



Building More Textured Worlds: Diversity in Fantasy/Sci-Fi World Building

Essential Question: The worlds of fantasy and sci-fi has suffered from a lack of diversity for many decades, despite the wonderful contributions of authors like Gene Roddenberry, Octavia Butler, N.K. Jemisin and Ursula K. LeGuin. This problem has seen some major strides in recent years, and yet some authors are still unsure of how to be more inclusive in their storytelling. There are some tricky issues of cultural appropriation and respecting the unique experiences of underrepresented groups in world-building; I would like to share my work from mybook, *The Wonderous Science*, to illustrate how these issues can be tackled in creative ways. From researching and using historic elements to ground characters, to adding diverse settings, we'll discuss how to communicate with readers from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and add "texture" to our science fiction and fantasy worlds.

I. Why add diversity? The hard work (and benefits) of a diverse world build

- A. You can add depth, interest, and texture to the world your characters live.
- B. Bring new audiences to your stories.
- C. Increase the breadth of your knowledge and cultural understanding.

II. It all starts with strong stories and characters

- A. First build the story that you are passionate about telling.
- B. Always be mindful from the beginning that your characters live in a diverse world.
- C. Make the diversity relevant to your story. This will help you avoid tokenism.

III. A question of culture, or, how much can I actually write?

- A. Abandon stereotypes - you're an author, and you're better than that.

- B. Research is the key!
 - C. When research falls short, ask the important questions to the people that know from experience.
- IV. Don't always go with what you know. Instead, strive to know more.**
- A. Avoid the well traveled paths.
 - B. Creating worlds pulls from real world cultures for inspiration.
- V. Equity, Representation, and Appropriation**
- A. Story is king, or queen :)
 - B. Having diverse characters in the background does not show equity.
 - C. To avoid Appropriation, approach the work with respect for every culture in your world.
- VI. Visuals are SUPER helpful**
- A. Start a pinterest board of helpful imagery. This can help you to be clearer on details of the cultural elements you are incorporating into your story.
 - B. Keep a world builders journal. This will help you to keep the elements of your world consistent, and allow to you see if you haven't expressed enough diversity in your world build.
 - C. Draw. Draw more! AND DRAW SOME MORE!!!
- VII. Learn from the best examples**
- A. Great authors for diverse world builds:
 - 1. Ursula K. LeGuin (Earthsea)
 - 2. Garth Nix (Sabriel)
 - 3. Tomi Adeyemi (Children of Blood and Bone)
 - 4. James Gurney (Dinotopia)
 - B. Film and video game creation are also awesome references
 - 1. The works of Guillermo del Toro
 - 2. Overwatch (game design)
 - 3. Magic the Gathering (art books and world creation)

Character Questionnaire

– Answer as your character

- What do you consider your greatest achievement?
- What is your idea of perfect happiness?
- What is your current state of mind?
- What is your favorite occupation?
- What is your most treasured possession?
- What or who is the greatest love of your life?
- What is your favorite journey?
- What is your most marked characteristic?
- When and where were you the happiest?
- What is it that you most dislike?
- What is your greatest fear?
- What is your greatest extravagance?
- Which living person do you most despise?
- What is your greatest regret?
- Which talent would you most like to have?
- What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?
- What is the quality you most like in a man?
- What is the quality you most like in a woman?
- What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
- What is the trait you most deplore in others?
- What do you most value in your friends?
- Who is your favorite hero of fiction?

- Who are your heroes in real life?
- Which living person do you most admire?
- What do you consider the most overrated virtue?
- On what occasions do you lie?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- What are your favorite names?
- How would you like to die?
- If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?
- What is your motto?

CHARACTER NAME:

Diverse Character Questionnaire **– Answer as your character**

- Where do you come from?
- Where do you call home?
- Who were your ancestors, and do you feel a close connection with them?
- How does the world see you, how do you see yourself, and where do the two views differ?
- What is your most treasured possession from your past?
- Do you feel accepted by people around you?
- What is your favorite family or cultural tradition?
- What is your faith? Do you or do you not practice it, and why?
- Are there items or keepsakes from home that you hold dear?
- What is your favorite story from home?
- Who was your first love? Have you had a first love yet?
- Where do you long to visit?
- Who are the people that you hang around? Are they from the same or different cultural backgrounds?
- What is your status in society? Example - are you rich, poor, revered, reviled, etc.
- What is one thing in your family history that you are proud of?
- What is one thing in your family history that you are ashamed of?

- How does your cultural background affect who you are today? If not, then why?
- Do you live in the culture you were raised in? If not, then why?
- Where do you find your inspiration?

CHARACTER NAME:



Biography:

Brian grew up in Alaska, then Mississippi, and has always been in love with storytelling in every medium. He earned a BFA in graphic design & illustration and an MA in writing & publishing. Currently he is the adjunct professor of children's publishing at Portland State University. He is the co-owner and creative director of Believe In Wonder Publishing, has written and illustrated 20+ books, and spends his days working with the family creating new and amazing stories