthel, Jessica and Jazz Jennings. *I am Jazz*. Illustrated by Shelagh McNicholes. 2014.
METHOD: NARRATIVE CRITICISM

- Walter Fisher: Humans are instinctual storytellers

- Narrative criticism:
  1. Choose appropriate narrative artifact
  2. Identify goals and themes
  3. Isolate rhetorical elements
  4. Assess rhetorical elements through the lens of the narrative’s theme

“Symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to introduce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common”

(Foss 308)
(Fisher 4)
ANALYSIS

NARRATIVE CRITICISM
Analyze the rhetorical elements and impact of:

Setting
Characters
Narrator
Audience
SETTING

- Includes common locations relatable to audiences, such as soccer practice

- Reduces the gap between Jazz and readers

- Validates Jazz’s story and provides relevant context

Herthel, Jessica and Jazz Jennings. I am Jazz. Illustrated by Shelagh McNicholes. 2014
CHARACTERS

- **Family**
  - Unable to connect with siblings, but supported by parents, as shown below

- **Peers**
  - Represent varying reactions of acceptance and rejection during Jazz’s transition, seen in the image below
NARRATOR

- Jazz: first-person perspective
- Intimate details and insight
- Relatable emotions
- Simple language
- Honest, reliable narrator

I don’t mind being different. Different is special! I think what matters most is what a person is like inside.

And inside, I am happy. I am having fun. I am proud!

I am Jazz!

Herthel, Jessica and Jazz Jennings. I am Jazz. Illustrated by Shelagh McNicholes. 2014.
AUDIENCE

- Young children
  Uses simple phrases and appealing illustrations

- Parents
  Introduces conversations about identity and diversity

- Educators
  Emphasizes broad implications and the importance of diversity and acceptance
CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- In *I am Jazz*, diversity and inclusion are expressed through both language and images.
- Truthful storytelling leads to respectful dialogues and peaceful actions, as pictured to the left.
- Current societal situations demand respect for diversity and efforts towards global citizenship.

Herthel, Jessica and Jazz Jennings. *I am Jazz*. Illustrated by Shelagh McNicholes. 2014.


