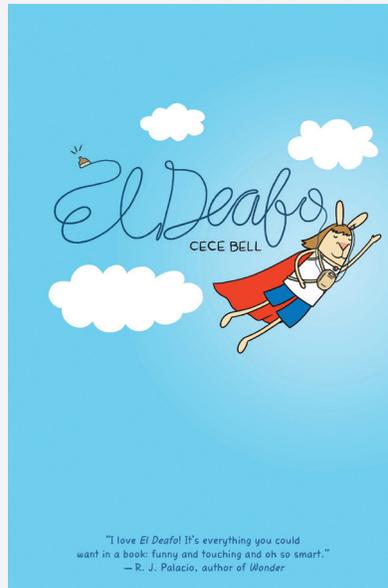


Second Reaction: Superheroes Have Something to Say

Bell, Cece. *El Deafo*. Harry N. Abrams, 2014.

Connie Harper



The world hears you loud and clear, El Deafo! Whether you have a disability or just want to be known as having a difference about you and not a disability, the world is listening. If only adults could be as understanding as children when it comes to recognizing that everyone wants to be treated the same way. Teaching our world to recognize such focal points relating to individual differences such as mental and physical disabilities, gender bias, sexual orientation, diversity, prejudice, and bigotry all revolve around acceptance for who we are as people. Cece Bell's *El Deafo* allows readers to understand that by being different one can make a difference and lead an amazing life. She uses her own life's hearing disability to relate to the trials and tribulations of middle school relationships and as a teaching tool that enables young readers to gain insight regarding the modifications needed to succeed in the world as a deaf person (Bell, A Note from the Author).

Of the many genres of literature today, there is none more popular than the graphic novel. Young readers are attracted to cartoons and are captivated by the visual stimulation of out-of-the-ordinary-styled characters and continuous dialogue. Bell explains why she depicts characters in *El Deafo* as rabbits in an interview published in *The Guardian* (Whitehealth Book Ninjas). This book is funny and touching in so many ways that relate to the real world, and it is wonderful when lessons are embraced by students and readers after the final page of the

book has been read and the book returned to the shelf. *El Deafo*, according to my students' reactions, examined many overarching themes that extended far beyond being deaf.

Students would tell any critic that you should never have to feel alone. There is always someone out there in the world who might be just like you, or someone who will empathize with your needs for companionship. They would also say that all of us have strengths and weaknesses, talents and shortcomings. All you need to do is work to get better or seek some assistance that can make you the best you can be.

Obstacles in life define our character. Don't let anyone make you feel worthless inside; rather, teach them about who you are and who you want to be. Words spoken by others really can hurt, so encourage others to think before they speak because other people do have feelings. Students, when they read the book, shared that you don't have to become a superhero like El Deafo, but you should be your own advocate, sticking up for yourself and for your beliefs. Superheroes might "save the day" in books and on the movie screen, but the only person you have to answer to is yourself when it comes to fitting in with a crowd of people. Remember, a true friend is someone who accepts you for who you are and doesn't try to change you.

Cece Bell relates events and feelings about her life growing up as a deaf person from the age of four. She inserts humor as she discusses serious subjects. For instance, when her teacher leaves her FM amplifier on, Cece hears everything like bathroom visits and teacher lounge conversations, which makes El Deafo a "super hero." She certainly does not view herself as having a disability (being deaf) and instead has embraced her life as one of opportunity. Diversity is all around us and is being taught in classrooms around the world. Now, it is time to apply those teachings in the real world. "What we do with our lives is up to us": this is how my young readers responded after reading *El Deafo*. Their idea is that we should "love and respect everyone so we can live in harmony." Each one of us, throughout the world, is special and unique in our own way. Thank you, Cece Bell, for having the courage to relate your experiences for others to learn from and for truly being a superhero.

Works Cited

Whiteheath Book Ninjas. "Cece Bell: I Wanted to Show What It Felt Like to Be the Only Deaf Kid at School." *The Guardian*, 27 Apr. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/apr/27/cece-bell-el-deafo-newbery-medal-deafness-childrens-books>. Accessed 27 Aug. 2017.

About the Author

Connie Harper is an award-winning educator, mentor, and investor in children. She has earned double degrees from Purdue University with a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education and Interpersonal Communications in 1980, along with a master's degree in education in 1983.

Harper resides in Lafayette, Indiana, with her husband and three children. She has been a classroom teacher for 36 years in both the Frontier and Tippecanoe School Corporations. In addition to her responsibilities in the classroom, Harper has coached the Southwestern Middle School Speech Team, tutors elementary school students after school, mentors student teachers, and has served on many textbook adoption committees. She is proud to have won the Tippecanoe School Corporation's Teacher of the Year in 2015 and the Greater Lafayette Golden Apple Award in 2017.