

## Original Paper

# What Emotions Do Jason Reynolds' Young Adult Novels Convey?

## A Sentiment Analysis

Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar<sup>1</sup> & Elena Filatova<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Children's Literature, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Computer Systems Technology, CityTech CUNY, New York City, USA

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### **Abstract**

*"The All-White world of children's books" (Larrick, 1965) is still mainly White and heavily skewed in one direction. Black children are either entirely absent from the books or misrepresented in the stories. Although there has been a notable increase in publishing African American books over the past several years, "characters of color are [often] limited to the townships of occasional historical books that concern themselves with the legacies of civil rights and slavery" (Myers, 2014). These characters "are never given a pass card to traverse the lands of adventure, curiosity, imagination or personal growth" (Myers, 2014). With a focus on African American Young Adult books, in this paper, we show how Natural Language Processing (NLP) and sentiment analysis can be used as alternate tools to identify emotional patterns in diverse YA novels. We follow the approach for emotion analysis suggested by Mohammad (2012) and use manually created lexicons that contain Plutchik's eight basic emotions. Also, we measure how the use of the emotion words changes through the course of our selected books and demonstrate the flow of the basic eight emotions as well as the sentiment associated with the emotion words in the sample books.*

### **Keywords**

*diversity, young adult novels, Natural Language Processing, sentiment analysis, emotion, African American literature*

### **1. Introduction**

Discussions about "the whiteness of children's literature" (Martin, 2022, p. 32) are not new. "Throughout the entirety of the history of the United States, African Americans have been active agents fighting for their own physical, social, and economic liberation from stifling oppression" (Reese & Thomas, 2016, p. 7). Du Bois (2007) describes this experience as living in a world which yields Black people no true

self-consciousness, but only lets them see themselves through the revelation of the other. Across different genres and formats, in poetry, picture books, fantasy, contemporary and historical fiction, people of color have been continuously misrepresented and underrepresented.

Since 1994, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) has been compiling diversity statistics for books for children and young adults by and about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Out of 3427 books published between 2018 to 2021, 767 titles (%22) were written by or about African Americans and only 9% of books were authored by African Americans. Notably, according to Park Dahlen and Huyck's diversity in children's books infographic (2019), there are more books featuring animals and inanimate objects than books representing people of color.

Invisibility in the books "undermines children's affirmative sense of themselves and reinforces prejudiced ideas about people who are not seen" (Derman-Sparks, 2016). As Nel (2017) indicates, "racial invisibility is as harmful as racial stereotyping," (p. 122) as it conveys "the message that Black children are unworthy of representation" (Nel, 2017, p. 120). Although most contemporary books are less likely to be overtly racist, it doesn't mean the hidden and unseen ways in which racism persists in children's literature have sufficiently changed. Racial invisibility is a hidden message that promotes "the naïve belief that if artists do not represent Black characters, then their work cannot be racist" (Nel, 2017, p. 130). In addition to being invisible in stories, African Americans experience implicit biases such as intentional or unintentional racial microaggressions that convey stereotypical messages in children's literature. These stereotypes demean people of color's racial heritage or identity and represent negative cues about them.

While the number of diverse Young Adult (YA) novels has increased since 1980, featuring protagonists of varied backgrounds is fairly a new concept. Historically, diverse characters are either absent, underrepresented or misrepresented in YA books. Diverse characters have long been given stereotypical or inconsequential roles, and rarely the main hero of the story. For example, award-winning YA fiction awarded between 2000 and 2009 exhibited 65.6% White protagonists, 10.4% Black, and 4.8% Hispanic (Rawson, 2011). However, people of color, including ethnic, cultural and religious minorities, LGBTQ+, and individuals with different levels of ability, with different socioeconomic statuses, and sexual orientations deserve to come out of the shadows and be the heroes, not the minor characters of their own stories.

The widespread stereotypes imposed on people of color can be viewed by others as facts and it is likely for adolescents to internalize these persistent assumptions when they read the biased stories. One of the most harmful mistakes is to continue echoing many of the same stereotypical messages in today's stories. In addition to revisiting the traumatic historical events in African American YA novels, it is critical to offer new stories in contemporary realistic fiction and fantasy genres that speak to the current circumstances of all different cultures.

Attempting to categorize stories into types, in 1981, Kurt Vonnegut, the prominent American writer, developed a theory about the shape of stories. However, his theory and master thesis were rejected. The

rejected research later was recognized as one of the landmarks of storytelling. According to Vonnegut (2011) “stories have shapes which can be drawn on graph paper, and that the shape of a given society’s stories is at least as interesting as the shape of its pots or spearheads” (p. 285). In his theory, Vonnegut identifies the narrative arc of common storylines and charts them across a horizontal axis representing the chronology of the events, while the vertical axis illustrates the experience of the protagonist, on a continuum of bad to good fortune.

Following Vonnegut’s research, in 2016, Reagan and colleagues used sentiment analysis to map the emotional arcs of over 1,700 English fiction that had each been downloaded from the Project Gutenberg website more than 150 times. They used data mining techniques to reveal the most common arcs and identified a set of six major patterns. Similarly, the present study aims to recognize the experience of African American protagonists, examining how their emotional status might reveal a recurring pattern. Identifying the most frequent emotions used in multicultural YA novels helps to explore affective patterns throughout the stories and identifies multicultural characters’ critical times, detecting their emotional state as well as affectual shifts.

The present study is a part of the broader perspective aiming at proposing and testing a simple, easy-to-use tool for analyzing the emotional status of fictional diverse characters in YA novels. This work provides a novel perspective on reading, reviewing and analyzing diverse YA books and offers new interdisciplinary methods that can easily be applied to literary texts to reveal their deeper meanings. We introduce the most recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) to empower diverse literature and use sentiment analysis for the benefit of better selecting and understanding multicultural books. In this paper, we present how sentiment analysis can be used as a tool to quantify basic emotion words and identify emotional patterns in Jason Reynolds’ novels that have received Coretta Scott King honor.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study*

The theoretical framework of this study is based on two different lenses: 1) Rudine Sims Bishop’s *Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors*, and 2) Theory of emotion. In this section, we briefly reflect on these two lenses.

#### *2.1.1 Rudine Sims Bishop’s Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors*

Frank (2004) makes a distinction between thinking about stories as opposed to thinking with a story. Applying narrative theory to the field of medicine, he indicates, “thinking about stories implies making a story the object of the gaze of an expert who produces an analysis” (p. 209). In contrast, “thinking with stories involves taking one’s own place in that process, in which all participants will continue telling stories about each other and about themselves” (p. 209). Thinking with rather than about stories is aligned with Rudine Sims Bishop’s metaphor of stories acting as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. The metaphor was originally coined in 1990 when Bishop questioned the representation of African Americans in children’s books. Stories as mirrors imply that readers see some characteristics of

themselves in the narrative. Such a story reflects readers with some familiar portion of their identities, values, cultures, or experiences and in that reflection, readers can see their lives and experiences as part of the larger experience. The mirrors also may act as windows, allowing for a vicarious, empathic, and unfamiliar experience to supersede the limits of the readers' own lives and spend time observing those of others. These mirrors and windows can also become sliding glass doors, inviting readers to step in, walk through, and become a part of the story world. With stories acting as mirrors, windows, and doors, readers will move beyond their ethnocentrism; they will be able to locate themselves within their own world and in relation to the worlds that are not their own. In addition to Sims Bishop's metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, Krishnaswami (2019) introduces the metaphor of prism. A prism can slow and bend the light that passes through it, splitting that light into its component colors. It can refract light in as many directions as the prism's shape and surface planes allow. Similarly, books can disrupt and challenge ideas about diversity through multifaceted and intersecting identities, settings, cultural contexts, and histories. They can place diverse characters at these crucial intersections and give them the power to reframe their stories. Through the fictional world, they can make us question the assumptions and practices of our own real world. (Krishnaswami, 2019, p. 6)

Sims Bishop's propositions about windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors and Krishnaswami's metaphor of prism have particular relevance to our current research.

#### 2.1.2 Theory of Emotion

Emotion is "a complex experience of consciousness, bodily sensation, and behaviour that reflects the personal significance of a thing, an event, or a state of affairs" (Solomon, 2022). Theories of emotion are concerned with fundamental questions such as whether some emotions are more important than others, how many emotions exist, whether most emotions are combinations of the basic ones, and whether some emotions are described positive or negative, are they learned or transferred from one to another (Plutchik & Kellerman, 1980). One can detect emotions through body signals and physical expressions, physiological responses, attitudes and impulses. Plutchik (1962) describes emotions as a sequence of mental states and reactions with a positive or negative polarity content, indicating pleasant or unpleasant. As Plutchik and Kellerman (1980) suggest, emotions can exist in varying degrees of intensity.

Although psychologists agree that some emotions are more basic than others, they disagree on which emotions, and how many of them should be classified as basic emotions—some propose 6, some 8, some 20, and so on (Mohammad & Bravo-Marquez, 2017). Ekman's six basic emotions are fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust, and surprise. Ekman (1957) proposes a pleasant-unpleasant and active-passive spectrum to address the intensity or the degree of different emotions. Plutchik (1980) adds trust and anticipation to these six emotions. Russell (1980) suggests that all emotions can be demonstrated in a circle controlled by two dimensions of pleasant-unpleasant and active-passive spectrum.

In this study, we use Plutchik's psychoevolutionary theory of emotions to better examine fictional African American characters in contemporary YA novels. Plutchik's (1991) theory of emotion has ten postulates and the present study focuses on two of them including: 1) There is a small number of basic

emotions. Plutchik identifies fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust, surprise, trust and anticipation as eight biologically primitive emotions; 2) All other emotions are mixed and they are variants or combinations of the basic emotions. Plutchik believes that there are common elements of emotion among all human beings as well as animals. An emotion is not simply a feeling state. Emotion is a “complex chain of loosely connected events [,] that begins with a stimulus and includes feelings, psychological changes, impulses to action and specific, goal directed behavior” (Plutchik, 2001).

Plutchik (1980) conceptualizes the primary emotions in a model analogous to a color wheel and suggests a wheel model (see Figure 1) to offer a visual representation of primary emotions and to describe how emotions are interconnected. Plutchik’s 2D wheel model shows to what extent emotions are similar. Eight different sectors in Plutchik’s model represent eight basic emotions. Each sector has an opposite sector representing an opposing emotion. The eight basic emotions are displayed with a distinct color within the model. The wheel also shows emotions with no color, which are representative of blended primary emotions. For example, “mixing joy and acceptance produces the mixed emotion of love; disgust plus anger produces hatred or hostility” (Plutchik, 2001). It should be noted that as emotions move from the outside to the center of the wheel, they intensify and their color becomes darker.

For the purpose of this study, we follow Plutchik’s eight basic emotions and define them as follows. The basic emotional bipolars are: joy and sadness, trust and disgust, fear and anger, surprise and anticipation. Fear: Fear is an interpretation imposed on the thoughts provoked by unfamiliar events and accompanying bodily sensations. Fear is not a brain state but an interpretation of the psychological product (Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, 2009, p. 389).

Fear is an alarming emotion for the presence of physical or psychological danger or threat. The danger might be real or imagined and the fear can be rational or irrational.

Anger: Anger is an emotional state that occurs when unpleasant or unmet expectations happen. It is an emotional response to frustrating and difficult situations and an intense feeling of displeasure and discontentment that can cause an aggressive response. Anger can be initiated by rational or irrational, internal or external triggers.

Joy: Joy is an emotional state or response that arises when something positive and pleasant happens. Joy is a “pleasant state that shares conceptual space with other positive emotions such as gladness, elation, happiness, and, to a lesser extent, amusement. Feelings of joy arise in circumstances appraised as safe, familiar, and requiring little personal effort” (Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, 2009, p. 230).

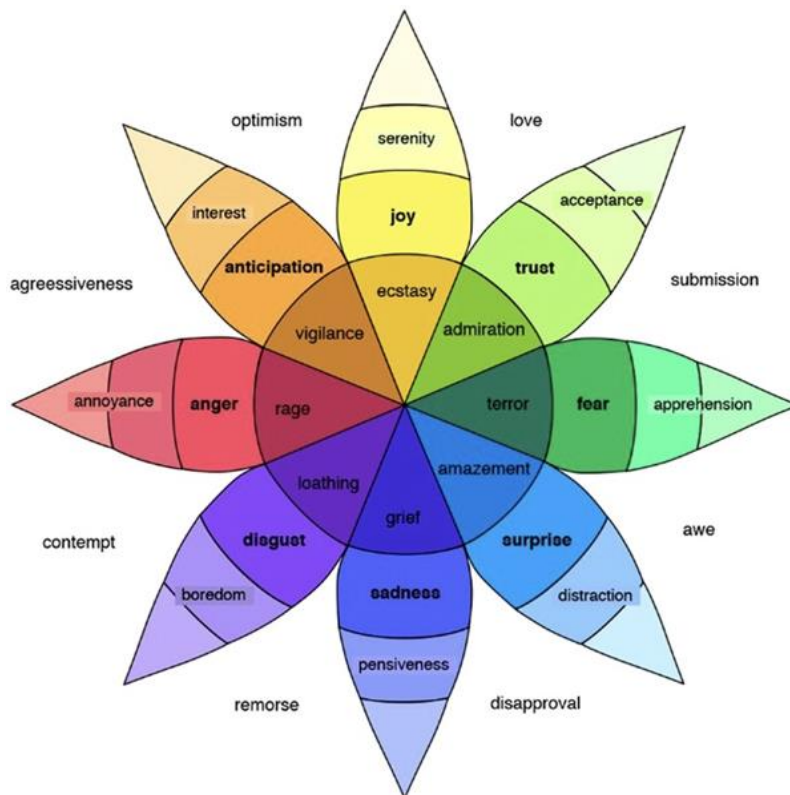
Sadness: Sadness occurs in response to stimulus such as loss and helplessness. “Sadness tends to be felt when an event is appraised as unpleasant, obstructive to one’s goals and concerns, typically caused by others or circumstances, and one feels unable to cope with it or modify it” (Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, 2009, p. 351). According to the American Psychological Association (2023), sadness is “an emotional state of unhappiness, ranging in intensity from mild to extreme and usually aroused by the loss of something that is highly valued”.

**Disgust:** Disgust is a profound feeling of dislike aroused by something highly offensive, unpleasant, distasteful, or sickening. According to the American Psychological Association (2023), disgust is an intense “aversion, for example, to the taste, smell, or touch of something deemed revolting, or toward a person or behavior deemed morally repugnant”.

**Trust:** Trust means to put confidence in somebody or something. Reliability and predictability are two important elements of trust. According to the American Psychological Association (2023), trust refers to “reliance on or confidence in the dependability of someone or something.”

**Anticipation:** Anticipation is an emotional state that refers to a feeling or realization of something pleasant or unpleasant forthcoming. Anticipation of disappointment prepares an individual for a possible negative outcome (Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, 2009, p. 120) as opposed to anticipation of victory or future positive states.

**Surprise:** Surprise is a response aroused by the unexpected. Any sudden and unexpected trigger may initiate the sense of surprise. According to the American Psychological Association (2023), surprise is “an emotion typically resulting from the violation of an expectation or the detection of novelty in the environment.”



**Figure 1. Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions. Adapted from Wiley Online Library. Copyright [2023] by Wiley Online Library**

## 2.2 Sample

Since the sample for this study are Jason Reynolds' YA novels that have received Coretta Scott King honor, we briefly overview Jason Reynolds' writing style, the Coretta Scott King book award, and a synopsis of our selected books. For the purposes of this study, we broadly define young adult literature as books for and about coming-of-age individuals, primarily written for readers aged between 13 and 19.

### 2.2.1 Coretta Scott King Book Award

Many different forces have shaped African American children's literature in the U.S. One significant force was to establish prestigious awards exclusively for books written by African American authors and about Black perspectives and experiences. In his 1926 influential speech, Du Bois (2000) discusses the criteria for African American art and decries that "We must come to the place where the work of art [...] is reviewed and acclaimed by our own free and unfettered judgment." Du Bois initiates the discussion on the need to have Black art for children recognized and legitimized and then during the 1970s this concern becomes the motivating factor behind establishing the Coretta Scott King Award by three librarians Glyndon Greer, Mabel McKissick, and John Carrol (Martin, 2004). As Martin (2004) further explains, these librarians realized that little attention had been paid to the work of African American authors and illustrators although Black writers and artists had published a great deal worthy of note. Therefore, they established the Coretta Scott King Award to bring recognition to an author and an illustrator.

Coretta Scott King was a remarkable author, leader of the civil rights movement, activist, and a dedicated advocate for social justice. In 1969, the Coretta Scott King Book Award was founded to recognize outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values (ALA website). The award commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and also honors Coretta Scott King, for her long-term advocacy for world peace.

### 2.2.2 Jason Reynolds

Jason Reynolds is a highly acclaimed New York Times bestselling novelist and poet, the recipient of a Newbery Honor, a Printz Honor, Britain's Carnegie medal, and multiple Coretta Scott King honors. He has always been hailed by critics as an author with an effortless, effective, frank, passionate and emotional voice. Jacqueline Woodson, the highly celebrated African American author, describes Reynolds' stories as honest conversations with his young readers. "His ability to connect his own experiences with those of the young people he writes for, and to address his readers with patience and respect, has made him a superstar in the world of children's lit" (Alam, 2021). As a youth, Jason Reynolds was inspired by Langston Hughes, one of the most important authors of the Harlem Renaissance. He was also influenced by Queen Latifah's songs as well as Toni Morrisons' and Water Dean Myers' books. Reynolds is the 2020-2022 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and a writing mentor to many young people.

Bunmi Omisore, a seventeen-year-old junior who has a strong admiration for Reynolds' books indicates that as an African American young individual she desires to be the main character in the books (as cited

in Alam, 2021). She looks for books that distill everyday lifelike Black experiences. Bunmi explains that “a lot of my white teachers and classmates, their perception of the Black experience is so warped, because all they come into contact with are books of struggle and pain” (Alam, 2021). It is important to highlight that “Reynolds’s books neither center on pain nor ignore it; they understand it as an aspect of life.” His books address the importance of being Black to personal identity, the power of seeing yourself in books, diversity, racism, and police misconduct. Reynolds’ novels “provide neither role models nor cautionary tales, and they are written in a hip-hop-inflected teen argot” (Alam, 2021).

### 2.2.3 A Synopsis of the Selected Books for This Study

*All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds 2016 honor. Jason Reynolds—an African American YA author collaborated with Brendan Kiely—a White YA author to write *All American Boys*, a novel in two voices. Their book sheds light on police brutality and violence against Black teenagers in the U.S. *All American Boys* was published in 2015 and listed as the third most challenged book in 2020. The protagonists, Rashad Butler and Quinn Collins are two young men, one African American and one White. The narration is through Rashad and Quinn’s alternating voices. Reynolds narrates Rashad’s story, and Kiely tells Quinn’s side of the story. Rashad is beaten violently by a police officer who mistakes him for a shoplifter at a local store and Quinn, Rashad’s classmate and a close friend of the brother of the cop, is a witness of the act. The incident is spread virally through social media and the injured Rashad finds himself in a public spotlight.

Although the subject matter is sensitive and controversial, the book became an instant bestseller. Readers including teenagers, parents, teachers, and librarians have embraced reading a book that deals with issues such as violence, racial bias and injustice in the country. They appreciate viewing the violent event from different perspectives and having an opportunity to discuss these difficult and uncomfortable conversations. The book is timely, the narration is heart-wrenching, and the message is powerful.

*The Boy in the Black Suit* by Jason Reynolds 2016 honor. A *Kirkus Reviews* writer calls Reynolds’ *The Boy in the Black Suit* a vivid, satisfying and ultimately upbeat tale of grief, redemption and grace. Reynolds’ message is frank and hopeful: Everyone needs to process different stages of grief slowly and uniquely as they adapt to a new reality. As Matt—the young African American protagonist is grieving, he tries to resolve the emotional and life changes that come with the death of her beloved mother in his own way. Matt’s grieving process involves visiting and eventually working at the local funeral home, closely observing and listening to mourning family members and learning from them.

Despite his traumatic situation, Matt manages to take care of himself as well as his dad. Lovey, the girl who befriends Matt, understands Matt’s loneliness and eases his pain in coping with sadness and the grieving process. The story’s main focus is not on grief but on what Matt can do to overcome his sense of loss. Narrated with candor and vulnerability, Matt’s story is sorrowful but also a source of healing for other grieving individuals.

*Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, 2018 honor. Reynolds’s 2017 novel in verse, *Long Way Down* is an emotionally intense, powerful and authentic story of the impacts of gun violence on young people of



color. Will is a desperate and angry teenager seeking revenge on those who shot his older brother, Shawn, dead. In the face of extreme hardship, the impulse for revenge is strong and irresistible. The entire plot takes place in the apartment building's elevator as Will is traveling from 7th to the ground floor carrying Shawn's gun tucked in his waistband. However, surprisingly Will visits the ghosts of other dead family and friends who were also victims of gun violence from the past. Will's 60 second in the elevator is a revelatory ride. Through this unique experience, Will could confront his feelings of sadness, loss and revenge with a clearer mind. He thinks about cycles of violence in his community through different perspectives and how hard a decision it is for him on this long way down to avenge or not. Simon & Schuster, *Long Way Down's* publisher, describes the novel as an ode to Put the Damn Guns Down.

*As Brave as You* written by Jason Reynolds 2017 honor. Genie and his brother Ernie were sent to stay with their grandparents for the summer—in rural Virginia. The difference between their Brooklyn lifestyle and their grandparents' home in the countryside of Virginia is incredible. Unfamiliar with the culture of the South, Genie and Ernie adapt to the new lifestyle and learn more about their Grandpop and what a visually impaired Black man might have experienced living in the South. *As Brave as You* is a coming-of-age story, exploring different themes of mental illness, grief, racism, gun violence, and bravery. Genie and Ernie have very different personalities. In their one month stay in Virginia, Ernie falls in love with a country girl, while Genie keeps asking burning questions and logging in his notebook. Genie is extremely inquisitive about every detail and Grandpop is very honest with his answers.

Grandpop believes to become a man; a very important step is to learn how to shoot a gun. Genie finds that awesome until he realizes Ernie is not willing to learn how to shoot. It is critical for Genie to decide what it means to be brave so he is very curious to know why his brother refuses to learn firing the gun. The dynamic between Genie and Ernie is interesting, complex, natural and believable. This is one special summer vacation that they will never forget as they learn more about empathy, compassion, family relationships as well as their own personalities.

*Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Block* by Jason Reynolds, 2020 honor. In the words of Simon & Schuster, *Look Both Ways'* publisher, Jason Reynolds conjures ten tales about what happens after the dismissal bell rings, and masterfully weaves them into one piercingly poignant look at the detours we face on the walk home, and in life. *Look Both Ways* is a collection of 10 stories about students from an inner-city middle school. The star of each story is a kid who lives within 10 blocks of the school and they all know each other in one or another way. All of the students are Black and each have their dreams, fears, weaknesses, struggles and hopes. After the school bell rings, students scatter in different directions. What happens to each of them is unique but at the same time their stories are interconnected. The narration captures the intellectual and imaginative nature of middle school students and depicts how they try to find their way in a world full of surprises. In the following section, we discuss our methodology and illustrate how sentiment analysis applies the theory of emotion to the selected literature for this study.

### 2.2.4 Description of the Methodology

We follow the approach for emotions analysis described by Mohammad (2012) and use eight manually created lexicons that contain emotions associated with each of the eight basic emotions: anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, trust. These lexicons are created by crowdsourcing to Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mohammad & Turney, 2013; Mohammad & Yang, 2011) and can be freely downloaded from the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) website. In addition to the emotions, these lexicons contain the sentiment (e.g., positive and negative) labels. Therefore, in our emotional analysis, we also recognize words with negative, neutral, or positive polarity. The NRC Emotion Lexicon (EmoLex) is the first emotion word association lexicon that provides a comprehensive and large list of two sentiments and eight basic emotions. Also, the NRC Emotion Lexicon is one of the first lexicons that employed a community of crowdsourced annotators, not a small group of raters and therefore it is a more reliable list.

The EmoLex has a list of about 14,000 terms in several categories. The emotion lexicons contain different parts of speech, including adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs. For example, some surprise words in our selected books are *bizarre*, *accidentally*, *celebration*, *erupt* and some examples of anger words are *insane*, *furiously*, *hell*, and *oust*. Below, we list the number of words that were identified as emotion descriptors by NRC. These numbers refer to the NRC Lexicons that we use in this study. 'Fear' lexicon with 1,474 entries is the largest lexicon that we use in this study.

- Anger: 1,245 words;
- Anticipation: 837 words;
- Disgust: 1,056 words;
- Fear: 1,474 words;
- Joy: 687 words;
- Sadness: 1,187 words;
- Surprise: 523 words;
- Trust: 1,230 words.

**Table 1. Lexicons Overlap Table**

	anger	anticipat.	disgust	fear	joy	sadness	surprise	trust
	1245	837	1056	1474	687	1187	523	1230
anger 1245		96	549	703	37	519	133	51
anticipat. 837	96		49	159	360	85	215	316

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disgust	549	49		487	20	430	79	34
1056								
fear	703	159	487		50	657	189	80
1474								
joy	37	360	20	50		38	20	397
687								
sadness	519	85	430	657	38		105	46
1187								
surprise	133	215	79	189	201	105		135
523								
trust	51	316	34	80	397	46	135	
1230								

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The positive sentiment and negative sentiment word lists that we focus on in this paper, have 2,308 and 3,316 terms in total.

- Positive: 2,308 words;
- Negative: 3,316 words.

It is worthy to note that the lexicons for eight emotions can overlap. The concept of overlapping emotions is like when someone feels a combination of emotions at once. Emotions are not entirely independent; they can be distinct and at the same time corresponding with each other. The number of overlapping words in the lexicons for eight emotions is presented in Table 1. In several cases, the overlap is substantial. For example, the fear lexicon of length 1,474 and the anger lexicon of length 1,245 have 703 common words, i.e., *abandoned*, *wrongly*, *torture*, *rob*, etc. which means that almost ~47.69% of the fear words are also treated as anger words, and ~56.46% of anger words are treated as fear words. Interestingly, there is also an overlap for the negative and positive sentiment words (81 words). Example words of this overlap are: *unbeaten*, *influence*, and *rave*. Overlaps of lexicons are expected as emotion and sentiment analysis heavily depend on the context (Ghosal et al., 2021). Complete emotion analysis in a text requires context understanding, partly defined by understanding the nearby words in a sentence. However, it must be pointed out that in the current study we do not implement any context analysis as we rely on the surface text analysis with pattern (word) matching.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Our corpus contains five Coretta Scott King 2016-2020 honor books by Jason Reynolds. All books are in English language, their genre is contemporary realistic fiction and their format is YA or middle grade novel. One of the books is a novel in verse and the rest are in prose. Our selected books are: 1) *All American Boys*, 2) *The Boy in the Black Suit*, 3) *Long Way Down*, 4) *As Brave as You*, and 5) *Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks*. We choose the Coretta Scott King award since it is the most prestigious award for books written by African American authors. We focus on Jason Reynolds' award books since he shares fearlessly honest emotional truth with his readers. In his own words, Reynolds believes "if I feel it, other people feel it too" (Alam, 2021).

In our study, we use lexicons with the words that correspond to eight basic emotions. A human language is a complex phenomenon, and several aspects of this complexity are reflected in the emotions lexicons that are used in this work. There are words in our selected books that can be associated with several emotions and thus, belong to more than one emotion lexicon. For example, the word 'bad' is used in the lexicons for four emotions: anger, disgust, fear, sadness and the word 'cop' is used in the lexicons for two emotions: fear and trust. We believe that there are situations where these lexicons correspond to emotions that have opposite connotations (see Examples 1 and 2).

In this research, we look at each word as a standalone word and examine its inclusion into the emotion lexicons. We do not analyze either the context around the word or the presence of negation in text. Thus, in the above example we only state that this sentence contains a word (namely, 'cop') and the fact that this word is present in both 'fear' and 'trust' lexicons. For our analysis, if a word is used in several lexicons it is counted for each of the emotions. If a word is repeated several times in a text snippet, then each repetition of the word is counted too (see Example 3).

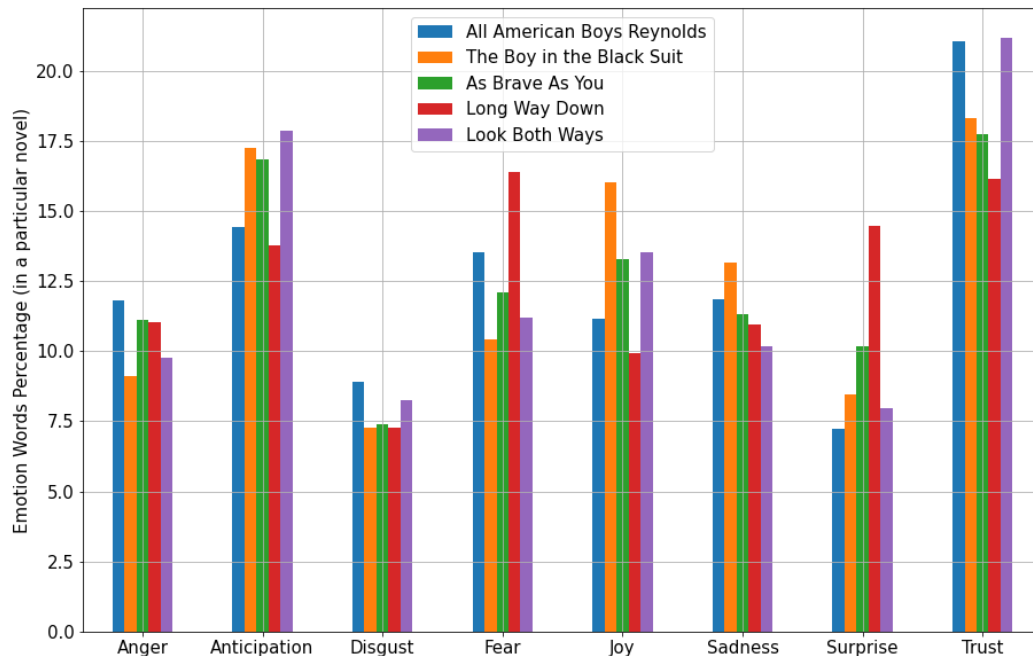
Example 1: And of course, it worked the other way around too—especially when the 'cop' involved was the older brother of your oldest friend (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015, p. 75).

Example 2: Maybe he was reliving what it was like to leave me every day to be a 'cop' (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015, p. 178).

Example 3: Mr. Ray clapped me on the back—good bad news is better than bad bad news. (Reynolds, 2015, p. 84)

We compare the distribution of emotion words across our selected books. As these five novels differ in length, to compare the emotions distribution we perform normalization: instead of absolute counts for each of the emotions, we identify the percentage for the emotion words used in each text. Figure 2 demonstrates the distribution of emotions across five novels by Reynolds. According to our chart, across all the five novels, the words that correspond to the "trust" emotion are used much more frequently than the words that correspond to the other seven emotions. At the same time, the words that correspond to the "disgust" emotion are the least frequent across all the five novels. Another worthwhile observation is the balance between the "fear" and "joy" emotion words for *The Boy in the Black Suit* and *Long Way Down* novels. Also, the outlier *surprise* emotion for the *Long Way Down* novel in comparison to the other four

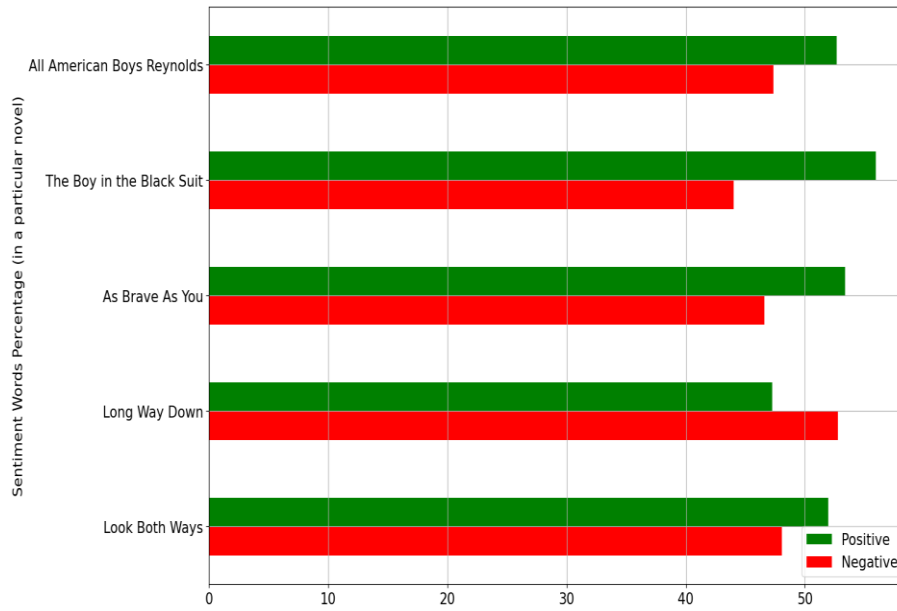
novels is an important observation.



**Figure 2. The Distribution of Emotions across Five YA Novels by Reynolds**

We are aware that when words are used in different contexts as well as different senses, they can convey different emotions (Mohammad, 2015). Also, we know that the presence of negations can have a significant effect on sentiment and emotion detection (Barnes et al., 2021). However, in this study, we do not use the context to fine-tune the emotion detection system. Also, we do not identify negations. Because of this limitation in the study, we only see that words that are listed in the ‘trust’ lexicon are frequently used in Jason Reynold’s novels. However, without human annotation and further analysis of the corpus we cannot predict if these words are used because of trust among the characters or lack of trust. Therefore, our results convey that across all the five novels, the words that correspond to the continuum of the “trust-mistrust’ emotion are used much more frequently than the words that correspond to the other seven emotions.

The issue with the processing of negation becomes more pronounced when dealing with sentiment analysis. Figure 3 presents the distribution of sentiment words (positive and negative) across the novels under analysis. Overall, the split between positive and negative words looks pretty even with four of five novels having slightly more positive words and only *Long Way Down* having slightly more negative words (see Figure 3).



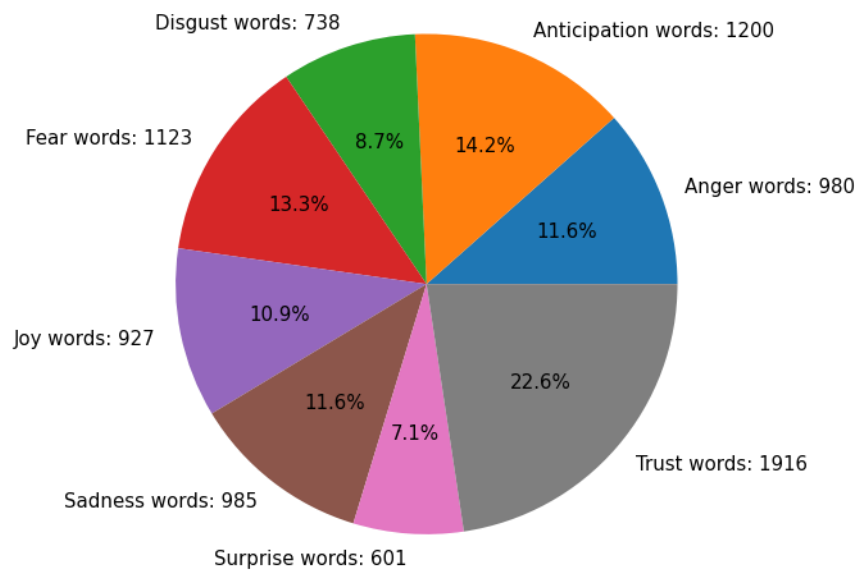
**Figure 3. The Distribution of Sentiment Words across Five Novels by Reynolds**

Below are the most frequent five words for each of the eight emotions in each of the five novels under analysis. (Note 1)

- *All American Boys*
  - Anger: hell, shit, damn, crazy, shot;
  - Anticipation: time, mother, good, thought, finally;
  - Disgust: hell, shit, finally, damn, weird;
  - Fear: hell, cop, hospital, police, crazy;
  - Joy: mother, good, kind, finally, god;
  - Sadness: mother, hell, hospital, crazy, shot;
  - Surprise: good, finally, shot, mouth, guess;
  - Trust: mother, good, school, brother, team.
- *The Boy in the Black Suit*
  - Anger: crazy, bad, damn, feeling, shot;
  - Anticipation: time, good, thought, mother, pretty;
  - Disgust: weird, bad, damn, feeling, finally;
  - Fear: crazy, casket, bad, chicken, feeling;
  - Joy: good, mother, pretty, love, food;
  - Sadness: funeral, mother, crazy, casket, bad;
  - Surprise: good, guess, mouth, smile, feeling;
  - Trust: good, mother, pretty, school, food.
- *As Brave As You*
  - Anger: gun, crazy, shoot, bad, hit;

- Anticipation: time, good, thought, top, finally;
- Disgust: finally, bad, weird, tree, smell;
- Fear: gun, crazy, shoot, bad, broken;
- Joy: good, finally, kind, mother, pretty;
- Sadness: crazy, mother, bad, dark, broken;
- Surprise: good, mouth, finally, smile, sweet;
- Trust: good, top, finally, truck, kind.
- *Long Way Down*
- Anger: gun, shot, bang, hell, feeling;
- Anticipation: time, thought, mother, finally, wait;
- Disgust: finally, bang, stomach, hell, feeling;
- Fear: buck, gun, shot, bang, kill;
- Joy: mother, finally, good, hug, kind;
- Sadness: mother, crying, shot, dark, bang;
- Surprise: buck, pop, mouth, finally, shot;
- Trust: brother, father, real, mother, finally.
- *Look Both Ways*
- Anger: smell, hit, shot, words, cross;
- Anticipation: mother, time, thought, long, good;
- Disgust: john, smell, weird, finally, nose;
- Fear: change, guard, homework, shot, war;
- Joy: mother, kind, good, laugh, love;
- Sadness: mother, shot, fall, cross, blue;
- Surprise: mouth, good, laugh, finally, cream;
- Trust: school, mother, kind good, father.

To visualize the percentage of words for each of the eight basic emotions in the novels, we examine the complete text of the novel, word by word, to check if the current word belongs to any of the eight emotions' lexicons. If the current word belongs to several lexicons, then all the corresponding counters are increased. For example, the pie chart (see Figure 4) demonstrates the percentage of every particular emotion coverage in *All American Boys*. As the chart shows, trust words (22.6%) have the highest percentage.



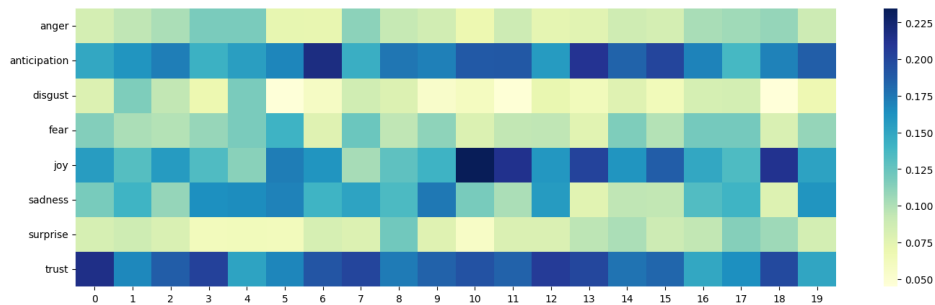
**Figure 4. The Percentage of Words for each of the Eighth Emotions in *All American Boys***

In this study, we use a lexicon-based emotion detection method. We do not apply any modern supervised classification techniques due to the fact that our corpus (five novels by Jason Reynolds) does not have emotions annotation. According to Öhman (2020), emotion annotation is a costly, time-consuming and difficult task, and the available annotation schemes are not always the most conducive and cost effective for the creation of reliable emotion annotations. One of the questions that need to be answered before performing emotion annotation is the granularity of text snippets for which the emotions are detected: e.g., sentence-level, chapter-level, etc. The present analysis is done on the novel-level and the texts of the novel are analyzed as a whole.

We note how the use of emotion words has changed through the course of our selected books. Therefore, we become interested in analyzing the flow of basic eight emotions throughout the novels. In this study, we present an example of such analysis for *The Boy in the Black Suit*. Following the research paradigm presented in Mohammad's (2012) study, we divide the novel into 20 parts of equal length in characters. Thus, text parts might contain incomplete sentences and even words. In each of the 20 parts we apply the same procedure as we applied to the complete text of the novel. An example of the emotion flow analysis is presented in Figure 5. To trace the emotions, we use a heatmap. A heatmap is a data visualization technique that shows the magnitude of a phenomenon as color in two dimensions. In this study, the two dimensions are: the emotions and the text parts. Each emotion within each text part is assigned a cell where the darker the cell color - the higher the ratio of this emotion in the current text part. Thus, using the heat maps we can trace each emotion throughout the text, and compare the magnitude of each of the eight emotions within a particular text unit. For example, in Figure 5 we can see that the most prominent emotions in *The Boy in the Black Suit* are trust, joy, and anticipation, with joy having the highest



magnitude in the middle and closer to the end of the novel. While the disgust and surprise emotions have a low magnitude throughout the novel.



**Figure 5. Flow of Emotions in *the Boy in the Black Suit***

While the method used in this study is a lexicon-based method, the generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) family of Large Language Models (LLM) are very popular these days. Thus, we submitted several queries to OpenAI ChatGPT-4:

1. What is the distribution of eight emotions: anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, and trust in the *All American Boys* novel by Reynolds
2. What is the distribution of emotions in the *All American Boys* novel by Reynolds?
3. What are the main emotions of the *All American Boy* novel by Reynolds
4. What are the main emotions in the novels by Reynolds: *All American Boys*, *The Boy in the Black Suit*, *As Brave As You*, *Long Way Down*, *Look Both Ways*?

The ChatGPT-4's answers to these four prompts are listed in the Appendix of this paper. The answers by ChatGPT have some correlation to our observations. However, they demonstrate differences to our observations as well. The difference is mainly due to the fact that there is no standard set of emotions used by researchers in different fields.

Per our observation that a continuum of 'trust-mistrust' emotion is more prominent than other basic emotions in Jason Reynolds' books, we would like to highlight that trust is an emotion that comes with uncertainties as well as new possibilities and opportunities. Reynolds' fictional characters are not always quick to trust. They can be mistrustful or suspicious of other characters, strangers, or unfamiliar situations. They build and sustain trust through keeping promises and committing to their words or they find a way to heal after a betrayal, and to rebuild their broken trust. Some build trust through intimate relationships or distant interactions. For example, within *Look Both Ways*, which represents the highest number of words with 'trust-mistrust' emotion, repeated consistent behavior between Fatima and Benni establishes and maintains trust between them. Fatima's parents have trusted her and allowed her to walk home on her own from school. She sees Benni every day. "Benni Austin sings old songs like they're new songs. She also does old dances like they're new dances. [She] wears old clothes like they're new clothes" (Reynolds, 2020, p. 34). Although Fatima does not trust Benni at first, through their daily

encounters she gradually builds a trust and shares her dreams and concerns with her. Another example from the book is the Low Cuts who are a group of four children whose parents all are cancer survivors. They are trustful friends who have been brought together by their school counselor. As a sign of solidarity, “they all cut their hair down to almost bald” (p. 13). Bit is the major character of the Low Cuts group and he is known for supporting his friends as they have built a reliable and trustful relationship because of their common pain and struggles.

Jason Reynolds’ books appeal to audiences through emotions. His novels provide readers with an authentic glimpse into African Americans’ lives and make connections to their experiences. The metaphor of stories acting as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors introduced by Rudine Sims Bishop applies to Reynolds novels. His books enable readers to see characteristics of themselves and others in the narrative. Consequently, stories and characters reflect aspects of the reader and her or his lived experiences (e.g., a portion of their identities, values, cultures, or experiences) and in that reflection, readers can see their lives as part of the larger experience. The mirrors may also act as windows, allowing for a vicarious, empathic, and unfamiliar experience to supersede the limits of the readers’ own lives. These mirrors and windows can become sliding glass doors, inviting readers to step in, walk through, and become a part of the story world. Readers will then be able to move beyond their ethnocentrism; they will be able to locate themselves within their world and in relation to worlds that are not their own. Jason Reynolds’ stories depict something valuable and special that his seventeen-year-old fan, Bunmi Omisore and other Black or White readers will recognize and relate to.

### *3.1 Limitations*

In doing any multicultural research, it is hardly possible to include and examine all different populations in one study. For the purposes of this study, the notion of ‘multicultural’ will be limited to include only African American culture and to not analyze other forms of diversity such as language, social class, sexual orientation, religion, and physical or mental disability.

Complete emotion analysis in a text requires context understanding, partly defined by understanding the nearby words in a sentence. However, in our study we do not implement any context analysis as we rely on the surface text analysis with pattern (word) matching. In this research, we look at each word as a standalone word and examine its inclusion into the emotion lexicons. We do not analyze either the context around the word or the presence of negation in text.

### *3.2 Recommendations for Future Research*

Children are not the passive recipients of what they read in the books. The findings of our study raise new questions as to what will be the impact of a book with more ‘trust’ or ‘mistrust’ emotion words on a reader’s self-image, sense of trust, personality, and image of others. This offers a fruitful area of future research for NLP (Natural Language Processing) as well as literary scholars. For future studies, some of the data collected here can be analyzed from different perspectives. One area worthy of investigation is to use the same analysis for mainstream not multicultural books and compare the results. Also, it might be interesting to discover more about the role of the insider-outsider in creating multicultural literature by

examining their representation of eight basic emotions in the diverse books created by insiders as well as outsiders. Furthermore, our emotion analysis in this study is not a “context-aware” (Ghosal et al., 2021, p. 1435) approach. Implementing context analysis and understanding the nearby words in Reynolds’ books can be another area for future research.

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## Appendix

The answers generated by OpenAI ChatGPT-4 that are presented in this paper were collected on April 2, 2023.

Prompt: What is the distribution of eight emotions: anger, anticipation, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, and trust in the *All American Boys* novel by Reynolds  
ChatGPT-4 answer: As an AI language model, I do not have access to the specific emotional distribution of characters in a novel. However, I can provide general information about the eight emotions you mentioned.

The eight emotions you mentioned are part of the basic emotion set proposed by Robert Plutchik, a psychologist and researcher. According to Plutchik's theory, these eight emotions are considered basic because they are universally recognized and have evolved over time to serve adaptive purposes. Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure or hostility towards someone or something. Anticipation is the feeling of excitement or expectation about something that is going to happen. Disgust is a strong feeling of revulsion or aversion towards something or someone. Fear is a feeling of distress or apprehension caused by the presence or anticipation of danger. Joy is a feeling of great pleasure or happiness. Sadness is a feeling of sorrow or unhappiness. Surprise is a feeling of astonishment or amazement caused by something unexpected. Trust is a feeling of confidence or reliance on someone or something.

In the context of a novel, these emotions may be experienced by the characters and portrayed by the author to create a compelling story that engages readers. However, the specific distribution of these emotions in a particular novel depends on various factors, such as the plot, character development, and writing style.

Prompt: What is the distribution of emotions in *All American Boys* novel by Reynolds?

ChatGPT-4 answer: As an AI language model, I do not have access to the specific emotional distribution of characters in *All American Boys* by Reynolds. However, I can provide general information about how emotions can be portrayed and distributed in a novel. Novels can contain a variety of emotional experiences and expressions, which can vary in intensity, frequency, and duration. Emotional experiences can be depicted through the actions, dialogue, and thoughts of the characters, as well as through the author's use of language and narrative structure. The distribution of emotions in a novel can depend on various factors, such as the genre, themes, and intended audience.

In the case of *All American Boys* by Reynolds, the emotional distribution may reflect the themes of racial injustice, police brutality, and social activism. The characters in the novel may experience a range of emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and hope, as they navigate through the challenges and conflicts presented in the story. The distribution of these emotions may be influenced by the character development, plot twists, and climactic moments in the novel. Overall, the emotional distribution in a novel is an important aspect of storytelling that can engage readers and create a compelling narrative.

Prompt: What are the main emotions of *All American Boy* by Reynolds

ChaptGPT-4 answer: *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely is a novel that explores themes of police brutality, racism, and the power of speaking up against injustice. The book features multiple characters that experience a range of emotions throughout the story.

Here are some of the main emotions portrayed in the novel:

- Fear: Many of the characters in the novel, particularly black characters, feel fear in their interactions with the police. They worry about being targeted, profiled, or harmed by law enforcement.
- Anger: There is a great deal of anger in the novel, both among the characters and in the broader community. People are angry about the police brutality and racism that they experience, and they are frustrated with the lack of accountability for these injustices.
- Sadness: The events of the novel are often heartbreaking, and characters experience a deep sense of sadness in response to the violence and injustice they witness.
- Empathy: The novel also features characters who demonstrate empathy towards others. For example, Quinn begins to understand Rashad's experiences and shows empathy towards him, even though they come from different backgrounds.
- Determination: Throughout the novel, characters are determined to fight against injustice and to make their voices heard. They are determined to bring attention to the issues of police brutality and racism that affect their community.

Overall, "All American Boys" is a powerful and emotional novel that explores complex issues through the eyes of multiple characters.

Prompt: What are the main emotions in the novels by Reynolds: *All American Boys*, *The Boy in the Black Suit*, *As Brave As You*, *Long Way Down*, *Look Both Ways*?

ChaptGPT-4 answer: Jason Reynolds is known for his emotionally charged novels that explore a range of complex issues. Here are some of the main emotions portrayed in several of his works:

- *All American Boys*: fear, anger, sadness, empathy, determination
- *The Boy in the Black Suit*: grief, loneliness, hope, resilience, love
- *As Brave As You*: curiosity, uncertainty, fear, love, understanding
- *Long Way Down*: grief, anger, fear, guilt, regret
- *Look Both Ways*: humor, fear, hope, love, resilience

While each of these novels addresses different themes and features unique characters, they all share a focus on exploring a range of emotions and experiences. Reynolds has a talent for crafting characters

who are multidimensional and feel deeply, which makes his books resonate with readers of all ages.