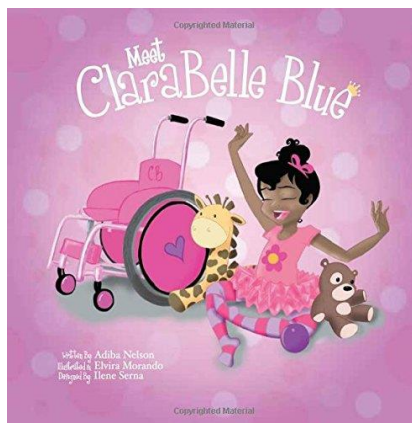


First Opinion: Looking Past Disability: *Meet Clarabelle Blue*

Nelson, Adiba. *Meet ClaraBelle Blue*. Illustrated by Elvira Morando, Scotts Valley, CA: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2013. Print.

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In the literary world, it is important to find representation of one's ethnicity/race and/or disability. For people of color it is hard to find books that portray us as everyday human beings and not heroes of the civil rights movement, remarkable inventors or famous actors. In children's literature, there is a limited number of books whose main character is a person of color, especially with a disability.

Meet ClaraBelle Blue tackles this problem head on. ClaraBelle Blue is an African American girl who uses a wheelchair. In this book, readers can explore ClaraBelle's experiences and be introduced to the concepts of diversity, inclusion, and disability. With the narrative using a rhyming pattern and the last page of the book providing hidden pictures for students to find throughout the book, *Meet ClaraBelle Blue* is sure to entertain readers and should be included in every early childhood teacher's library.

The book introduces ClaraBelle Blue by explaining how she is just like anyone else—just like you. The story is narrated from the point of view of ClaraBelle's mom who tells funny stories about ClaraBelle throughout the book. To address inclusion, ClaraBelle's mom explains how ClaraBelle can do everything her peers can, but that it takes her longer because of having "special needs." Even though in the disability world the term "special needs" can be

controversial, the message of the book is simple and clear: even if ClaraBelle Blue is a little bit different on the outside, at the end of the day she is just a kid who wants to play. As an introduction to disability the story does a good job of portraying a child in a wheelchair just as any other child.

The book is loosely based on the author, Adiba Nelson, and her daughter, Emory. In addition to being a children's book writer, Nelson is also a disability rights and inclusion advocate. Her passion for inclusion is evident in her portrayal of ClaraBelle in this book.

The illustrations by Elvira Morando are colorful and pop out of the page. They show Clarabelle using a pink wheelchair in different settings—playground, classroom, home. Although some of the scenes in the book seem unrealistic (i.e., ClaraBelle Blue zooming by on a rocket-propelled wheelchair), the love ClaraBelle's mom has for her daughter comes through on every page and the narrative demonstrates a strong bond between ClaraBelle and her mother. In fact, one of the most appealing sections of the book are the illustrations where ClaraBelle and her mother appear together. My personal favorite part included ClaraBelle and her mother rubbing their noses together (Nelson unpagged). The book ends with ClaraBelle Blue falling asleep in her bed while her mother turns out the light while saying, "Good night ClaraBelle Blue, I love you" (Nelson unpagged). These illustrations truly evoke the bond between mother and child, and it is on these pages that ClaraBelle seems just like any other child without the author or illustrator going out of their way to make a point.

In conclusion, Meet ClaraBelle Blue would make a great addition to any classroom library. It portrays people of color as everyday humans with regular needs, it represents diversity and disability in an inclusive way, and it normalizes peers with disabilities in the classroom for other children. I look forward to reading more about ClaraBelle's future adventures.

About the Author

Carlos E. Lavín is a doctoral candidate in special education at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Carlos received his master's in special education from North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina, and recently accepted a position as an Assistant Professor in Special education at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. His passion lies in preparing future special educators to create inclusive classrooms where learning is accessible

to all students through differentiation and meeting individual academic, social, and behavioral needs.