



## DIVERSITY GRAND PRIZE AWARD



Truly great books do one or both of two things: they serve as mirrors into their readers' lives, and they act as windows into the wider world. With this category, we're looking to expand our titles to include more culturally relevant and inclusive stories that demonstrate the broad range of human backgrounds and experiences.

- Submissions must be **between 1,000 and 15,000 words**
- Intended audience is **teens and adults** (anyone 10 and older) who read below their age or grade level
- Stories should represent characters and situations that are complex and **authentically diverse** and include experiences that are **culturally relevant** for a range of identities & experiences, including but not limited to LGBTQUIA, people with disabilities, and ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious minorities.
- Use familiar **vocabulary** and straightforward sentences. Avoid long, unbroken paragraphs or chapters

## TIPS AND INSPIRATION

- **Know your demographic(s).** In order to create an authentic story with relatable characters, we recommend either writing from a perspective that you have experience with, or heavily researching the perspective(s) that you will be writing from. Books (especially non-fiction) and the internet can provide a wealth of information, however, we also recommend speaking with members of the community you're writing about whenever possible. Ground-level feedback is invaluable to the authenticity of your story and characters.
- **Don't just focus on** stories about people facing **adversity** for their differences. Those stories have a place, of course, but they can't be the only light in which diversity is shown. True diversity also means showing diverse characters and experiences in an ordinary, mundane way: for example, a teenager, who happens to be in a wheelchair, navigating the highs and lows of high school life just like his/her peers.

- **Use factual detail and descriptions.** For example: say that your character has dark, brown skin. Treat your representations with as much factuality as care. Avoid metaphors or “dancing around” in your representation; for example, avoid using food metaphors to describe skin tone: caramel, chocolate, coffee. Details erase the status of “whiteness” as default in your story.
  - **Infuse your characters with personality.** And don’t make it dependent on diversity. For example, don’t assume that your character in a wheelchair will hate sports. It’s possible that the idea of sports may depress your character, but it is equally possible that he/she is a prominent athlete on a special-needs team.
  - **Explore genres!** It is important for the richness of humanity to be displayed across all genre types. We want to see black superheroes fighting crime, latina adventurers embarking on epic quests, and differently-abled vampires!
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### WRITING PROMPTS

- Set your story within a cultural celebration: one that you are familiar with yourself, or which you have researched/discussed with someone who celebrates. Don’t make the celebration the story itself, but have your story taking place with the celebration as a backdrop. Work the history and customs of the celebration into your story with details and dialogue. [Use this guide](#) as a starting point for choosing/researching cultural celebrations around the world.
- Religious festivals are a great focus topic as well. [Find several here.](#)
- Compare two different cultures/show cultures overlapping. [Read about the concept of Nepantla](#) and apply it to your story.
- Chapter by chapter, focus on a different individual from a different place, all of whom are working towards the same goal(s). Ex.) Write about people from different cultures working to protect endangered species.
- Write about how artists (painters, musicians, etc.) from the world use their tools to showcase their unique cultures/heritages.
- Retell a popular fairy-tale or graphic novel with diverse characters. What would change? What would remain the same?
- Write about a character who isn’t quite sure what he/she believes in, despite growing up in a very religious family. Follow along as he/she explores the religions of the world.

- Use images as a starting point. Find a photo that you feel is representative of “diversity” and think about what is happening in it. Use this as the basis for your plot.

## IDENTITY

When shaping diverse characters, writers need to do so much more than mention skin tones and genders. To build genuinely complex, realistic characters, we need to consider what a character wants (driving force of the story), what is standing in their way (conflict), and who the character is/wants to become, at their very core. Use the following prompts to create diverse plotlines and characters. Stay true to your character's heart, culture, and history.

- A character making friends while waiting for a hurricane to hit the hotel where they're staying.
- A bookshop that's the last refuge of a group of fans of an unusual (and very specific) genre.
- A character who discovers a strange calendar which appears to prophesy important events in their life.
- A character who gets trapped in their memory palace and has to find a way out in order to save someone else.
- A painter who travels to another planet in search of a rare pigment.
- A teacher who takes attendance and finds that there's an extra student in their class.
- A guest who begins to suspect that they're not the only guest.
- A historical character who travels to the present day and causes chaos when they steal back something that originally belonged to them.

**Questions?** Send us a note: [support@storyshares.org](mailto:support@storyshares.org)

