

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Literature is one of the products of human culture that reflects reality in human life aspects such as social, cultural, political, and so on. Therefore, the use of literary works by the creators is to express the author's ideas, thoughts, and imaginations. Novels, poetry, dramas, and short stories are the example of literary works. Literary works are created to entertain and also to educate and give information to their audiences and readers. The information and messages contained in the story are the positive values and messages that teach the readers. In addition, the readers and audiences also get information about the world and its phenomenon through literature. They are produced to be enjoyed by everyone, including children. Children get to enjoy literary works that talk about issues going on in the world through children's literature, for example, children's books.

Children's books are written for a different audience than adult books. Thus the authors need to apply various skills, needs, and ways of writing and reading (Hunt 2002:3). Children's books have different ways of delivering their content and message to the readers and audiences. The process of writing children's books must consider several aspects suitable for children. Obi defined children's literature in *Children's Literature* book into three criteria; children or teenager's characters, simple languages, and ideas, and also the aim is to teach morals and values (Obi 2010:3). Thus, children's book authors must be careful in writing the books to leave a good impact and lesson to the readers, especially the children books that contained multicultural discussions.

Children's books that discuss multiculturalism are known as multicultural children's books. It is the kind of children's literature that has always been discussed and published in American diversity society. Madigan defines multicultural children's books as the kind of literature that discusses the culture of

the minority focuses on how the people embrace the difference (1993:169). Thus, multicultural children's books contain the discussion of the experiences of the underrepresented groups and different historical backgrounds or perspectives in society. The aims are to encourage people to accept and respect cultural differences and also to create social equality (Cai 2002:7). The publications of multicultural children's books have been increasing these recent years (Salas 4). It happens due to the following cases that relate to the experiences and struggles of underrepresented or minority groups in society.

However, recently many classic stories have been re-examined due to the sensitive issues and stereotypes of certain minority groups. Those multicultural children's books are more likely to present the minority groups negatively and the majority groups in positive ways. The representation of race characters in children's books was found stereotyped and problematic in the majority of the twentieth century (Wilson 2014:7). The Black characters in the varieties of multicultural children's books remain unnamed and hardly visible in the majority of the children's books at that time. Thus, creating balance characters and stories in multicultural children's books is essential for the authors. The aim is to give a positive impact on the racial representation of the diverse society.

Cultural diversity is necessary for humankind, the same as the need for the biological diversity of living organisms. In the end, culture is still needed for its values. None of any cultures existed in this world are teaching negative values. Thus, the diversity of cultures should be embraced and celebrated by people and should have the right attention and respect, so that the positive values among people could be spread widely, such as cultural tolerance. Embracing cultural diversity can be used as the way to prevent racism as one of the social issues in American society (Trenerry 2012:4).

Racism has been a big issue in society for many years in the society, especially in the United States. The term racism always refers to negative actions against inferior people in society. According to the article "Sociology of Racism",

racism is an ideology that leads to domination of a certain race that tends to feel superior to other racial groups (Clair 2001:857). The act of racism usually occurs in several forms such as color, ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. However, the type of racism that has always been addressed to the African-American community is the racism of color.

Every day people are struggling and experiencing racism, such as race discrimination, violence, and even bullying. Moreover, the African-Americans still could not get a job due to their skin color and ethnicity. An article titled “Discrimination in the United States: Experiences of Black Americans” reported that discrimination against most African-American adults even occurs in working place, such as when applying for jobs and inequality of payment (Bleich 2019:7). The discrimination of race occurs in every corner place of the country, in public transport, school, or even street. Moreover, it happens not only to adults, but kids can also receive that kind of action from people around them.

As one knows, the racism issue has become a big topic in America and even the world, especially towards the minority of African-American people in the United States. Racism being discussed again when the news of an African-American guy named George Floyd was dead during an arrest after being knelt on the neck by the police. This news was later brought up to the media and triggered public anger, especially among African-American people. The African-American community and many American people march in the street and shout “Black Lives Matters” which is a movement and a protest against police brutality and racial actions toward Black people. This movement indicates how serious the racism problem is against different races in American society, especially against African-Americans. Therefore, in this research, the writer would like to encourage the readers to embrace and celebrate the differences and diversity of culture to have a peaceful life among human beings. In this research, the writer would like to discuss the issue by using literature, especially children’s multicultural books.

In the books, there is some disagreement in society which created racism against African-Americans, such as discrimination, violence, and police brutality. Racism affected a person or group of people physically and mentally in a negative way. The victims of racism would experience trauma, depression, and the worst part is suicide. Racism could also create a society where people hating and not respecting each other. Therefore, racism can be prevented and fight against by spreading awareness of racism and educating people to embrace one another despite differences. Thus, children's books have become one of the media in educating and spreading racism to raise awareness of racism and cultural diversity.

In analyzing the books, the writer uses the Sociological theory of literature by Alan Swingewood and Multiculturalism. The writer assumes that the Sociological theory of literature and Multiculturalism are suitable to analyze those selected books because the topics of the books are related to the social phenomenon of human life and are the reflection of reality. The books analyzed in this research are also multicultural and tells about multicultural society. Thus, the writer assumes that multiculturalism is also a suitable approach in analyzing the selected books. The main topic of the books is the racism experienced by African-Americans and how to embrace the diversity of culture to fight against racism. In this research, the writer focuses on analyzing the type of racism experienced by African-American people presented in the books.

The writer is interested in analyzing these children books; *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World* by Michael W. Waters, *Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins and Ann Hazzard, *Shiloh and Dande the Lion* by Ciara L. Hill, and *Sulwe* written by Lupita Nyong'o, due to following reasons. First, the selected children's books analyzed are all included as children's picture books. As stated by Bianquin (2017), the picture book is a book that combines both text and illustration to tell its story and ideas and representing the texts (1). These selected picture books represent their characters and ideas in pictures. The illustrators illustrated realistic pictures of the characters on each

page that could enrich children's understanding of the stories. These selected children's books also portray the characters' emotions in a picture so that the readers, especially children are interested in reading the books. Moreover, since the selected children's books are multicultural stories, the illustrators portrayed each character differently for example, for a young Black boy character they picture the character in dark skin, and for the young White girl they picture it in more light skin. Therefore, the children would enrich their understanding of the story and also the issues behind the story.

Second, these books represent the real issues in society regarding the racism against African-Americans and the community during this time. The forms of racism discussed in these books are different. The first two books by Michael W. Waters and Marianne Celano focus on discussing modern racism and social injustice, which is the police brutality against African-American people. In these modern days, walking on the street becomes one of the factors of violence and racial injustice by the police against Black people (Lavalley and Khalilah 2020:7). These are the sad reality that African-Americans have to go through every day and everywhere. Thus, the story of these books teaches people why there should be equality and justice of race, social class, and skin color.

In addition, the books written by Ciara L. Hill and Lupita Nyong'o portrayed discrimination against skin color. This kind of discrimination against race and skin color is affecting both men and women. These acts could affect them mentally, for example, their self-confidence. However, these books teach minority or African-Americans children and adults to boost up their confidence in their skin color through an imaginary journey. These books teach children to not be afraid of being different from society's standards.

The writer hopes that after doing this research, she can get more information regarding the issues of racism and also could embrace and celebrate the diversity of culture in society, especially how to respect diversity and apply cultural tolerant towards each other. Moreover, the writer hopes this research could help

the readers to obtain some lessons and values behind the story of all books. The writer also hopes that the readers could understand that racism addressed to people of any race is unacceptable, and could be tolerance and respect towards people from any race to fight against racism. Therefore, the writer gives the title to this research as “Embracing Cultural Diversity to Fight the Racism against African-Americans as Reflected in Selected Multicultural Children’s Books.”

1.2 Identification of the Problem

The main problem found in the selected children’s books is the racism against African-Americans in American society. According to the books, racism has been experienced by the African-American people. However, the stories portray how the characters are fighting and trying to prevent racism toward their fellow community by embracing the differences and diversity of cultures. The story teaches the readers to understand each other’s differences in ethnic and racial and also raise people’s awareness on racism and embracing differences.

In the selected multicultural children’s picture books, the writer found some problems related to African-Americans as a minority group in the diverse society. The book was written by Michael W. Waters and illustrated by Keisha Morris titled *For All Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World*. It presents the racism against African-Americans in the forms of gun violence and police brutality. These forms of racism are experienced by African-Americans/Black people for unclear reasons. As presented by Waters in his book which was published in September 2020, he mentions some African-American victims of gun violence and police brutality that happened in America. The names such as Treyvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Jordan Edward are reported to be the victims of racism in America. In this book, Waters tells how Jeremiah finds out the racism against African-Americans through television and newspapers. That news makes Jeremiah thinks about how to prevent and stop this tragedy against the people in his community. Thus, the discussion with his parents makes him understand that preventing racism can be done by strengthening the community and applying cultural tolerance.

A similar storyline can be found in *Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard and published in April 2018, where police brutality against African-Americans discusses in this story. This story tells how the main characters, Emma and Josh, hear the news about how a police officer just shot a Black man. Hill provides in this story about how Emma's family (white people) and Josh's family (Black people) are reacting to the social injustice against African-Americans. This story reflects how necessary the discussion is between parents and children to raise young people's awareness of racism and diversity. This story also teaches the readers that embracing diversity is a way to fight against racism.

Two other multicultural children's picture books by Ciara L. Hill titled *Shiloh and Dande the Lion* (published in April 2018) and Lupita Nyong'o titled *Sulwe* (published in October 2019) present the racism against African-Americans in the form of skin color discrimination. These two stories tell how the African-American child characters are discriminated against based on their dark skin color. Therefore, the African-American readers could reflect on the characters and the stories. These stories teach African-American readers to build positive self-esteem to gain confidence and a positive perception of themselves. On the other hand, these stories also teach the readers outside of the African-American community to respect differences and apply cultural tolerance. Furthermore, in promoting diversity, these authors present imaginary stories on the books that help the children's readers understand the issue.

1.3 Review of Related Literature

The writer found some studies regarding the topic and the selected children's books analyzed in this research. The first journal is written by Elyssa Youngs titled "Effects of Multicultural Literature on Children's Perspectives of Race and Educator Implementation of Multicultural Literature". This journal article discusses how multicultural literature affected the children about race and how the educator implements the literature. The author argues that children are important to be exposed to multicultural literature to be aware of the social issues in their

surroundings. Multicultural literature is necessary to be exposed earlier to children to develop their views of the world and its issues, since reading books, especially multicultural literature that could influence those (Youngs 2015:3).

The journal article concludes that multicultural literature is used to educate the students about diversity and differences. The author states that it is necessary to discuss in a classroom since it is an easy way to help the minority in the class to be active and educate the majority about other cultures (Youngs 2015:69). In conducting the data, the author uses some table of score percentage data that support the arguments and points, such as the exposure of multicultural literature in the class, skin color stereotype, and also the perceptions of adults' biases. The author also argues that those happen due to the lack of multicultural literature exposure to the students. This study is related to the author's analysis since the topic of the analysis discusses tolerance among children, which will be able to happen only if children or students are taught and exposed to multicultural works.

The second study is a journal article written by Stan F. Steiner entitled "Teaching about Peace through Children's Literature". This journal article discusses how the author uses children's literature to introduce and teach the children about social issues, such as social justice. The author uses children's picture books as an object to teach about the theme. Steiner states that children's literature has a big role and potential for teaching concepts, especially multicultural literature. Children's literature contains not only reflects the portrayed about cultures of some ethnic groups, but also pictured how the people from various cultures and ethnic groups live peacefully together by interacting to each other (Steiner, 2008:231).

Multicultural literature indeed is different because it is introduce and teach the children about differences and diversity offers in the story. As Steiner (2008) stated in the journal, the story offers in the multicultural literature teach the children to see race as a natural beauty and not as a barrier that separate people (231).

According to the journal article, Steiner discusses why he uses children's literature in teaching about social issues. Moreover, he also discuss about how to teach the issues by using literary works. This journal article has a difference kind of analysis towards the writer's analysis. However, this journal article does have relation to the writer analysis since Steiner the writer uses children's multicultural literature as the object of the research and analysis.

The third article is a paper written by Heather C. Chunningham "The Representation of African-American Male Protagonists in Picture Books: A Content Analysis" published in 2011. The focus of the research is on the teenage boys in the children picture books. However the author also focuses on younger boys. The intention is to develop works which Black Americans might relate to, books that recognized its particular cultural heritage, as well as writings that seem to be amusing. In addition, Chunningham carried out the analysis by having a look at picture books which was written by and about African-Americans that suggested by Cooperative Children's Book Center (2011:2).

Chunningham argues that the characterization of African-Americans in book stores affected their motivation to read the multicultural books. Chunningham added that it also affected the people's perspective of African-Americans in reality (7). The author uses several methods in the research such as sampling, unit of analysis, categories and coding, validity and reliability. In this research, the author provided several graphics as the result of research. As the result, the author found that 54% of sample books population is discussing realistic fiction than historical fiction (19). As for the theme of the books, majority of the books are talking about family with 27.5%, while the theme of African-American story is only 11% of the books followed by cultural differences theme with 5% (20). Thus, this research found that the production of books which discuss the minority group's struggles or diversity is really in a low percentage. This research can be useful be a reflection for other authors and illustrators to produce more literary works discuss the minority group struggles and embrace diversity in order to increase the awareness of people.

The fourth article by Jenna Wilson titled “Race Representations in Children’s Picture Books and Its Impact on the Development of Racial Identity and Attitudes” which published in 2014. This article discusses on how the development of racial representation within children’s picture books since the twentieth century. This article begins the discussion by explaining how children’s picture books have affected the development of children’s perspectives toward race. There was a test in 1939 among the children to identify their racial perspective by using both White and Black dolls. They were asked something like; which one is good and unpleasant, which one has a decent color, and so on. The result of this research identifies that the majority of the children prefer the White doll because it looks nice and said the black-colored dolls looks unpleasant. This is occurs due to the lack of information regarding race within their families. Some of the mothers in America did not discuss and avoid discussing race and racism with their children (Wilson 2014:5).

In addition, most of the classic children’s literature was problematic, stereotyped, and racially biased mainly in the twentieth century (7). For example, African-Americans characters are often present in the background of the story and invisible. The characterization focusing on the African-American community is also highly stereotyped, biased, and not balanced (7). Thus, these biased stories presented in the children’s literature resulted in the negative perspectives of children regarding a certain kind of race.

The fifth is a review of one of the selected children’s book analyzed in this research, which a book titled *Something Happened in Our Town* by Marietta Collins, Ann Hazzard, and Jennifer Zivojn. The review of this book is written by Claudia Pereira and published in the blog of University of Minnesota called *Children’s Literature UMN*. Claudia Pereira is a research fellow and invited assistant professor at ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon (IUL), integrated at the Centre for Research Studies in Sociology (CIES-IUL). Pereira started the review with a brief explanation to the plot of the story. She argues that this book is a great book to introduce to the children about social injustice that happened

nowadays. As she stated in her blog that this children books is a representation of the racial injustice and discriminations experienced by the minority groups, and it opens the discussion and conversations regarding the issue (Pereira 2020).

In her review, Pereira concludes that this book is an understandable for the children because of its vocabulary and narrative. She also stated that the illustration will attract the children and later will be an open conversation about the issue. However, this book also has a mistake in choosing the right words to express a criminal action.

Thus, this review is a short review that discusses the racial injustice against African-Americans. Pereira does not really explain and review the book in detail, instead she just states her opinion on the books in general. However, this review could be one of the media that promotes and exposes the diversity, and attracts the readers to read the books.

1.4 Research Questions

In analyzing the selected children's books in this research, the writer makes some research questions to limit the analyzing, as following:

1. What kind of racism experienced by the African-American people reflected in *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World*, *Something Happened in Our Town*, *Shiloh and Dande the Lion* and *Sulwe* books?
2. How do the authors show the embracing the cultural diversity in *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World*, *Something Happened in Our Town*, *Shiloh and Dande the Lion* and *Sulwe* books?

1.5 Scope of the Research

To make the analysis clearer, the writer has to limit the problems of the analysis. There are some interesting problems the writer found on the children's books that selected. However, the writer will focuses on the racism as the problem

showed in the books and tolerance as the solution to the problem. To limit the analysis, the writer will only analyze as following:

1. The racism experienced by African-Americans reflected in *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World, Something Happened in Our Town, Shiloh and Dande the Lion* and *Sulwe* books.

2. The author's ways on embracing cultural diversity shown in *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World, Something Happened in Our Town, Shiloh and Dande the Lion* and *Sulwe* books.

1.6 Objective of the Study

The objective of this research is to identify the racism addressed to the African-American's community and how to embrace and celebrate the diverse of cultures as an attempt to fight against the racism. In addition, the intention of this research is also to define the racism which reflected the social condition in America nowadays and relate to the children's books selected, in *For Beautiful Black Boys Who Believe in a Better World, Something Happened in Our Town, Shiloh and Dande the Lion* and *Sulwe*, so that the kind of racism is easier to be understood and also to know what kind of ways or strategies to embrace the diversity shown in the books as a way to fight against racism.

The objectives of this research are:

- This research reveals the kind of racism towards Black people shown in the books, such as discrimination, violence, and police brutally.
- This research reveals how to embrace cultural diversity in American society shown in the books, such as showing kindness, stand up for each other and accept the differences