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Being different is not wrong: Representing children's inferiority feelings

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Being different is not wrong: Representing children's inferiority feelings in *The Day You Begin* (2018) by Jacqueline Woodson

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the representation of children's feelings of inferiority in the picture book *The Day You Begin* (2018) by Jacqueline Woodson and to explore how these feelings develop into self-acceptance. The study applies Alfred Adler's theory of inferiority feelings, which explains that feelings of inferiority arise through social comparison but can also motivate individuals toward personal growth and compensation. Adopting a qualitative literary analysis, this research employs close reading and thematic interpretation of the picture book's verbal narratives and illustrations to examine children's emotional experiences. The findings reveal that children's feelings of inferiority, primarily caused by differences in appearance, language, culture, food, and personal experiences, manifest in insecurity, fear of negative evaluation, social withdrawal, and hesitation to express themselves, while these emotional struggles are gradually transformed into self-acceptance through the courage to share personal experiences and supportive social interactions that foster confidence and a sense of belonging. This study contributes to the existing discussion on children's literature by demonstrating how picture books can meaningfully represent children's emotional development and the process of overcoming feelings of inferiority. It also highlights the role of storytelling in promoting empathy, inclusion, and appreciation of diversity, thereby enriching literary studies on children's emotional experiences and identity formation.

Keywords: Alfred Adler; children; inferiority feelings; picture book; self-acceptance

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji representasi perasaan inferior pada anak-anak dalam buku cerita bergambar *The Day You Begin* (2018) karya Jacqueline Woodson serta mengeksplorasi bagaimana perasaan tersebut berkembang menuju penerimaan diri. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori perasaan inferior Alfred Adler yang menjelaskan bahwa perasaan inferior muncul melalui perbandingan sosial, tetapi juga dapat mendorong individu menuju perkembangan diri dan kompensasi. Dengan mengadopsi analisis sastra kualitatif, penelitian ini menggunakan teknik pembacaan mendalam (close reading) dan interpretasi tematik terhadap narasi verbal serta ilustrasi dalam buku bergambar untuk mengkaji representasi pengalaman emosional anak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perasaan inferior pada anak direpresentasikan melalui perbedaan penampilan, bahasa, budaya, makanan, dan pengalaman hidup yang memunculkan rasa tidak aman, ketakutan terhadap penilaian negatif, penarikan diri dari lingkungan sosial, serta keraguan untuk mengekspresikan diri. Selain itu, buku bergambar ini merepresentasikan proses negosiasi menuju penerimaan diri melalui keberanian berbagi pengalaman pribadi dan interaksi sosial yang suportif, sehingga menumbuhkan rasa percaya diri dan rasa memiliki. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sastra anak dengan menunjukkan bagaimana buku bergambar dapat merepresentasikan perkembangan emosional anak dan proses mengatasi perasaan inferior. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menyoroti peran cerita dalam menumbuhkan

empati, inklusivitas, dan penghargaan terhadap keberagaman sehingga memperkaya kajian sastra mengenai pengalaman emosional dan pembentukan identitas anak.

Kata kunci: Alfred Adler, anak-anak, buku bergambar, penerimaan diri, perasaan inferior

INTRODUCTION

Feelings of inferiority or low self-esteem are a common emotional problem that people often face when comparing themselves to others (Zati Amani & Taqiyah, 2024). These feelings can arise from various factors, such as appearance, family relationships, cultural background, language, abilities, or life experiences (Abdulkarimovna, 2025). When someone feels different from those around them, they may experience a lack of confidence, fear of rejection, and a sense that they are less valuable than others. Furthermore, Stoyanova & Ivantchev (2025) explain that feelings of inferiority are closely related to feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, shame, and negative self-evaluation stemming from social comparison with others. They also state that low self-esteem and feelings of rejection may strengthen feelings of inferiority and limit individuals in their daily activities and social interactions. In everyday life, especially among children, feelings of inferiority often arise in school environments as they begin to recognize the differences between themselves and their friends (S. Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, the issue of inferiority feelings is important to discuss because it is related to identity development, the confidence to express oneself, and acceptance of each person's uniqueness, especially among children.

One work that raises the issue of inferiority is the picture book *The Day You Begin* (2018) by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López. This picture book tells the story of several children who feel different from their peers, whether because of cultural differences, food, language, appearance, or their life experiences. These feelings of being different make them feel ashamed and alienated in their school environment. However, as the story unfolds, the characters begin to learn about self-acceptance and find the confidence to share their personal experiences with others. Through these interactions, they realize that differences are not something to be hidden but rather something that can enrich their relationships with others. With warm illustrations and a simple yet emotional narrative, this picture book illustrates the process by how children can slowly overcome feelings of inferiority and gain their self-confidence.

To analyze this issue, this study applies Alfred Adler's theory of inferiority feelings in individual psychology. According to Adler (1927), feelings of inferiority are a natural and universal condition experienced by every individual when they feel lacking or incapable compared to others (Arranz-Freijo & Barreto-Zarza, 2021). Adler argues that these feelings emerge through social comparison, particularly within interactions with family, school, and the wider social environment. Rather than being entirely negative, feelings of inferiority may encourage compensation, namely individuals' efforts to overcome perceived inadequacies and develop confidence. Accordingly, this study uses three Adlerian concepts—inferiority feelings, social comparison, and compensation as the pathway toward self-acceptance—as the main analytical categories for interpreting the characters' emotional development in the picture book. Moreover, (Liu, 2025) explains that feelings of inferiority can encourage individuals to pursue achievement and self-development, but if they are not managed properly, they may develop into an inferiority complex that causes isolation, insecurity, and difficulties in social interaction. This theory is relevant to *The Day You Begin* because the characters

experience feelings of inferiority due to their differences but gradually overcome them by finding the courage to speak, interact with others, and accept their own identities.

Existing studies in the literature and children's psychology have explored how children experience and respond to feelings of inferiority through social and emotional struggles. (Zati Amani & Taqiyah, 2024) explain that children's feelings of inferiority are often shaped by social exclusion, parenting styles, environmental differences, and low self-esteem, which make children feel less capable or different from others. The study also emphasizes that children who experience rejection or negative treatment from their surroundings tend to struggle with confidence and social interaction. Similarly, Schmidt et al., (2020) found that children's self-esteem is positively associated with social inclusion by peers at school, suggesting that feeling accepted by peers contributes to more positive self-evaluations. In relation to children's literature, specifically picture books for children, Watkins et al., (2025) explain that picture books help children understand emotional experiences and develop empathy through the combination of visual and verbal storytelling. Furthermore, according to Bulut-Ozsezer & Canbazoglu (2018), illustrations in children's storybooks play an important role in supporting children's language development, creativity, intellectual growth, and artistic understanding. However, these studies primarily examine feelings of inferiority from psychological or educational perspectives or discuss picture books in terms of empathy and literacy, rather than analyzing how inferiority feelings are represented as a literary construct within a specific picture book. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, limited attention has been given to an Adlerian literary analysis of *The Day You Begin* (2018), particularly regarding how its verbal narratives and illustrations represent children's emotional development from inferiority to self-acceptance.

Therefore, this current study aims to analyze the literary representation of children's feelings of inferiority in the picture book *The Day You Begin* (2018) by Jacqueline Woodson through Alfred Adler's theory of inferiority feelings. By examining children's emotional struggles, social differences, and the process of self-acceptance represented through verbal narratives, this research seeks to answer the following research question: What does *The Day You Begin* (2018) reveal about the development of children's feelings of inferiority? Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates how picture books can represent children's emotional experiences and encourage self-acceptance through storytelling.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis because it aims to interpret how children's feelings of inferiority are represented in the picture book *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson. Rather than employing a conventional qualitative descriptive methodology, this research focuses on the close reading and interpretation of literary elements, particularly the verbal narrative and dialogues, to examine how emotional experiences and social interactions are constructed within the text. According to John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, qualitative research is useful for exploring and interpreting meanings embedded in literary texts and social experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, this study applies Alfred Adler's theory of feelings of inferiority, which explains that feelings of inadequacy often emerge through social comparison and social interaction. Recent studies also explain that children's feelings of inferiority are influenced by peer relationships, social environments, and emotional insecurity (Zati Amani & Taqiyah, 2024). Therefore, Adler's concepts of inferiority feelings, social comparison, and compensation serve as the main analytical categories in interpreting the characters' emotional development.

The primary data source of this study is the picture book *The Day You Begin* (2018), while secondary data are obtained from journals, books, and previous studies related to feelings of inferiority, children's psychology, and children's literature published within the last ten years. The unit of analysis consists of verbal and visual excerpts, including narrative passages, dialogues, and illustrations that represent the characters' experiences of inferiority and self-acceptance. The data were collected through repeated reading and close observation, and the excerpts were selected purposively based on their relevance to the three Adlerian concepts. The collected data were then coded and categorized into four themes: physical appearance, language and cultural background, food and personal experiences, and the development of self-acceptance. Furthermore, the analysis was conducted by interpreting these themes through Adler's theory to explain how the picture book represents children's emotional experiences. This study is limited to the literary representation within the picture book and does not examine audience reception or the production background of the work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research question of how children's feelings of inferiority are portrayed in "The Day You Begin," this study analyzes several important aspects presented in the picture book. The discussion begins by examining the causes of children's feelings of inferiority, particularly those related to social environment and personal differences. It then explores the children's internal struggles before they can accept themselves, including fear, insecurity, and hesitation to express themselves. Finally, the analysis discusses how the children gradually overcome feelings of inferiority through self-acceptance and connection with others.

Social Differences as the Source of Feelings of Inferiority

Feelings of inferiority in children often arise when they realize that they are different from their social environment (Wang, 2025). School environments play an important role in children's socialization process, where children learn social values and become more aware of similarities and differences among peers (Audley & Jović, 2019). At school, children begin to compare themselves with their peers, whether by appearance, language, culture, or life experiences. These differences can make children feel unaccepted, embarrassed, or lacking in self-confidence. According to Adler (1997), feelings of inferiority emerge through social comparison, particularly when individuals perceive themselves as less capable or less accepted than others within their social environment (Fauziyah & Andriyanto, 2024). For children, social environments such as schools have a significant influence on shaping their self-identity and self-confidence because children tend to seek acceptance and recognition from their peers (Xu, 2024). Accordingly, this study interprets the children's emotional struggles in the picture book as literary representations of Adlerian inferiority feelings rather than actual psychological experiences.

The representation of inferiority feelings can be seen in the line, "There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you. Maybe it will be your skin, your clothes, or the curl of your hair." (Woodson, 2018, p. 1). This quotation represents the moment of social comparison in which the child immediately evaluates herself against the surrounding group. Rather than suggesting that physical appearance is inherently deficient, the narrative constructs inferiority through the child's perception of being different from the dominant social norm, making appearance the starting point of emotional isolation.

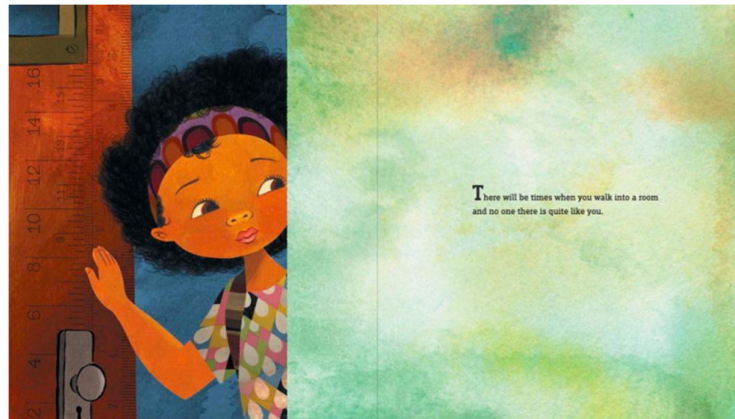


Figure 1 Illustration of A Child Entering A Room Where She Feels Different from Others



Figure 2 Illustration of A Child Feeling Different from Others Because of Physical Appearance and Cultural Identity

Similarly, the quotation “There will be times when no one understands the way words curl from your mouth, the beautiful language of the country you left behind” (Woodson, 2018, p. 4) extends this experience from physical appearance to language and culture. Here, language functions as a marker of identity that distinguishes the child from her peers, and the inability to be understood reinforces Adler’s idea that inferiority develops within social relationships rather than from individual weakness. The child’s hesitation to speak represents the emotional consequence of feeling disconnected from the surrounding community.

Taken together, the findings on physical appearance and on language and cultural background show that social and cultural differences contribute to children's feelings of inferiority. From Adler's perspective, feelings of inferiority develop through social interactions when individuals feel unable to adapt to their surroundings. The children in *The Day You Begin* experience low self-esteem not because they are actually lacking in any way but because they feel different from the social norms of their peer group. Differences in skin color, clothing, hair, language, and life experiences make them feel excluded and not fully accepted. This situation demonstrates that the social environment plays a very important role in shaping how children view themselves. However, at the same time, this picture book also shows that these differences are actually part of the identity that makes each individual unique.



Figure 3 Illustration of A Child Comparing Her Life Experiences with Those of Her Peers and Feeling That She Has Little to Share



Figure 4 Illustration of A Child Feeling Different Because Her Food Is Unfamiliar to Her Peers

The issue of inferiority in children caused by cultural differences and difficulties in self-expression can also be seen in the lines, “There will be times when the words don’t come. Your own voice, once huge, now smaller,” and “There will be times when the lunch your mother packed for you is too strange or too unfamiliar for others to love as you do” (Woodson, 2018, p. 6-8). These quotes illustrate how children may feel insecure and excluded when what is familiar to them is perceived as unusual by others. The first quote describes a child who feels embarrassed when their food is seen as strange by their peers. Something that should represent comfort, family, and cultural identity instead becomes a reason for the child to feel different in a social environment. Meanwhile, the second quote shows the emotional impact of this situation, where the child gradually loses confidence and becomes afraid to speak. The child’s voice, which was once “huge,” becomes “smaller,” symbolizing the loss of self-confidence caused by fear of rejection or judgment from others.

The textual and visual evidence reveals that children experience emotional pressure as their personal habits and identities are perceived as different within their social environment. The unfamiliar lunch represents a cultural marker that unintentionally separates the child from their peers, creating a sense of awkwardness during social interaction. Instead of feeling proud of their background, the child

becomes more conscious of being seen as “different” in front of others. Furthermore, the statement about the child’s voice becoming “smaller” suggests an internal emotional shift in which confidence slowly disappears. The child no longer feels secure enough to participate openly and begins to retreat into silence. This condition illustrates how repeated feelings of discomfort and social uneasiness can shape a child’s inferiority and influence the way they perceive themselves in relation to others.

Overall, *The Day You Begin* represents children’s feelings of inferiority as an emotional response to social comparison across physical appearance, language, culture, food, and personal background. Through these interconnected representations, Woodson illustrates Adler’s concept that inferiority emerges within social interaction while simultaneously preparing the narrative for the later movement toward confidence and self-acceptance.

The Fear of Negative Evaluation in Children’s Journey toward Self-Acceptance

Before reaching self-acceptance, children who experience feelings of inferiority often go through an internal process that is full of doubt and insecurity. When children perceive themselves as different from their peers, they may develop a fear of negative judgment, rejection, or the inability to be accepted within their social environment (Muñoz et al., 2024). As a result, children become hesitant to reveal their identity, experiences, or the things that make them different from others (Poole et al., 2022). According to Adler, feelings of inferiority arise when individuals view themselves as lacking compared to others, leading them to feel insecure in social situations (Bradley, 2022). In Adlerian theory, this perception is rooted in social comparison, in which individuals evaluate themselves against the standards of those around them. At this stage, children are not yet able to see differences as something positive but rather as a reason that makes them feel alienated and unequal to their environment. These feelings then drive them to constantly compare themselves to others and question the value of their identity and experiences.



Figure 5 Illustration of A Child Comparing Her Life Experiences with Those of Her Peers and Perceiving Her Own Experiences as Less Valuable

This internal process is shown in the sentence, “And in that room, where no one else is quite like you, you’ll look down at your own empty hands and wonder, ‘What good is this when other students were flying and sailing and going somewhere.’” (Woodson, 2018, p. 7). This sentence shows how the child begins to compare themselves to their friends, who have life experiences that are considered more interesting and meaningful. Rather than lacking meaningful experiences, the child perceives her own

experiences as less valuable because they do not match those celebrated by her peers. This represents Adler's concept of inferiority as a subjective evaluation produced through social comparison.



Figure 6 Illustration of A Child Feeling Insecure When Her Friend Reacts Negatively to the Food Representing Her Cultural Identity

A similar sentiment is evident in the quote, “When even your own friend Nadja will wrinkle her nose and say, ‘What’s in there, anyway? And you’ll wonder how she doesn’t see the rice beneath the meat and kimchi.’” (Woodson, 2018, p. 9). This quote illustrates how the child feels uncomfortable when their cultural identity, which is represented through the food they bring, receives a different response from their friends. Nadja’s response does not simply create embarrassment; it reinforces the child’s perception that her cultural identity places her outside the accepted norm, intensifying her inferiority feelings within the social setting.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the children’s internal struggles are initiated by social comparison, while fear of negative evaluation functions as one of its emotional consequences. From an Adlerian perspective, feelings of inferiority arise when individuals view themselves as lacking compared to others and feel unable to meet the standards of their social environment (Adler, 1927). In the first set of findings, the children compared their life experiences with those of friends they considered more interesting, leading them to doubt the value of their own experiences. Meanwhile, in the second data point, Nadja’s reaction to the food brought by one of the children makes her feel that her cultural identity differs from others’ and is likely to be negatively judged. This aligns with the concept of fear of negative evaluation, which is the fear of negative judgments or reactions from others that can lead to feelings of insecurity in social situations (Weeks et al., 2009). As a result, children become hesitant to express their identity, experiences, and the things that make them different from their peers. Thus, fear of rejection is represented as the result of inferiority feelings rather than as an independent psychological concept.

The issue of children’s fear of rejection and feelings of exclusion can also be seen in the line, “There will be times when the climbing bars are too high, the run is too fast and far, the game isn’t one you can ever really play. I don’t want him on our team. You can watch. Maybe you can have a turn later” (Woodson, 2018, p. 10). This quotation portrays a child who struggles to participate in social activities with their peers. The phrases “the climbing bars are too high,” “the run is too fast and far,” and “the game isn’t one you can ever really play” symbolize the child’s perception that they are unable to keep up with others. The situation becomes more emotionally painful when the child is directly rejected

through the statement, “I don't want him on our team.” Instead of being accepted, the child is told to only “watch” and wait for “a turn later,” which positions them as an outsider within the group. This rejection creates feelings of insecurity and causes the child to question their place in the social environment.



Figure 7 Illustration of A Child Experiencing Social Comparison and Feeling Different from Her Classmates



Figure 8 Illustration of A Child Feeling Isolated While Being Surrounded by Other Children

The emotional impact of the child's experiences of being unable to participate in social activities and being rejected by peers is reflected in the line, "There will be times when the world feels like a place that you're standing all the way outside of ..." (Woodson, 2018, p. 11). This quotation illustrates the child's internal condition after repeatedly experiencing exclusion and rejection from others. The metaphor of "standing all the way outside" represents emotional isolation, while the accompanying illustration visually reinforces this distance by positioning the child apart from the surrounding group. Together, the verbal and visual elements portray how repeated exclusion transforms social comparison into a lasting feeling of inferiority.

The textual and visual evidence depicting the child's exclusion from social activities and rejection by peers demonstrates how repeated experiences of exclusion and rejection can create emotional

insecurity in children. When children feel unable to participate equally in social activities, they begin to perceive themselves as different or less capable than their peers. This gradually undermines their confidence and makes them feel emotionally disconnected from their surroundings. Fear of negative judgment also encourages children to withdraw from social interaction because they worry about being rejected again. This interpretation aligns with Adler's view that inferiority develops through interpersonal relationships and shapes individuals' perceptions of themselves.

Taken together, *The Day You Begin* portrays fear of negative evaluation as a crucial stage in the development of children's feelings of inferiority. Through experiences of social comparison, rejection, and exclusion, the children become increasingly aware of their differences and begin to question their own worth within their social environment. These experiences lead to insecurity, self-doubt, and hesitation in expressing their identities openly. From an Adlerian perspective, such emotional struggles emerge when children perceive themselves as inadequate in relation to others. Therefore, before achieving self-acceptance, the characters must first confront their fears of judgment and rejection, which shape their journey toward greater confidence and belonging.

From Isolation to Belonging

Children who experience feelings of inferiority often go through an internal process before they are finally able to accept themselves and connect with others. Fear of rejection and negative judgment can make children hesitant to speak, participate, or express their true identities within social environments. However, positive social responses and supportive peer relationships can gradually help children develop confidence and feel more secure about themselves. Sakiz et al., (2021) explain that self-esteem and social competence help children feel more connected to others and reduce feelings of exclusion and loneliness. Similarly, Lindsey (2017) states that positive interactions and acceptance from peers contribute to children's social and emotional development, helping them engage more confidently with others. In addition, Orth et al. (2012) emphasize that positive self-esteem contributes to children's emotional well-being and social confidence, while Van Geel et al., (2018) highlight that healthy peer interactions play an important role in shaping children's self-worth. Butler et al. (2022) further explain that supportive peer relationships help children feel socially accepted, strengthen their sense of belonging, and encourage them to express themselves more confidently. From an Adlerian perspective, these supportive interactions can be understood as part of the process of compensation, in which individuals respond to feelings of inferiority by developing confidence and constructive relationships with others rather than remaining trapped in self-doubt. These ideas are reflected in Jacqueline Woodson's "The Day You Begin," where children gradually overcome feelings of inferiority by finding the courage to share their stories, accept themselves, and build connections with others.

The emotional impact of the child's experiences of being unable to participate in social activities and being rejected by peers is reflected in the line, "And all that stands beside you is your own brave, self-steady steel and ready even though you don't yet know what you're ready for" (Woodson, 2018, p. 12). This quotation illustrates the child's internal struggle before gaining the courage to face their social environment. The phrase "your own brave, self-steady steel" symbolizes the child's growing inner strength and emotional courage despite still feeling uncertain and afraid. Rather than applying that inferiority suddenly disappears, this moment marks the beginning of compensation, as the child gains the confidence to actively confront feelings of inadequacy instead of withdrawing from others.



Figure 9 Illustration of A Child Developing Inner Courage Despite Feelings of Uncertainty and Fear



Figure 10 Illustration of A Child Gaining Confidence to Share Her Stories and Experiences with Others

Meanwhile, the quotation “There will be times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you until the day you begin to share your stories” (Woodson, 2018, p. 13) portrays the turning point in which the child begins to overcome feelings of isolation by opening up to others. Initially, the child feels disconnected because no one seems similar to them, but this feeling gradually shifts once they begin to share their stories openly. In Adlerian terms, sharing stories functions as the child’s compensatory action: by participating in social interaction and expressing personal experiences, the child transforms feelings of inferiority into meaningful social connections.

Taken together, the child’s “brave, self-steady steel” and the willingness “to share your stories” represent two interconnected stages of compensation: the development of internal courage followed by active engagement with others. The child’s emotional strength gradually develops through the process of accepting personal differences and learning to face social fears despite feelings of

uncertainty. As a result, self-expression becomes not merely an act of communication but an Adlerian strategy for overcoming inferiority through participation and belonging.

The process of overcoming inferiority can also be seen in the line, “And all at once, in the room where no one else is quite like you, the world opens itself up a little wider to make some space for you.” (Woodson, 2018, p. 14) This line illustrates the changes that children experience once they begin to have the confidence to accept themselves and express their identities to others. A space that previously felt unfamiliar and unwelcoming of differences is now depicted as more open and making space for their existence.



Figure 11 Illustration of A Child Finding Acceptance and Connection with Others



Figure 12 Illustration of Children Finding Connection through Shared Experiences While Embracing Their Similarities and Differences

A similar change can also be seen in the quote, “This is the day you begin to find the places inside your laughter and your lunches, your books, your travels, and your stories, where every new friend has something a little like you—and something else so fabulously not quite like you at all.” (Woodson,

2018, p. 15). This illustrates that children begin to find common ground with others through the stories, experiences, and identities they share. Rather than eliminating difference, the narrative represents belonging as the recognition that similarity and uniqueness can coexist within friendship, reflecting Adler's emphasis on meaningful social relationships.

Both sets of data illustrate how children successfully overcome the feelings of inferiority that previously came from differences they faced. According to Adler's theory, individuals attempt to overcome feelings of inferiority through compensation, which may involve improving various aspects of themselves, such as social communication, academic performance, and self-esteem (Yang et al., 2023). In the former data, the children's bravery in accepting themselves made them feel more accepted by their social environment. Meanwhile, the latter data shows that as children began sharing their stories and experiences, they discovered that everyone shares both similarities and differences. This finding relates to the issue of self-acceptance and the need to be accepted within a social environment. Having previously feared judgment and rejection, children begin to realize that expressing their identity does not always result in a negative response. In fact, sharing their stories helps them build closer relationships with others and boosts their confidence in social interactions.

Overall, *The Day You Begin* illustrates that feelings of inferiority can be overcome through the bravery of self-acceptance and forming connections with others. This process does not happen all at once, but rather through an emotional journey involving doubt, insecurity, and fear of rejection. Viewed through Adler's theory, the characters' movement from silence to self-expression represents compensation: they no longer define themselves by perceived inadequacy but develop confidence by participating openly in relationships with others. Through this process, the picture book ultimately represents belonging as the outcome of embracing difference rather than hiding it.

CONCLUSION

According to the analysis, *The Day You Begin* illustrates that children's feelings of inferiority stem from social, cultural, language, and life experience differences that make them feel unequal to their peers. These differences lead children to compare themselves to others, resulting in feelings of insecurity, doubt, and fear of rejection and negative judgment from their social environment. Consequently, they become hesitant to express their identities, lived experiences, and distinctive characteristics. This finding contributes to an Adlerian literary interpretation by demonstrating that inferiority is represented as a relational experience constructed through social interaction rather than as an inherent personal deficiency.

However, the picture book also represents that feelings of inferiority are not a permanent condition. As the story unfolds, children begin to find the confidence to accept themselves, share their stories, and build relationships with others. From an Adlerian perspective, this process represents compensation, in which the characters respond to feelings of inferiority through self-expression and constructive social participation. Therefore, *The Day You Begin* portrays how children overcome feelings of inferiority through self-acceptance, self-expression, and positive social interaction, enabling them to feel more confident and accepted in their environment.

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