

“Think of the Children!”: Representation in Animation

[HEADS UP! This article contains some spoilers for seasons one and two of *The Owl House*.]

“Think of the children!” It’s a rhetoric often used by conservatives to argue against, among other things, diverse characters in children’s media.

Now, it’s important to preface that “animation” and “children’s media” are not one and the same. Animation is for everyone, including people of all ages, but it’s important to remember that “everyone” often includes children, and a diverse range of them, at that— from all sorts of racial and ethnic backgrounds, with all sorts of abilities, of all genders, and of any orientation. Everyone deserves to see themselves represented in the things they read, listen to, and watch.

The truth is, under the guise of so-called age-appropriateness, “think of the children!” pushes a closed mindset which prevents young people from becoming empathetic and informed in a healthy and digestible way. In simplest terms, children are the future of our society. If we want to create a more humane world, we need to seriously consider the media diet young people are consuming. It’s not just silly, unimportant fluff to be dismissed; there is immense value in understanding and analysing cartoon content. Yes, even stuff like *Peppa Pig*— but we can save that for another time.

Today, we’ll be talking about Disney’s *The Owl House*.



Disney
THE
OWI
HOUSE

Official promotional poster for *The Owl House* season 1 release. Photo from Disney General Entertainment Content.

[*The Owl House*](#) is an animated television series created by Dana Terrace, and it's a perfect example for the discourse of inclusion because it is produced by a large, mainstream studio (Disney TVA), is currently ongoing, and features ethnically diverse and LGBTQ+ main characters.

The show revolves around a 14-year-old girl, Luz Noceda, as she pursues her dream of becoming a witch despite not having magical abilities. The first season introduces us to many loveable characters, including Willow Park, a young witch with two fathers who are Asian and Black. Luz also befriends Gus Porter, a young Black witch studying at the Hexside School of Magic and Demonics, where Luz eventually begins her own magical studies and meets fellow student, Amity Blight.



Gus, Willow, and Luz in season 1. Photo from Disney General Entertainment Content.

Amity's character in *The Owl House* is nothing short of revolutionary. Starting the season as an antagonist, we watch as she slowly loses her edge and develops a crush on Luz. Her romantic feelings are confirmed in the episode "[Enchanting Grom Fright](#)", when it's revealed Amity planned to ask Luz to be her date to the "Grom," Hexside's school dance, their own version of the prom.

And that's not even mentioning our protagonist's cultural background as a Dominican-American! This shows a huge step forward for Hispanic representation in television, especially in an era of the (majorly under-discussed) "[Latino in red hoodie](#)" trope.

Season two of *The Owl House* takes us leaps further, too, when the episode "Knock, Knock, Knockin' on Hooty's Door" sees Luz and Amity [confess their romantic feelings](#) for each other and officially become a couple.



Amity and Luz. Photo from Disney Channel official YouTube channel.

Season two also introduces viewers to Raine Whispers, a non-binary witch who uses they/them pronouns. Many young genderqueer fans of the show were elated to see a non-binary character on screen being normalized.



Raine Whispers in their debut, “Eda’s Requiem”. Photo from Disney TVA.

Unfortunately, this milestone is not without roadblocks. Some dubbed translations of *The Owl House*, including Latin-American Spanish, changed Raine’s pronouns to be gendered, disappointing many Spanish-speaking fans, including Avi Roque, Raine’s voice actor. Roque took to [Twitter](#) to express their disappointment with the change.

“This saddens me and I wish I could do something to remedy it,” Roque writes in Spanish. “I hope Disney TVA fixes this soon.”

The Owl House has also gained negative attention from conservative parent groups calling for its cancellation. Sadly, these kinds of “scandals” have become commonplace for shows featuring racially diverse and queer characters.

“ Kids are so much smarter than they get credit for. ”

One Million Moms is a socially conservative advocacy group created by the American Family Association, an organization known for opposing LGBTQ rights and expression. In early 2020, OMM released a [petition](#) campaign against *The Owl House*, calling it “extremely dangerous” for “inundating young minds with secular worldviews that reflect the current culture”. OMM

supposedly “fights against indecency in the media”, but based on their parent organization’s history, and the common thread between the media which offends them (generally LGBTQ-friendly content), the true nature of their bigoted agenda becomes clear.

And herein lies the problem: the assumption that children are “too young” to learn about identity. We, as adults, do young viewers a severe disservice with the assumption that they somehow won’t be able to “handle” certain topics. Kids are so much smarter than they get credit for. All too often, the argument against inclusion is that it would be too complicated, too difficult to explain— unless, of course, the characters are White and straight.

But that’s just it. Not all children are White, and not all children are straight.

Yes! Queer kids exist! They’ve been around, will continue to be around, and they deserve representation as much as anyone else.

“There are certainly bigger and better things on the horizon for the future of animation...”

The Owl House is currently on hiatus after the mid-season two finale, and although the series has seen a bit of a bumpy ride with its reception from certain viewers and [executives](#), its existence proves that change is possible.

In a medium where pretty much anything is possible, introducing young viewers to delightfully diverse casts is such a treat! And *The Owl House* is not doing it alone.

Both Nickelodeon’s *Legend of Korra* and Netflix’s *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* feature romantic relationships between two female protagonists. *Kipo and the Age of Wonderbeasts*, also on Netflix, showcases a relationship between two boys, Benson and Troy, who are both also characters of colour (Benson is Black and Troy is mixed Asian/Latino). And there is also the Bardel Entertainment production on Netflix, *The Dragon Prince*, which spotlights the deaf character of General Amaya, who regularly uses sign language.



Troy and Benson in *Kipo*. Photo from DreamWorks Animation.

And although most of the other shows mentioned here have officially concluded, I get the feeling they will not be the last of their kind. There are certainly bigger and better things on the horizon for the future of animation, including children's media, and personally, I'm very excited to see where we'll go from here.