

The Disregarded Quarter:

The Unmet Market of Disabled Readers in American Book Publishing

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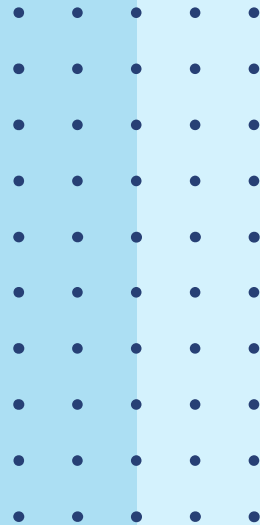
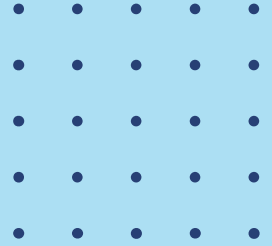


Table of contents



01.

**Statistics &
Stakes**

02.

**Accessible
Alternatives
(to print books)**

03.

**Representation
in Literature**

04.

**Representation
in the Workforce**

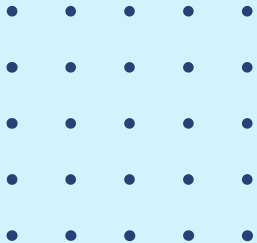
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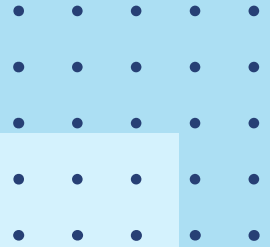
**Areas for
Improvement**

01.

Statistics & Stakes

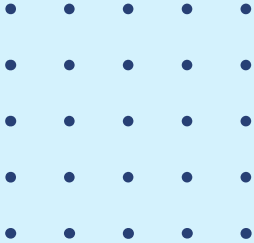
Is the publishing industry effectively connecting with individuals with disabilities?





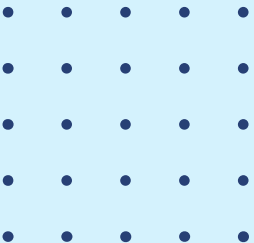
Disability – definition

Inclusive of physical, invisible, chronic, mental, and similar diagnoses.



28.7% of the US adult population has a disability

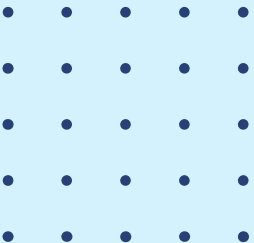
CDC, "Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic," May 2026



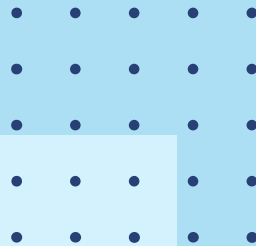
16.5% of the Publishing Workforce has a disability

Lee & Low Books, "The Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Survey 3.0," 2023

**More books than ever with
disabled characters and/or
authors, but still viewed as
“disproportionate,” inauthentic,
and even hostile**



Alice Wong, “Disabled Authors Deserve, and Demand,
More” / Wolfe, Hidden in Plain Sight: Disability
Represented in Literature”



By looking at:

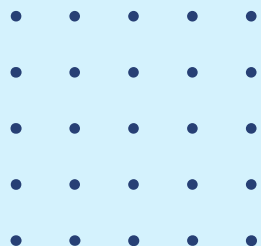
- the current state of accessibility considerations in product formatting,
- the availability of disabled narratives, and
- the treatment of disability in the workforce,

I identify facets within traditional publishing that alienate disabled readers, authors, and professionals alike.

02.

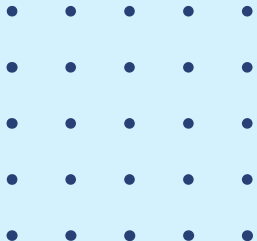
Accessible Alternatives

Are non-print books being
produced with accessibility in
mind?



Audiobooks:

- Can make up 10% or more of a publisher's total trade revenue ¹
- No "fixed" best practices for production
- Primarily marketed toward podcast listeners, drivers, and multitaskers ²
 - Less or no attention given to people with impaired vision, attention deficit disorders, etc.



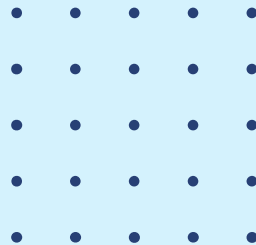
¹ Humber College, *Making Audiobooks Accessible: Accessible Audiobook Resource Guide*

² Snelling, "The Audiobook Market and Its Adaptation to Cultural Changes"

Digital Files:

- Schools and other institutions may request digital book files in order to create their own braille, large print, or audiobook editions
- Creating accessible files seen as timely and costly³
 - Publishers often pass along files “as is,” without necessary tagging of structural elements
 - Institutions are motivated to create their own non-copyrighted materials
- Earlier accessibility implementation would avoid future expenses and potential piracy

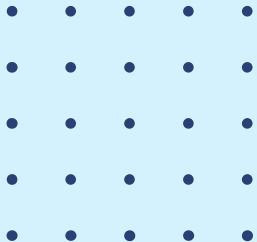
³ Bowes III, “Accessibility Requirements Take on New Significance for Publishers”



Braille Books:

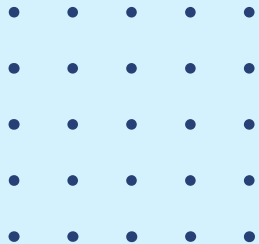
- Readers with visual impairments prefer braille: a “more immersive experience” that activates the visual cortex ⁴
- Limited number of braille book publishers
 - Burden of demand falls on specialized publishers like the National Braille Press
 - Mainstream publishers adopting braille production would open the market for braille books significantly

⁴ Stewart, “How the National Braille Press Brings Books to Blind Readers.”

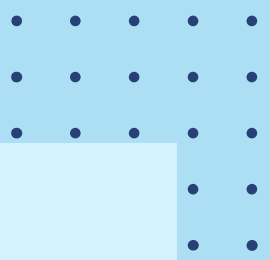


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Representation in Literature

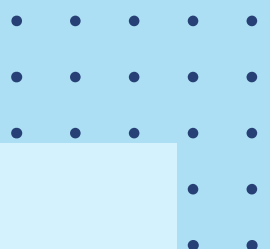


Are readers with disabilities
being represented in the
stories they consume?

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of small, dark blue dots arranged in three rows and five columns, located in the top right corner of the slide.

“... authors have had to fight for their [disabilities] to be present in books. They are told that their experiences are too niche; but what is ‘niche’ about a quarter of Americans having a disability?”

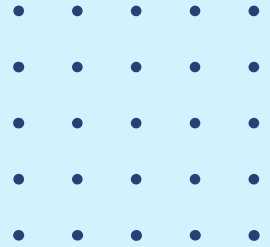
—Ginsburg and Rapp, “Disability Worlds / Disability Futures”

A decorative graphic in the top right corner consisting of a grid of small, dark blue dots. The grid is 5 columns wide and 4 rows high, with the bottom right corner missing, leaving 19 dots in total.

“Most people don’t realize how difficult it is to tell your story when it feels like the world doesn’t have space for you. . . What if major publishers provided support and infrastructure to people from underrepresented communities who want to be part of this industry?”

—Alice Wong, “Disabled Authors Deserve, and Demand, More”

Publishing houses with prominent disability considerations:

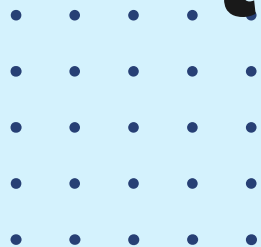


- National Braille Press
 - Specialist in braille book production
 - "... the only organization in the U.S. that publishes its own books by blind authors for blind readers. . ." ⁵
- INCLUDAS Publishing
 - Exclusively publishes books that feature **characters** with disabilities
- Oleb Books
 - Exclusively publishes books by **authors** with disabilities

⁵ Stewart, "How the National Braille Press Brings Books to Blind Readers."

04.

Representation in the Workforce



Are professionals with disabilities being hired in the publishing industry?

Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Survey



2019

89% — Non-Disabled
11% — Disabled

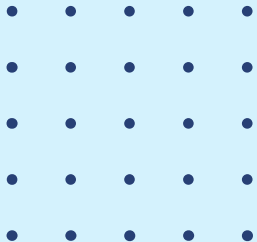
2023

83.5% — Non-Disabled
16.5% — Disabled

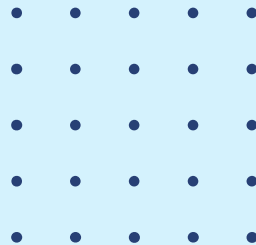
Barriers of Entry:

- Physical requirements for entry-level positions
 - "... a person should be able to lift 50 pounds. . ." ⁶
- Return to a fully in-office work model
 - Increased discomfort for many mental disabilities
 - Puts immunocompromised individuals at risk
 - Lack of access to home spaces tailored to mobility needs

⁶ Beeck, "Disability Representation in Publishing"



Benefits of a Disabled Workforce:



- Personally informed solutions to accessibility concerns
 - Example of bookstores: owners and employees with disabilities able to surpass ADA requirements in their efforts to maximize accessibility and comfort⁸
- Increased comfort for authors with disabilities
 - Shared basis of understanding, decreased sense of alienation

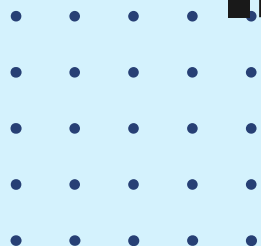
⁷ Beeck, "How Bookstores Are Bringing Books Within Reach."

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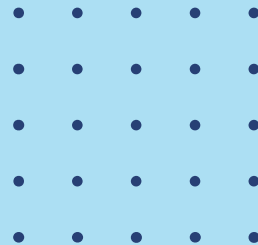
Areas for

Improvement

How can publishers improve their disability considerations?



How to Better Connect with the Disabled Public:



**Implement book
accessibility
standards from
the start.**



**Publish disabled
stories; elevate
authors with
disabilities.**



**Include people
with disabilities
in workplace
considerations.**

Thank you for making book publishing more accessible.

Let's discuss further!

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