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### The Effects of the Socio-Political Climate on Children's Literature Over the Past Eighty Years

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The Effects of the Socio-Political Climate on Children's Literature Over the Past Eighty Years

By

Molly Daniels

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
English Honors-in-Discipline Program  
Department of Literature and Language  
East Tennessee State University

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Molly Daniels

Date

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Dr. Phyllis Thompson, Thesis Mentor

Date

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Dr. Martha Michieka, Reader

Date

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	7
<i>And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street</i> Analysis.....	12
<i>Where the Wild Things Are</i> Analysis.....	28
<i>Ada Twist, Scientist</i> Analysis.....	36
Epilogue.....	45
Works Cited.....	47

## Abstract

When looking back through the last eighty years, one thing is certain: the socio-political climate has changed dramatically. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where racism and sexism was rampant to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where equal rights and acceptance of all is becoming the norm, the climate has flipped throughout the last one hundred years. The question to then ask is how does the climate impact literature, specifically children's literature. Research shows that children's literature is impacted, but research does not describe how it is impacted. This thesis will work to qualify the quantitative research by explaining how the socio-political climate impacts children's literature. By looking at three texts over the past eighty years, the qualitative analysis shows how children's literature is impacted by the socio-political climate. The three texts that will be analyzed are *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* by Dr. Seuss (1937), *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (1963), and *Ada Twist, Scientist* by Andrea Beaty (2016).

## Introduction

Picture books are the first pieces of literature that children come in contact with because they are created with children in mind. However, “the assumption about children is that their imagination is “visual” in a way that gives them an intuitive ability to understand pictorial information. The assumption about pictures is that they are automatically understandable. Neither of these assumptions is true” (Nodelman and Reimer, 275). Since the assumption is that picture books are somehow less meaningful because their message is direct, this thesis works to show how the historical context of the time period that a work of children’s literature is published in affects the pictorial story as well as the written story. This thesis analyzes picture books over the course of the past eighty years. Picture books are being analyzed because they not only have a written story, but they also have a pictorial story. Both of these aspects add to the overall story. With that being said, just as words often have deeper meanings, so do pictures. In children’s literature, there is no exception.

When analyzing literature, it is important to pay attention to the “text’s absences [or] the ideas or assumptions it takes for granted and therefore does not explicitly assert (Nodelman and Reimer, 156). Text absences often indicate underlying assumptions or biases that the author has, and these assumptions and biases can show the socio-political climate of the time period. Historical laws, political changes, and societal norms are all factors of the climate that work together to impact literature, and the impact is often shown in what is absent in the piece of literature. Children’s picture books are one form of literature that is impacted by socio-political changes. The text’s absences, along with what is present in the book, often speak to the socio-political climate of the time which the book was published. These absences often present as intentional decisions to leave a group of people out in order to appease the societal norms of the

time period. However, sometimes the absences were unintentional but still as equally detrimental to the group of people that is missing. An author may not be aware of a bias he or she has, or the author may not be aware that he or she left anyone out. However, this does not take away from the harmful effects that these absences can have on these groups of people. The following texts are analyzed with the socio-political climate of the time it was published in mind and with the audience (children) in mind. These texts were chosen to be representatives of the time period they were published in. Though they are not be all encompassing of the time period, they are still representatives because they were published during the time period.

This thesis will prove that the socio-political climate does impact children's literature, and it will work to show how it impacts children's literature. This thesis will look at scholarship that discusses trends in children's literature over the past one hundred years, and it will look at current theory regarding representation. The thesis will then analyze three books published over the course of the last eighty years and determine how the socio-political climate impacted these books. The thesis will begin with the oldest book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, go through *Where the Wild Things Are*, and end with the newest book, *Ada Twist, Scientist*. In *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, the focus of the analysis will be on representation, or lack thereof, of people and what the continual nature of the parade represents. With *Where the Wild Things Are*, the analysis will look at what gender stereotypes look like and how they impact those involved, and it will look at how representation has changed or stayed the same since *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. Finally, *Ada Twist, Scientist* will be used to show how gender and racial representation has changed since the previously published novels but also how there is still room for growth and change. All of these will be analyzed with

the intention of showing that children's literature is impacted by the socio-political climate and with the intention of showing how children's literature is impacted.

## Literature Review

The following research provides insights into what trends were occurring in children's literature over the last one hundred years. The scholarship quantifies representation within children's literature, while also describing how those who are represented are portrayed. This scholarship looks into gender and racial stereotypes and loosely connects it to the socio-political climate of the time the books were published. This scholarship is showing the trends in children's literature without indicating why these trends are occurring. This literature review will serve to look at the primary arguments of this scholarship and examine current theory regarding these arguments.

In "Gender Representation in Children's Literature: 1900-1984," Elizabeth Grauerholz and Bernice A. Pescosolido study the amount of male characters depicted in children's literature in comparison to female characters in children's literature. They looked at books published from 1900 to 1984, and they looked at all books by focusing award winning books and books that have not won awards. Their goal was to see how gender was represented with adult characters, child characters, animal characters, and gendered objects such as "mother nature."

Grauerholz and Pescosolido discovered that in every category, men were depicted more than women. In the 1920s, there was a 2:1 ratio of the amount of central adult male characters depicted as there were women characters. Since the study ends with the 1980s, there is missing data for the last thirty years. However, since the 1920s, there has been a greater ratio of the amount of central male characters depicted as there were women characters. For example, in the 1940s, there was an 8:1 ratio of central adult male characters depicted as there were women characters. Out of all nine decades in this study, the 1920s had the lowest for this criterion.



While “Gender Representation in Children's Literature: 1900-1984” quantifies the amount of male characters versus female characters over nine decades, it fails to completely take into account how the socio-political climate impacts children’s literature and its portrayal of males and females in children’s literature. The study ends with a discussion of what it is lacking and issues that future research can explore. The authors say, “more specific characteristics about the sociocultural context need to be included in the development of a theory linking gender-role images and social structure” (Grauerholz and Pescosolido).

Another study that deals with trends in children’s literature is “Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century” by Bernice A. Pescosolido, Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie. They studied the amount of African American people portrayed in children’s literature over the course of several decades. They examined a limited set of books by focusing on award winning books, which skews the reality of the deficit in the number of books where African American people are depicted.

Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie determined that “Blacks tend to be relatively invisible in children's literature, and when they do appear, they are depicted in negative ways, especially prior to 1945.” In every set of criteria in this study and over the course of all five decades in this study, African American people are depicted in children’s literature at a fraction of what white people are depicted. These authors produced two studies in one because it compares books that depict only one African American person to books that depict more than one African American person, and it does not account for how little African American people are depicted as the central character. This study does present children’s books that can be controversial, but it does not detail what makes them controversial in relation to race.

“Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books Through the Mid- and Late-Twentieth Century” does explicitly state that when racial tension in the United States is higher than the research indicates that African American people are depicted significantly less or not at all. It does not explicitly detail the racial tensions and politically charged happenings that is causing this decline in depictions. This study also does not depict the number of books that are not award winning, which would change the numbers considerably. Grauerholz, Pescosolido, and Milkie do present children’s books that can be controversial, but it does not analyze what the authors considered to be possibly controversial.

Another scholarship is “Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children” by Lenore J. Weitzman, Deborah Eifler, Elizabeth Hokada, and Catherine Ross. It opens with a discussion about how women are invisible in children’s literature. The authors examine how women are underrepresented in prize-winning books and how women are portrayed in comparison to men in books where they are represented. The key aspect of this study is socialization and how that works because children’s literature is socializing children, while also describing how this could negatively impact children.

Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross explicitly state that children’s literature trends and societal expectations and norms are directly correlated, but they do not explain how. The authors write that children’s literature teaches children values, and if children see we do not value women, then this will become socialized into their minds. They analyze children’s books as well, which is an area that has been lacking in other studies that have been mentioned. They have all briefly mentioned children’s books, but this one analyzes pictures and comments on what these books might mean for children.

In “Sex-Differentiated Behaviors in Nonsexist Picture Books,” Albert J. Davis analyzes how behaviors are presented in children’s books based on gender. He analyzes these behaviors in award winning books that are considered to be nonsexist. Because of the criteria of them being nonsexist, the results show that more women are portrayed as independent than men, which reverses the typical stereotype. By adding the criteria of the book being nonsexist, the pool they are looking at are automatically going to be leaning more in favor of women being treated equally.

The most interesting aspect of “Sex-Differentiated Behaviors in Nonsexist Picture Books” is that Davis collects data on the different behaviors that is shown in both men and women, and then this data is compared. Davis is not just comparing how many times men and women are shown, though that is talked about too. Davis takes it one step deeper and talks about behaviors that are traditionally seen as masculine and behaviors that are traditionally seen as feminine.

Davis captures the change that is occurring in children’s literature between the 1920s and now, and it is a significant one. However, this study is still lacking the detailed look of how this relates to what is happening in the political climate and the social climate.

Besides the above scholarship regarding trends in children’s literature, there is a relevant theory that pertains to this thesis. In “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” Kimberle Crenshaw details how a lot of studies and point of views lack the consideration of how race and gender might influence issues at the same time. While this study is not explicitly related to this thesis, these issues are important to the issue at hand. All of the previous studies mentioned regard female versus male or people of color versus white people. It does not combine the ideas together, and they influence children’s literature more than is mentioned in any of these

studies. In the past, intersectionality has not been discussed and researched as much concerning children's literature. Discussing race, gender, sexuality, ability/disability, and class is essential for the development of quality children's literature for the future; however, how and why these aspects come together is even more crucial.

Overall, most of these studies lacked looking explicitly at the socio-political climate happening at the time of the study, this thesis will greatly impact this area that is lacking. Another important part that these studies are lacking is analyzing literature from the various time periods. A few studies do analyze literature a little, but they do not spend significant time analyzing the books of the time period when that is an important factor. The studies addressed the fact that women and people of color are unrepresented in children's literature, but they did not go into explicit detail as to why this is happening. All of the studies listed above are older, and research is lacking on current trends. This thesis will address this as well and base it on current popular children's books and the current political climate.

### ***And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* Analysis**

*And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* by Dr. Seuss is a story about a boy named Marco. His father would ask what he saw on his walk to school each day, so Marco decided to imagine a parade. He returns home, and when his dad asks what Marco saw, he says what he actually saw. He does not say anything that he imagined. This book was published in 1937. This children's picture book represents the socio-political climate of when it was published. This is shown in its colorful pictures, representations of people, and what groups of people it is missing. The aspects of this story that are present along with the ones that are absent combine to depict the socio-political climate of 1937.

In this section of the paper, I will demonstrate that *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* reveals the ideologies and assumptions of 1937 even if it did not intend to. This will be done in several ways. Through the written story, the pictures are mostly described, limited details are added to the story from what is written, though there are a few. The pictorial story elevates the details and shines a different light onto the story. This story shows how the idea of reading, for children, is different than what might be expected. Children primarily watch the story unfold instead of reading it while the story unfolds. How this story moves has a lot to do with how the story is able to be watched, but it especially creates an element in the book that presents the idea of life being an infinite circle. As the story unfolds, the point of view and perspective continues to show that life is an infinite circle. Finally, this story uses color, presentation of people, and obvious omissions of people to showcase the socio-political ideals of the time period in which this story was published.

First of all, when looking at children's books, it is important to remember who the audience is, which is children. Picture books, especially, are written for children who may not yet

be able to read, or if they can read, they cannot read very much. That is why the pictures in children's books are so important because they are what the children focus on. As a result, the pictures are what most impact the children. If the child is alone looking at a book, they are likely mostly looking at the pictures if they are unable to read. Taking that into consideration, it is important to rethink what reading is for the target audience of children's picture books. For young children, reading involves more watching than actually reading the words on the page. They focus on what is shown more than what is written and thus read. However, some children's books are made for this more than others due to how the pictures move and flow throughout the story. *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* is a picture book that can be watched and not read, due to how the images moves. This movement will be analyzed later.

Secondly, examining the pictures is important because for children, the story is mostly in the pictures and not in the text. When considering if books can be watched instead of read, there are a few aspects to consider. First, watching something is traditionally considered passive. This is not passive, however. Watching *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* is active. The mind is taking in what is happening: the sound, the background, everything and creating the purpose of the story. The movement and flow of the pictures makes this a book that can be watched because it is drawn as though a parade is occurring, and the readers are there. Since the readers are meant to feel as if they are there, they are able to see that the parade is moving and changing. The part of the parade that Marco sees first is a horse-drawn wagon with a man, but as the story progresses the parade changes, more spectacles are added like zebras, elephants, carts, and men playing instruments. This change and shift create the sense that the parade is ongoing. Each time there is a new element added into the images of the parade it creates the feeling that the parade is almost finished, that there is an end. By adding more to each image, the parade

keeps going because the amount of parts the illustrator could add seems endless. This sense that the parade is ongoing shows how watching this story is active. The readers engage with the images and have to interpret what is happening. They had to understand that Marco is experiencing a parade and what that could mean for him. However, the readers are not idly sitting by watching this happening to Marco; they are there with Marco during the parade because he is not shown in most of the images. He is not shown and thus readers are there with him watching and interpreting the parade.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the fact that when a story is read to a child, the child is often watching the pictures and hearing the narration, which is much like a film. If children are experiencing the book alone and are too young to read, the words do not mean anything, so they are looking to the pictures to interpret the story. But, when the children are being read to, the meaning of the story is invoked in the same manner as with a film. The children watch the images and hear someone describe the story in much the same way a narrator does. They are then actively connecting the words and the pictures. When the story's text is taken into consideration, it further shows that this is a story that can be watched more often than read. The text is simple and often describes the pictures without adding much to the story. There are the moments where Marco is discussing with his father that give some context to the story, but a lot of what is said and described can be interpreted from the story. The insight that is gained from these parts of the story explicitly tell the readers he goes somewhere and sees something happen. However, this can be interpreted through the pictures. He begins somewhere that the readers do not know (if readers just look at the pictures), but then he clearly goes somewhere else because he begins to see the parade that he was not seeing before. Without the text, the ending presents itself as if he has gone to another location or finally arrived at his destination. This is the most

important part of the story for text because without the text, the readers would not know that he is returning home. The idea that Marco leaves home, goes on an adventure, and returns home is an important aspect that will be discussed later in this analysis.

As mentioned above, the movement in this story helps to tell this story. Throughout the entire book, everything is facing to the right. As the story flows, the pictures flow to the right. The people and animals are looking toward the right, and the carts and carriages are facing that way as well. Since all of their gazes and all of the objects are pointing to the right, it seems as if there is something to the right. Either the parade is going toward something that the readers never see, or the parade is looking to its ending point. Whichever it is, neither is shown. The reader's point of view is focused in so much on the parade that when the parade is over or arrives at its destination the reader does not know because the point of view is so focused on the elements of the parade. This parade is presented as if it were never ending, and thus it presents a feeling of desire for something that cannot be achieved. The point of view shows that something is just a bit too far out of reach to achieve or to see, and while it is still close, it is unreachable or unachievable. This is important because it gives the sense that Marco is unable to achieve something. When something is never ending, then Marco can never reach the end. Marco's life is a never-ending circle, which is discussed later in this analysis. He is continuing his daily walks and daily discussions with his dad, but he does not see the end to it. Marco is never going to be able to satisfy his dad's questions with what he sees on his daily walks. He feels as though he is never going to be able to end this daily occurrence.

Similar to this, near the end of the book, Marco is walking up steps. While the readers know that these are the steps to his home because the text says, "I'm almost home," the readers never see Marco go into his home (Dr. Seuss). This makes the story feel unfinished in neither a



positive nor negative way because readers are meant to assume that he made it home because of the phrase “I’m almost home” and then the conversation with his dad (Dr. Seuss). The movement throughout the book has led to this one moment that is the climax of the story, but it is still unresolved. The readers do not know where Marco is, besides the text saying that he is going home. Notice how the text says, “I’m almost home” and does not say “I made it home” (Dr. Seuss). This difference means that it is never confirmed that he makes it home, though readers are meant to assume that he did. This creates a sense of uneasiness with the readers because they are never sure if he actually makes it home or what home looks like for him. Marco’s dad does talk on the following page, but they could be talking anywhere, not necessarily at home.

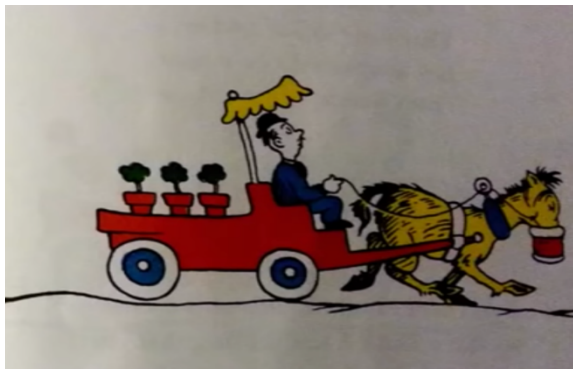


Figure 1- The first image of the parade in the book.

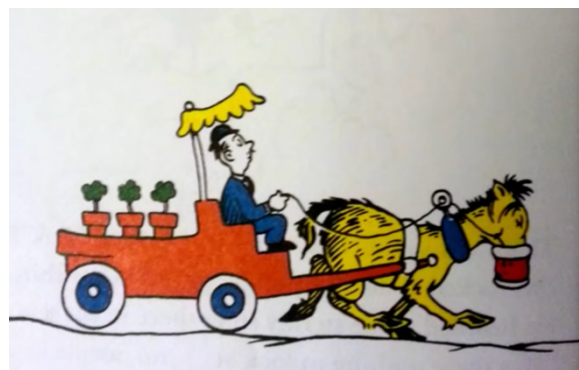


Figure 2- The last image of the parade in the book.

Another aspect of the movement of the story is how the book ends by returning to the very first element in the parade that is shown in Figures 1 and 2, which is a man in a horse-drawn cart. This brings the story completely back to the beginning of story, which makes the story feel as though it is still going. The carriage is still facing to the right, and since it is also the first element of the parade, it feels as if the parade is continuing even after Marco has returned home. This creates a full circle moment, and it makes the parade seem as if it is an infinite circle. This idea can be seen throughout the book. The parade first begins with a single horse-drawn cart with a man, and as the parade progresses, more is added to it. Animals, more carts, carriages, people playing musical instruments, and lots more are brought into the pictures. As the parade progresses, it grows and changes. However, by the end of the story, the parade is brought back to the same horse-drawn cart with a man as in the beginning of the story. The pictures do not show that the parade ends anywhere. However, it does show that it ends with the beginning and thus establishes the infinite circle. There seems to be no end even though it is a circle and circles are typically closed and thus ending. This circle is different though. This circle keeps going and going. Since Marco is on an adventure, the parade is part of the adventure. Since this is an adventure and the boy leaves home, goes out to discover new things, and then returns, it suggests these circles are symbolic of growing up. The home, away, and home motif shows “confrontations with the new and strange in which the main characters learn to understand both the new things and themselves better” (Nodelman and Reimer, 198). As Marco is growing up, he is experiencing new things. He is changing and understanding new things. This can be seen through the way that Marco talks with his dad in the beginning in comparison with how they talked at the end of the story.

This adventure is one that shows the parade of life, how life is continual, and thus cycles. First, this book is showing the parade of life. Marco begins at home with his dad. He is naïve and has not seen much of the world. This is like a child who is growing up at home. They are confined in a safety zone and not allowed outside of that zone until they are older. When he does leave home, he is exposed to a whole new world. He sees a variety of people (the Chinese man and the Rajah). He experiences a lot of new things that he had never experienced before. It is as if he goes through a transformation because when he does return home, he acts differently with his dad. Before leaving, he tells his dad of all the adventures he has been on and what he has previously seen. His dad does not believe him. When he returns this time, he does not tell his dad what he has seen. Instead, he keeps it to himself. He likely does this because what he has seen as altered his perspective in some way. Before, he did not realize how transformative experiences could be, and once he realizes it, he keeps it to himself because he knows it is only transformative for himself. His life completed the cycle, and now it is beginning again. This time, however, the readers do not see who it is with. The readers only see the image of the first part of the parade of life. The readers know that it is an infinite cycle, but the readers do not know who is partaking in the experience next.

The transformation that Marco goes through is one based on him “yearning for escape from a confining society, rigidly structured in terms of gender, class, and race” (Nodelman and Reimer, 153). This can be seen at the beginning of the book and then paralleled with how people were feeling at the end of the Great Depression, which was happening right around the time this book was published. As Marco is leaving his home in the beginning, he is trying to figure out what to tell his dad about his walk to and from school. It seems as if Marco has been saying what he has been seeing (or imagining), but his dad did not believe him. He goes about his walk and is

realizing he has nothing to say to his dad when he decides: “That *can't* be my story. That’s only a *start*. I’ll say that a ZEBRA was pulling that cart” (Dr. Seuss). The story that he is referring to is the one that he only sees a horse-drawn cart with a man as shown in Figure 1 above. However, this could be a reference to something much deeper if readers zoom out of this story. Marco is attempting to escape from his reality. He is in his reality, and he is not happy about it. This is much like the way that people felt about the Great Depression during this time, and likely, parallels this exactly. During the Great Depression, people were trying to escape from their reality. Their reality was bleak, much like what Marco really saw on Mulberry Street, and the people experiencing the Great Depression wanted to escape, similar to how Marco wanted to escape. During the Great Depression, “Some men deserted their families” (Konkel 2018). Marco is deserting his reality in much the same way that those men were deserting theirs. Those men did not like what their life had become. They did not like that they could not provide, so they left that reality and made a different one. Marco is doing the same thing. His reality is a horse-drawn cart with a man. These parallels are meant to serve as a way for readers to escape their reality. Not everyone deserted their families during the Great Depression, so not everyone was able to escape reality. Dr. Seuss gave this reprieve to readers during a time when they most needed to escape their reality. This book gives them an escape from this reality.

Since the reader’s point of view is focused, the images show mostly the central parts of the parade. The readers cannot see if there are other people in the audience, and most of the time, the readers cannot see the main character of the story. Since this is a story about going on an adventure, by having the reader’s point of view be on the parade, part of the adventure is withheld. The adventure is not a large unknown area that needs to be discovered. It is confined and more manageable. By centralizing the point of view, it eliminates a lot of the potential fear

that could arise as a result of being in the unknown or too far into an adventure. Marco and the readers are not millions of miles from home, so they still have the safety net of their home. Since the area is confined and this is a story of an adventure, the child who reads this can feel safe leaving home because they see Marco leave home and return safely. He gets to experience the adventure while also getting to come home. It transforms him, but it does not take away his safety. This is a safe adventure story because he still gets to return home and only his perspective has changed. He realizes now that he does not need to tell his dad about the parade because Marco knows what he has been through and accepts it. However, it is still in an adventure because the readers are not sure exactly where Mulberry Street is. There is a sense of unknown and adventure because it is not clear how close or far away Mulberry Street is. The point of view allows the thrill of the adventure to continue while also removing any fear of the unknown because the perspective is focused in on one aspect of the story.

While the reader's point of view is focused, the perspective tells a lot about the story. When looking at one image in the book, the readers are on the outside. They are not in the parade, but they are watching from a bit away. The readers are spectators to the parade that is occurring. When considering why someone would be at a parade, it boils down to two reasons: they know someone in it, or they like parades. Since readers do not know anyone in the parade (as everyone in the parade is nameless), the readers can assume that they are meant to be watching the parade for enjoyment, so it is a show of sorts. While readers are viewers of this parade, readers are also invited into the parade. In none of the pictures are there barriers between the readers and the parade. It is open and inviting. A significant portion of the parade is also presented as chaotic. There is a lot going on, so it would be easy for someone to slip in who is not meant to be there. However, Marco does not slip in the parade. He continues to be an

outsider watching the parade, and once the parade begins, the readers do not see him again until he is at his house. This indicates that the readers are meant to experience this parade in the exact same way as Marco. This is not just a life altering event for Marco. It is meant to be a life altering event for the readers too. Readers are not seeing the parade from Marco's perspective. They are seeing it from the audience's perspective, and Marco is merely another member of the audience. Marco is narrating the event, but again, when looking at this text from the eyes of a child, there would be no narration.

As readers further look into the pictures, the coloring of the pictures is another prominent aspect of the text. The colors in this book are mainly the three primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. Other colors, like green, are occasionally thrown into the picture, but the main colors are the primary ones. These primary colors are more saturated, which means that they "seem more vibrant" (Nodelman and Reimer 281). This vibrance draws readers to look at the pictures because they create a happier feeling (Nodelman and Reimer 281). Since it is primary colors and they are more saturated, this makes it easier for children to look at the pictures. It draws the children into the pictures because these are the colors the children are more familiar with. These vibrant colors are often seen as more assertive because they jump off the page so much (Nodelman and Reimer 281). This assertiveness and vibrance entices the readers to look. When looking at books that are more recently published, such as *Ada Twist, Scientist*, there are muted colors in the background and prominent colors in the foreground. In these books, a few items or people are colorful on the page, but in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, there are no muted colors. Everything is a prominent vibrant color. Even the white parts on the page, which are just devoid of ink, feel vibrant because they are surrounded by so much color. While these vibrant colors draw people to look at the parade, it also makes the parade seem even more

chaotic. With all the parts of the parade, the chaos is further shown with the colors and creates the idea that something is undone or unsettled. It is likely that this parade is perceived as chaotic because life at that the time that this was published was chaotic. During the Great Depression, people were adapting to a new way a life. A lot was changing, and people were trying to change with it. One instance of this is the fact that “It’s estimated that more than two million men and women became traveling hobos. Many of these were teens who felt they had become a burden on their families and left home in search of work” (Konkel 2018). The chaos that was felt during the Great Depression was still shown in Marco’s escape for reality, which was also mean to serve as the reader’s escape from reality. However, the vibrant saturation of the colors used in the book helped readers escape from the chaos in their lives because the colors drew readers more into the text, which allowed them to escape what they were dealing with in their lives.

A huge aspect of this book is its presentation of people. Marco is the main character and also the first character presented. The readers can assume that Marco is white because of the way he is presented, his clothes and eye shape. This can be assumed about the majority of the people within the parade because of how they dress and the shape of their eyes. There are two characters that are drawn into question because of the way the book presents them. First is the Chinese man with the chopsticks. He is depicted as a stereotypical Chinese man. He has on what appears to be traditional Chinese dress, and he is using chopsticks. Both of these stereotypes are caused by society’s view of Chinese people. This Chinese man is depicted as a spectacle for being stereotypically Chinese. He is not shown for some tricks like the magician, for riding animals, or for playing instruments. He is shown in unique (in comparison to Marco) clothing and uses chopsticks. While the other items listed above are spectacles for being a talent or just different, he is a spectacle because he is a Chinese man doing stereotypical Chinese things in a parade full

of white people. His part in the parade is to entertain people who have likely never seen a Chinese man. This is an instance of reading the text's absences. Though the Chinese man is present, the reasons why he is shown the way he is would be an example of the text's absences. The way the man is shown perpetuates stereotypes of Chinese people that can be harmful and thus indicates a stereotype to readers that is racist.

When thinking about why the Chinese man is a spectacle, readers can look to what is not said in the book, but they can also look at the socio-political climate of the time period the book was published in. Until 1952, Asian people were not given the rights to be citizens. Considering that this book was published in 1937, it is likely that the treatment of Asian people was not nearly as humane as it should be. Since they could not become citizens until the McCarran-Warren Act passed in 1952, there were likely very few people of Asian ancestry who were living in the United States since they were not allowed to be citizens ("U.S. Voting Rights Timeline" 2016). This would make them something of a spectacle to children who had never seen someone who looks different than the way they look. However, this is a deeply racist ideal ingrained in our society. The fact that a well-known author was able to present someone of a different race as a spectacle and then continue to be a well-known author brings to question society's morals during this time period. If an Asian person were presented as a spectacle for being an Asian person now, society would not take it as well. There are more anti-discrimination laws now than there ever were before. At the time when this book was published, Asians were considered lesser in much the same way that African Americans were. In the social and political climate, people of color were often seen as spectacles when they would walk into somewhere, so this book reflects society's morals of the time well.



Another example in this story where a person of color is seen as a spectacle is the Rajah on the blue elephant. It can be argued that anyone that is royalty would be a spectacle in a parade or outside of a parade, and that is true. However, Dr. Seuss could have picked someone of royalty that would have had a much more recognizable title if the point was to have someone of royalty in the story. A child would have more knowledge of kings and queens because there are lots of stories about kings and queens when they are children. A Rajah is a lesser known title because it is not used a lot in children's books. It appears that Dr. Seuss utilized the Rajah as a spectacle specifically because of the race of a Rajah and the way they dress. Again, the majority of the people throughout the story are dressed in clothes like Marco or typical parade clothes. The Rajah and the Chinese man are the only two people who are spectacles for their culture. They are the only two people that are not dressed in parade clothes, but the readers are meant to feel as if the Rajah and the Chinese man are dressed in parade clothes. Parades are all about unique experiences that you do not typically get to see. Unfortunately, the Rajah and the Chinese man are presented as the unique experiences that you do not typically get to see. This explicit racism depicts Marco's life more clearly. He is on an adventure throughout his life, but his life is full of spectating people who are different than him. For him, different races are a rare part of life that should be spectated when they are a part of life. They should be watched and mocked when they are seen. At the time that this was published, the United States was not nearly as diverse (Gibson & Jung 2005), so the different races would not be nearly as common in the United States as they are now. But this is important to discuss because it sheds light on the preexisting stereotypes surrounding a group of people, and it comments on how detrimental it can be for a group of people if they are not depicted as equals within a text. They become spectacles and not people.

Throughout *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, there is one text absence that is more obvious than any of the rest: women. Not only are there no women shown, there is no mention of women. For example, Marco talks with his dad twice throughout this book, and his dad is discussed. However, his mom is never mentioned, nor does she ever talk. Marco's dad is the only parental figure in the entire book. This lack of women is clear and direct, but the message is a bit muddy. Even though an Indian and Chinese man are shown as spectacles in a negative way, they are still represented in the book. Women are not even allotted the idea that they can be spectacles. They are not valuable enough as even spectacles to be seen in the book. This is problematic for multiple reasons because statistically speaking, women make up about half of the population, and thus should make up about half of the characters to be seen in the book. By leaving women out, the author is saying that women cannot be a part of the story. They do not matter enough to put them into the story, so they are left out.

One of the reasons that women are not shown in this book is likely due to the fact that the activities that are done in this book are gendered by the author. By leaving women out, the author is saying women cannot do the activities shown in the book. The biggest element of this book is the parade as an adventure, but because there are no women in this book, the author is saying that women are not meant to go on adventures. Typically, adventures are not only for men. Women experience them too in real life. However, by leaving women out of the adventure, of the entire story, the author is saying this is not an activity that women can do. In the story, Marco leaves home to go out and discover a new part of the world, and by not showing women, it shows that they are not supposed to be partaking in the adventure. They cannot be the ones going on the adventure because they are not men. Women cannot even be seen in the adventure because then the adventurous element might be lost. Traditionally, women are the mother figures in the house.

They are the ones who discipline the children and taking care of the home. If women were part of this book, the adventurous element would be lost because the mother figure would be telling Marco to be careful. The mother figure would limit the adventure and take away the adventure. No more would Marco be free to roam because his mom is telling him to be careful and to be home soon. These gendered stereotypes are deeply embedded in the absence of women in this book.

Another reason that the absence of women is problematic is due to the fact that this story is about life and transformations, and since women are intentionally left out, then this means women are not seen as necessary to life. Marco discovers the world through this parade, but he does not discover that women are a part of the world. Marco does not even have a woman in his world as his dad is the only one mentioned. Without women, this story of life is meaningless. Women are necessary in the life cycle. Since this story is without women, the life cycle cannot continue. It appears to be continuous due to the circular element of the pictures but is not because women are not a part of the circle. They are not a part of the continuous life cycle that this story has presented, and without women, the life cycle cannot continue. If the statement was trying to be made that women are unnecessary for men to transform and experience the world, that is true and acceptable, but this means the opposite is also true. Men are not needed for women to transform and experience the world. However, the idea that women are not needed for men to experience the world is not shown as much throughout the story as that of the life cycle being continuous and thus shows that women are seen as unnecessary for life, which is not a factual statement.

The absence of women was intentional, but why they are absent is in direct correlation with what society was experiencing during the time that this book was published. This book was

published toward the end of the Great Depression, and so there a lot of the parallels between this book and the socio-political climate during that time. Several of those have already been discussed, but how the Great Depression impacted society's views of women and then how that affected how women were shown in books is still left to be discussed. During the Great Depression, "Domesticity, motherhood, and homemaking once again became regarded as the only truly proper and fulfilling roles for women" (Lewis 2020). This is why women were not shown in this book. If women were to be shown, they would be the mother figure. They would be the ones that were limiting the adventure to keep the children safe. Dr. Seuss could not show women in the book because during the Great Depression, women were performing the expected motherly duties. Women were not having adventures, and they were not allowing children to be having adventures. Women were maintaining their household and keeping everyone safe. If Dr. Seuss had included women in this book, he would have had to completely reinvent what women are allowed to do by society, so he could not show women because society at the time was not allowing women to be in roles other than motherhood and the keeper of the household. Dr. Seuss is reproducing the gender roles and stereotypes of society at that time.

### ***Where the Wild Things Are* Analysis**

*Where the Wild Things Are* is a timeless children's book that was published in 1963. This book has been popular since it was first published and is still popular more than forty years later. This book follows Max who is sent to his room by his mom. While in his room, he begins imagining he is going to this far away land where he becomes a part of a group of wild things. He becomes their king but decides he does not like being king and returns home. The timelessness of this book indicates that it is a good representative of the time in which it was published. This book showcases boys as wild things and women as equitable members of society. This book also describes an adventure that is similar to *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. However, this book lacks a significant portion of the population, and this absence is one that speaks to the socio-political climate of the time this book was published.

This analysis will serve to qualify aspects of *Where the Wild Things Are*. This book has served for decades the idea that boys are wild. It has given into the cliché that boys will be boys. It showcases this idea through how Max's mom treats him and how he progresses through the adventure. These ideas present the question of whether parents, specifically the mom in *Where the Wild Things Are*, are the ones continuing the idea that boys are wild things. Not only does this story show that idea, it shows how putting this idea onto a child continuously can impact them in the long run. Not only does this story present these ideas, this story also continues the idea that some people cannot be a part of the adventure. The absence of African American people perpetuated the idea that was founded in racist ideals of the society at the time that this was published. This analysis will explore these ideas.



Figure 3- The first image in the book.



Figure 4- The second image in the book.

Max is portrayed as a wild thing throughout this story, and this is perpetrated by society's expectations of boys at the time this was published. When the readers first see Max in the story, he is doing something he should not be doing. The first two pages of the book indicates he is disturbing the peace of the house. He is messing up stuff in the house in Figure 3 shown above, and he is chasing the dog with a fork in Figure 4 shown above. Right at the beginning of the story, the readers are being told that Max is bad, and he is a wild thing. These first two images, shown above, are the readers' very first impressions of him, and the impression is not a good one. The written part of this story tells the readers that Max is a wild thing, but the pictorial story shows how he is a wild thing. The pictorial story does not leave room for misinterpretation either. Max is dressed up like an animal, which shows that he is wild like an animal. This is showing his persona as a wild thing Max's face is drawn as a scowl instead of a smiling child. It is as if he knows he is a wild thing, and so his face is emulating what he believes a wild thing would look like, which will be discussed more later. Having these images be the first two encounters with Max sets up Max to be a wild thing for the remainder of the story.

As mentioned above, Max is called a wild thing by his mother. An analysis of the mother specifically will be done later in this section, but this part will focus on Max's mother calling him a wild thing and what that means. First, "his mother called him "WILD THING!" at the beginning of the story, and thus set the tone for who Max is (Sendak). Before calling him a wild thing, Max was doing things that he should not have been doing, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. However, by using this term, the mother is putting a label on Max. The term wild thing labels Max as two things. First, Max is wild like a wild animal. By calling Max wild, she is comparing him to an animal and creating the idea that Max has no control. If she were to call him this often, which she probably does because he understands what she means by wild thing, she would push him into believing that he is wild. If something is said about a person often enough, that person will begin to believe it. Max begins to believe it. This is shown when he goes on this adventure and becomes the kind of the wild things. Not only is he one of them, he is the most important one of them. Thus, he is the wildest wild thing. He believes this all because his mom said this to him. Second, he is a thing, which is nonhuman. His mother could have easily described him as a wild child or a wild boy. This would have still furthered the idea that he is wild, but it would not have dehumanized him. By calling him a thing, his mother is saying that he is so wild that he is no longer human. If she were to continue to call him this, he would begin to believe it, and he would begin to feel inferior. By calling him thing, she is saying that his mistakes, the things he did wrong, dehumanize him. He is no longer equitable to her because of the mistakes he has made.

By calling Max a wild thing, the mother is creating the idea that boys will be boys. She does not seem surprised by his behavior, and she does not tell him to stop doing it. All she does is send him to bed, without discussing the problem or how to fix it. This explicit statement of Max's character without a discussion of what he needed to work on likely forced him to believe

that he is a wild thing. This idea is one that shows up in literature often, and it “confirms the idea that boys are wild things again and again (Nodelman and Reimer 166). This idea can be applied to how men were expected to be during the time that this was published. The gender roles for men are often that they need to be strong, aggressive, and adventurous, and they often meet those expectations because they are told that is what they are supposed to be. They are often rewarded with something if they meet these expectations. Like Max, he met the expectation of being a wild thing, and then he became king of the wild things. But, if they do not want to be those things, they should not have to be. Maybe Max did not want to be a wild thing. This might be why even when he was crowned king of the wild things, he chose to come back where he did not have to be king of the wild things. He did not want to be with the wild things anymore because he did not want to be a wild thing. This seems as if Max is refusing to be what his mom’s expectations of him are, which is a lot like men refusing to be what society’s expectations are. It seems like Max tried being king of the wild things at first and then determined it was not for him. This is parallel with how men may react to society’s expectations of them. A step further with this is the fact that Max was crowned the king of the wild things, which most would think would be what he wanted. Even after he is crowned the king, he wants to leave. If we apply this to society’s expectations, then it goes like this. A man is given everything he has ever wanted because he has conformed to what is expected, but then he decides he would rather be true to himself and not have what he has always wanted. Max’s decision to leave is meaningful because he chooses to return to his life before the wild thing expectation. He does not want the expectation that he is a wild thing to drive him anymore in his choices.

In this book, Max is portrayed as a stereotypical boy, but the mom is the one pushing those ideals onto him. The mom is never shown in the story, but she represents society placing



gender role expectations onto men, which was discussed above. But she also represents a societal shift in favor of women. Not only is she a character in this story, she is a woman that controls the character of a man, albeit in a negative way. This is vastly different than *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* where women were not even mentioned. However, it is still just a shift, not a complete change, because the mom is not shown at all. This shift in favor of women is shown through the way that the mom is presented in this story. The mom is in control of Max's future, at the beginning of the story. She is punishing him by sending him to bed, which controls his immediate future. She is also putting the wild thing expectation on him, which will affect him long term because he will begin to believe it if she says it enough. Looking at it from society's expectations, the woman is in control of the man. This shift in literature is occurring at this time because equal rights are being fought for more and more. The Civil Rights Act, which was enacted in 1964 right after this story was published, was a crowning moment for equal rights because it "banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin" (2020). Even though this was enacted after this book was published, the Civil Rights movement was something that was occurring years prior to it being formally passed, so *Where the Wild Things Are* represents the shift in how women were being viewed. Women were beginning to be in control more and to be discriminated against less. This book shows a small shift in favor of women because while the mom was shown in a different way than women are traditionally shown, she was still never depicted throughout the entire story. The focus is still on men, but there is a small shift that is positive for women.



Figure 5- The image when Max returns home from seeing the wild things.

The adventurous aspect of this story is similar to the one in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* because Max, like Marco, leaves home to go on an adventure. Max leaves home, however, to find out if he is a wild thing or not. He leaves after his mom describes him as a wild thing because he wants to find out if that is true or not. When he gets to the place with the other wild things, they crown him “the most wild thing of all” (Sendak). Since Max is the one that is creating this adventure inside his mind, then he is the one that is creating the idea that he is “the most wild thing of all,” but it is based off of the expectations that his mother has put on him (Sendak). He is using these expectations to create the adventure, so he has blown up this expectation that his mom has of him to the biggest degree possible. He is not just one wild thing amongst the rest. He is the wildest thing of the all because he is crowned that. He creates this adventure for himself because he is trying to see if what his mother’s expectations of him is true, and he is trying to see if he wants it to be true. However, by the end of the journey he has made his choice. He has seen what it is like to truly be a wild thing, and he has decided he does not

want it. So, he goes home where he changes himself from a wild thing to just a boy. In figure 5, shown above, Max has just returned home from visiting the wild things. There is a noticeable difference between when he was first called a wild thing at the beginning of the story and now after he has decided he does not want to be a wild thing. Max's facial expression has changed, and he is beginning to remove his costume, which represented the wild thing persona. By removing the costume, he is symbolically removing everything that represented him as a wild thing. He is taking control and removing that persona. He no longer wants to be a wild thing. His facial expression also shows how he feels about this because at the beginning, in Figures 3 and 4, Max is unhappy. He is unhappy with his gender role as a wild thing, but in Figure 5, he is happy. He has broken free of the gender role, and he has found himself as something other than a wild thing.

There is a lack of diverse characters in this book, and by reading the text's absences, these absences can make more sense. This is the story of one white male, and it could have easily been the story of any diverse male character. However, the author chose a white male. He likely chose to use a white male instead of any other race because of Jim Crow Laws that had been established previously and were not yet completely dispelled, which meant there were people who were still racist. Even after the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs the Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act was enacted in 1964, racism was still occurring (2020). By not including a race other than white in this book, the author is making the point that other races cannot be a part of the adventure. By leaving out a whole group of people, it creates the message those people are not welcome to whatever is happening in the story. They do not get to leave home to find themselves, and they do not get to experience things the way that Max did. The author is also saying that white people do get experience this, and thus making the claim that

white people get to do things that people of diverse races cannot do. This is a concept that is deeply embedded in society at the time that this was published and is, as a result, embedded in literature that was published during this time. By not including diverse people in the adventure, the author is saying that they are not meant to partake in the adventure, which means they are not equal to those who do get to partake in the adventure. This creates the sense that all races are not equal because they are not shown.

*Where the Wild Things Are* shows how societal expectations on men can negatively impact them. It shows the identity crisis that men can go through if they are called something for so long. Max struggles and goes on an adventure to find himself in order to determine if he truly is a wild thing. *Where the Wild Things Are* also shows how the lack some groups of people can create a negative ideal surrounding those people. They cannot be a part of the story because they cannot go on adventures.

### ***Ada Twist, Scientist* Analysis**

*Ada Twist, Scientist* was published in 2016. This is the story of a strong-willed little girl who is determined to discover all unknowns in the world. Over the course of this story, Ada is trying to solve a mystery of what smells so bad. She is deeply interested in science, and she does experiments to figure out what happens. However, her parents do not understand her infatuation with the mystery and punish her for getting into stuff she should not because she was trying to solve the mystery. This story shows a dramatic shift of the representation of people since the last book in this analysis, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and it shows a dramatic shift in the subject of a book. This book is not a story that follows the same home, away, home routine, but it is still one of discovery and change.

Over the course of this analysis, one thing will be clear; children's literature is changing in a positive direction. It is not perfect, but it has shifted to being more inclusive of all people. One part that helps to show this is the color used in the story so how the illustrator uses muted colors to highlight the redness of Ada and what that means. Another part is how Ada herself is represented in the book, whether she is shown as masculine, feminine, or both. Finally, the presentation of the people around her indicates what has changed in children's literature and what is still changing. Her parents and her brother play important roles in her life and show how people can change when they are taught. Her teacher, Miss Greer, shows that sexism is still occurring. Finally, the amount of people represented in this story show how far children's literature has come, considering the first two books in this analysis mostly showed only white people.

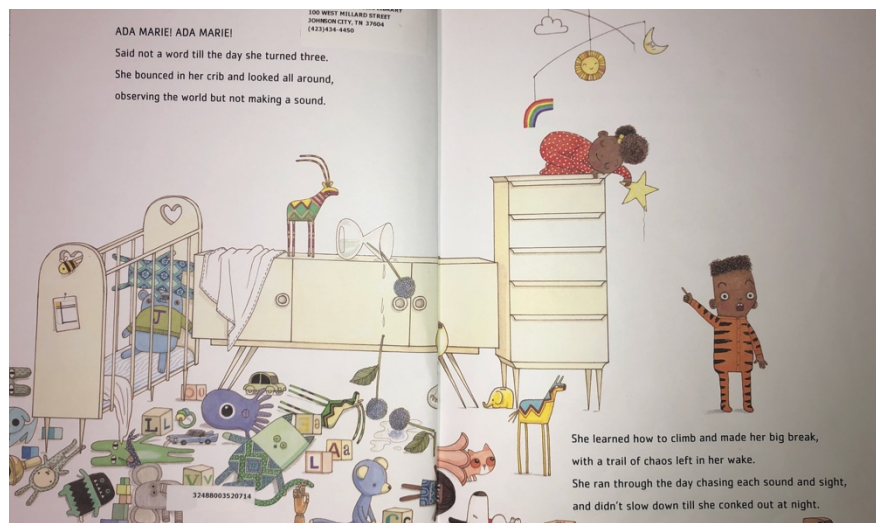


Figure 6- The first image in the book.

Looking through this book, color plays an important role in how the story plays out. The muted colors are abundant, but there is a reason everything is muted. When looking through the book, everything not directly having to do with Ada is muted. Her parents wear muted colors as does her brother. For example, in Figure 8 below, here parents are wearing creams and browns while her brother is wearing green and white. Her room at the very beginning of the story is muted. Even when she goes outside, everything is muted colors. All of these items are muted because they are supposed to pale in comparison to Ada, which will be discussed later in this analysis. In figure 6, which is the first picture in the book, Ada is the central focus in a room of muted colors. While her brother is wearing an orange sleep set, he is pointing to her, which makes her the central focus. This book is using these muted colors, along with other aspects, to make Ada the central focus, but it is also setting her apart from everyone else. In other places in the book, she is the only part of the image that is not wearing a muted color. All items are muted, and all people are wearing muted colors. This sets her apart from everyone and everything else

and further makes her different than everyone else. This story is using this to set her apart because it is trying to make the readers feel as though she is not only mentally different, because of her scientific thinking, but physically different as well.

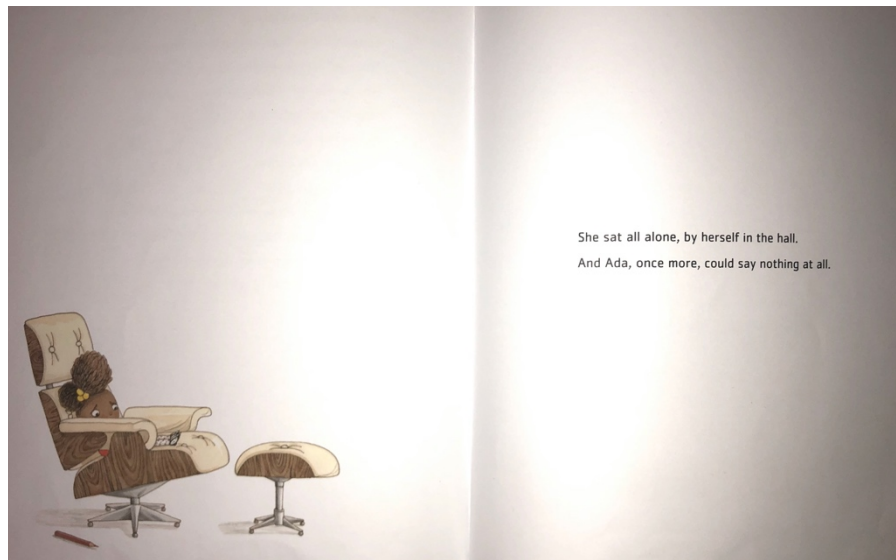


Figure 7- Ada is in timeout.

What really sets her apart from others in this book is the fact that in every picture in the story she is wearing red. Not only is she wearing red, she is, in almost every picture, wearing the exact same dress. Her parents and brother wear different pieces of clothing, but she rarely wears anything besides that red polka dot dress. In comparison to the other colors in this story, the red she wears is more saturated, which in turn makes it more assertive (Nodelman and Reimer 281). The red she wears throughout this story is meant to represent her inquisitive nature, and even though there are a few instances of other kids wearing red in the book, they are not nearly as vibrant as Ada's. This red is meant to show how she stands out with her inquisitive nature. Throughout the whole book, the readers can see all of Ada's red. She is fully there in every

picture and so is her inquisitive nature. She is always exploring and always thinking, except for the image in the middle of the book shown above in Figure 7. Here, her red is almost completely gone, and it is because her parents have taken away her inquisitive spirit by punishing her for it. Her red is full blown when she is thinking and exploring, but when she is put into timeout, the red diminishes and is nearly gone completely. All that is left is a tiny sliver shown near the arm of the chair. Her parents are taking her inquisitive nature away from her by punishing her for exploring. Her spark and fire for science, her inquisitive nature is almost completely gone in this image. In this moment, her spark and fire are being repressed by her parents, and readers can see that by looking at her dress to represent that fire.

Throughout this story, Ada is stepping away from gender roles. In the other books in this analysis, the women have been performing typical gender roles by either being the housewife or by not being shown at all. They have taken care of the kids, and they have not stepped outside of those societal confines. Ada steps outside of those societal confines. Ada loves science and is determined to be a great scientist, which is typically considered something men would do since “less than 30% of the world’s researchers are women” (2020). Even though she is doing these things outside of the expectations of her gender, she does not look the way that is expected typically. She wears dresses for most of the story, so she is drawn as feminine. However, she is exhibiting behaviors that are traditionally masculine. The author is combining two stereotypes of a gender in order to create a character that does not fall into either stereotypical category. The author is doing this to show that kids can be whatever they want to be. They can be a mixture of a lot of things that are not stereotypically meant for them. This story is also giving the push for women to be in science, which is a positive thing to see in children’s literature. Ada showing both traditionally masculine and feminine traits helps readers to see that they can be either or



both. They can choose what kind of person they want to be, and they can choose what career they want.

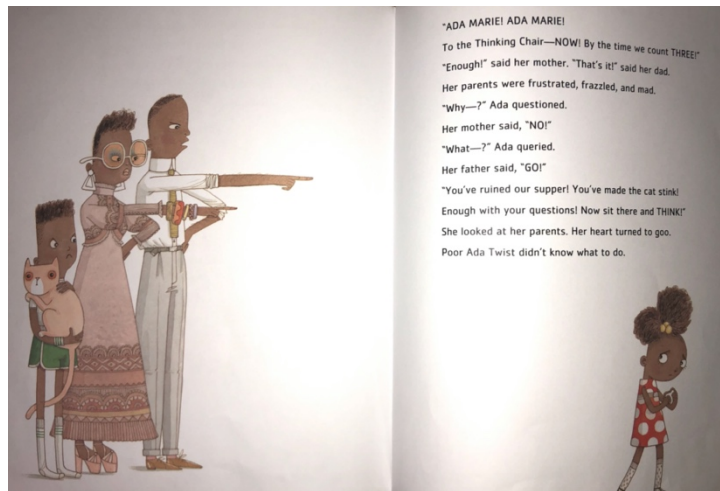


Figure 8- Ada is being sent to timeout.

While Ada is presented in nontraditional gender roles, the parents in this book are in very traditional roles. The mom and the dad are shown often throughout the book and are the ones trying to contain Ada and her wildness because they see it as misbehavior. However, the mom is presented in an interesting way. She is always in dresses and high heels. This could be to make the images as beautiful as they are because she is always in beautiful outfits. It could also be that she is intentionally being presented in feminine attire because she is the less assertive parent. When Ada is being sent to time out, both parents are pointing for her to go to time out, but her dad's arm extends further. This makes it seem as if the family is a patriarchy, and so the mom being dressed in traditionally feminine attire would perpetuate the idea that this is a patriarchy. This creates a hierarchy that seems to be trying to empower women but only when they are young. Another aspect of the mom is the fact that she is always shorter than the dad. No matter what shoes she wears or how high the heel is, she is always slightly if not drastically shorter than

the dad. This furthers the idea that this family is a patriarchy. The mom is always smaller even though her shoes change throughout the story, and she is supposed to seem smaller. She is not as assertive as the dad, so she cannot be as large or larger than the dad. The dad is supposed to always be seen as taller and more assertive because of how he is drawn in comparison to his wife. This is a switch from the way the kids are presented and lessens the progressive nature of the book because the women are not being lifted up as adults but only as children. This means that children, no matter their gender, can be whatever they want. They can be assertive and smart, or they can be calm and quiet. When they become adults, however, it shifts. They have to meet societal expectations, which are still focusing on gender roles. Though there has been a shift in comparison to *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, which was published in 1937, there are still gender roles that are deeply engrained in our society and thus in children's literature. Another aspect of the gender roles in this book is how the mom and dad are drawn next to each other. Most of the time the dad is in the background; he is behind the mom. However, he is still larger. His limbs extend longer, and he still towers over her, which can be seen in Figure 8. Even as what can be perceived as a background character, he is still over her. He is bigger and thus indicating the family is a patriarchy.

Even though the parents are presented in a patriarchal way, the way the parents change throughout the story is so positive. At the beginning of the book, the parents were against what Ada was doing. They were trying to control her and get her to stop what she was doing. They did not recognize the potential that Ada has. They saw her inquisitive nature as a nuisance. By the end of the story, they have transformed. They are now adapting to meet her instead of expecting her to adapt. They are seeing her inquisitive nature as a gift instead of a nuisance. This change is quite interesting. If a similar story had been written during the 1930s, it is likely that the parents

would have completely stopped her inquisitive nature. They would have seen it as not how little girls should act and then done everything they could to stop it. These parents do start out doing that, but then they realize the importance of letting her be who she is and letting her discover the world around her. The parents' transformation throughout the book shows how parents have changed throughout the last century. A century ago, parents would have reacted the way the parents are acting at the beginning of *Ada Twist, Scientist*. The parents would have pushed back and not let her continue to show her more masculine traits. However, a change in societal expectations has occurred and as has how parents responded to inquisitive little girls who love science. Now, generally speaking, parents accept girls who desire to pursue traditionally male jobs. This change is shown at the end of the book when Ada's parents are looking at books on how to help her solve her questions. No longer are parents holding little girls back. Now parents are pushing their kids and helping them be exactly who they want to be, even if it is outside of society's gendered expectations. As a result of this, women are being given the chance at careers now more than ever before, all because parents shifted to being more accepting of what their kids want.



Figure 9- Miss Greer

A briefly mentioned character in the book is Ada's teacher, Miss Greer, and her portrayal is a sharp contrast to what the expectations of the book are as shown in Figure 9. Miss Greer is drawn with over exaggerated curves. She has large breasts, an unrealistically small waist, and a larger butt. She has a lot of makeup on and high heels. All of these are traditionally feminine expectations. The men in this book are not drawn with crazy muscles, but the women are drawn with stereotypically feminine features. This means that there are still societal expectations of women, which are completely unrealistic. Women are expected to wear dresses and heels, which overly feminizes them. While this book does an excellent job of showing girls getting into science, there are still traditional gender roles they are expected to maintain as adults. This means that they are encouraged to be whatever they want when they are children because Ada has both traditionally masculine and feminine features, but once they are entering puberty, they are expected to take on traditionally feminine roles. This indicates that even though women's roles are changing a role that still remains is that of motherhood. They are still expected to be feminine when motherhood is most likely to happen because they need to attract a male and so their features are drawn in an exaggerated way to indicate what role they should be in as adults.



Figure 10- The last picture in the book.

Finally, the most dramatic shift in comparison to the other books in this analysis is the representation of people. Not only are the main characters in this story African American, but the story also shows people of other races shown in Figure 10. An important aspect of this is the fact that the attention is not drawn to their race, like with the Rajah and Chinese man in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. They are shown as people and not as spectacles. This story shows how much the social and political climate has shifted because in 1937 and 1963, when the other two books were published, diversity was not something that was as common in children's literature due to racism. However, since the Brown vs the Board of Education and Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed and the culture has continued to accept diversity, the representation in children's literature has changed, and as a result, an African American child can open more books and see his or herself in them. This is important because when they are represented, their stories are represented. They do not have to pretend they are able to go on an adventure when there is a story that shows them going on an adventure. They are able to see themselves in stories when they are represented in them. By showing diverse children, the author is creating a sense of belonging. No one group of people is excluded so everyone gets to be a scientist or explore something they are curious about. When children feel as though they belong, they are motivated to be a part of the story. They see themselves doing something, so they have no doubt they can do that something. By representing everyone in books, authors give students a chance to see themselves succeeding at something which motivates them to go do what they wish to accomplish.

## Epilogue

Over the course of this analysis, the argument has been made that children's literature is impacted by the socio-political climate of the time period the book was published in. This analysis shows that over the last eighty years the socio-political climate has changed and so has the content of children's literature. In *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, there was a clear display of racism when the Rajah and the Chinese man were presented as spectacles for just being different than the white people in the parade. There was a shift for that blatant racism to diverse people not being shown at all in *Where the Wild Things Are*. Finally, with *Ada Twist, Scientist*, the main characters are diverse. There are background characters that are diverse, but the main characters are also diverse. This shift is one of many that has been shown throughout this analysis. Gender roles are also one that has shifted. From women not being shown at all to them being shown as the main characters, gender roles are something that is still changing within children's literature. It is still changing within society, and as a result, this continual change will be indicated in children's literature.

This study is but a small glimpse into how the socio-political climate has impacted children's literature, and it is a small glimpse into how it will continue to impact children's literature. As society changes, so will the literature that is produced. Literature, in this case children's literature, is a direct indicator of what the socio-political climate of the time that it was published in. It is meant to change and move with society, and so it will continue to do so. As long as society is changing and growing, children's literature will as well because children learn about society through the books they read as children.

Representation in books matter because children should see themselves in books. When children see themselves in books, they are able to put themselves in that situation. They are able

to go on the adventure. They are able to get into whatever career choice they desire. Books open opportunities for children, and if the children are not represented in the books, then the children may feel that they do not have that opportunity. Representation matters because all different children matter, which means their stories, their differences, and their similarities matter. Without diversity in books, authors are eliminating groups of people. The authors are saying that they are not part of the story. However, all groups of people are a part of the story and should be represented as such.

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