



## **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.

### **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)



**Brian W. Parker**

**Author, Illustrator, and Creator of the Fantastical**

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, and now spends his days working in youth publishing (so cool, right?) through his company, Believe In Wonder, which he co-owns with his wife. He is the author of *Crow in the Hollow*, *You Can Rely on Platypi*, and co-author of *Obi The Changeling*, *Nicholas & Sabina in The Busy Season* and *The Wonderous Science*.