

# MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

INCLUSION PRACTICES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



## DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME:

### Sharing Children's Books about Disabilities with Your Students

Is there an elementary classroom in America that doesn't contain at least the beginnings of a children's literature collection? The books we collect to read with our students, or have them read to themselves or a friend, can open up a world of imagination, information and discussion about topics including but not limited to disability. With thoughtful attention to selection and use, children's literature can be a vehicle for understanding the diversity of the world through the characters our students meet along the way. This practice, sometimes called bibliotherapy, provides the opportunity to discuss sometimes sensitive topics in a nonthreatening and productive way. Bibliotherapy can develop empathy and respect, key dispositions in today's world, starting but not ending in our classrooms.

#### USE BOOKS ABOUT DISABILITIES (DIFFERENCES) TO TEACH ABOUT LIKENESSES...

As teachers consider using books as tools to introduce or discuss disability, some first questions to consider may be "what, why and how?" When teachers wonder, "What do I want to share? Why do I want to share it through a children's book about disability? and How can I meet the goal of my lesson or discussion through my book selections?", possible answers can lead to teaching strategies and more relevant book selections. Consider these first questions and look for your answers to be the initial steps to the lesson you present or the discussion you facilitate. Below are possible answers to the questions you may be asking:

***I want my students to learn about and discuss a particular disability:*** for this lesson, you are introducing disability through factual information that can be presented through fiction or non-fiction titles. In Brenda Miles' *How I Learn: A Kids Guide to Learning Disability*,

#### Resources

A collection of children's books on various disabilities and perspectives on disability and diversity:

[www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2017/08/28/find-a-childrens-book-to-explain-disabilities-to-your-child-or-classmates/](http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2017/08/28/find-a-childrens-book-to-explain-disabilities-to-your-child-or-classmates/)

Curated in conjunction with experts in the field, this search tool contains information and synopses of children's and young adult literature about or having to do with people with disabilities:

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/books/>

A list for both children and adults from TeacherVision:

[www.teachervision.com/childrens-books-about-disabilities](http://www.teachervision.com/childrens-books-about-disabilities)

The Schneider Family Foundation Awards: American Library Association annual list:

[www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/1/all\\_years](http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards/1/all_years)

Books on Autism Spectrum Disorder:

[www.readingrockets.org/article/using-childrens-picture-books-about-autism-resources-inclusive-classrooms](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/using-childrens-picture-books-about-autism-resources-inclusive-classrooms)

the main character talks not only about his learning disability, but about strategies he and his classmates with disabilities use to learn and be successful. Remember, however, that one book is one perspective. Continue with additional titles and discussion as needed to broaden student understanding and reflection. Emphasize that we have much in common, different as we may be.

***I want my students to learn about and embrace the diversity of our world or community:*** Children can recognize disability as part of the diversity of their class, school or community. In such discussions, disability is portrayed as an attribute, a part of what makes someone who they are. While teaching about disability itself is an obvious outcome, consider highlighting other skills, features or issues than just the difference of the character with the disability. For example, books about children with Autism Spectrum Disorder like *My Brother Sammy* by Becky Edwards, describe the behaviors we often see as characteristic of autism (streaming sand through one's hands just for the sensory experience as opposed to building sand castles). Consider taking these actions and putting them on the board, then having the students put post-its under things they do too. This creates a graph, as well as a common experience for reading the book.

The story becomes a discussion of similarities not differences. Note

also that the book is written from a sibling perspective, which can also generate discussion.

***I want to explore the idea of friendship:*** Eliza Woloson's *My friend Isabelle* teaches about friendship and similarities with simplicity and grace. The publisher, Woodbine House, offers a teacher's guide to help you work with this charming title.

***I want to enrich my lessons with current or historical figures with disabilities:*** Include the achievements of persons with disabilities in the areas of history and current events you study. A book like *No Excuses: Growing up Deaf and Achieving my Super Bowl Dreams* by Derrick Coleman, Jr., teaches about disability through the story of a familiar sports figure.

***I want to use a book that includes disability in order to explore classic curriculum areas:***

*A Character study:* real and fictional characters: In *Be Good to Eddie Lee* by Virginia Fleming, Christy considers Eddie, who has Down syndrome, a pest, but when he shares his secret world her feelings toward him begin to change. The three characters in this story can become an introduction to character analysis - or a scavenger hunt for alliteration!

*An Author study:* Award-winning author Patricia Polacco includes among her many titles books like *Thank You, Mr Faulker*, an autobiographical story of a

struggling learner whose potential is recognized by her fifth-grade teacher. Students can recognize both disability and ability in Polacco's many stories.

In your search for titles, you may also wonder, "Is the most recently published book always the best choice? Do I have to have the latest off-the-shelf to teach well?" The answer is an emphatic "no!" The resources in this issue of ABC Notes contain some of the best in children's literature as listed by entities like the American Library Association, Vanderbilt University and Friendship Circle. Some date as far back as the mid twentieth century, so read, read some more, then decide which books meet your needs. Know that there is going to be more than one book that can answer "why, what and how," and that is the good news. But while there are some great titles to be found across the decades, all must be used planfully and judiciously. As teachers, we must be careful not to reinforce "otherness" or pity for the characters we meet in the books we select. Use books about disabilities (differences) to teach about likenesses, and enjoy the hunt for books that answer WWH? for you!

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Archdiocese of Philadelphia

**Office for Persons with Disabilities & the Deaf Apostolate**

*Mass for Persons with Disabilities*

**Saturday, March 24, 2018 at 10:30 am**

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