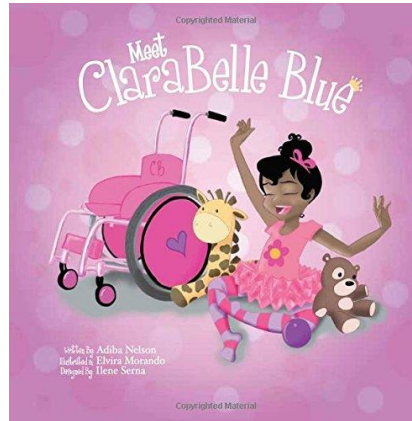


Second Reaction: ClaraBelle Blue, A Girl You Should Know

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

Cindy Kalachek



Meet the endearing ClaraBelle Blue, a girl with spirit and spunk who loves Double Dutch jumping rope and playing Duck Duck Goose. She also uses a wheelchair to get around. The book *Meet ClaraBelle Blue* written by Adiba Nelson details a day in the life of this young woman while ultimately teaching values of accepting differences, inclusion, acceptance and civility.

The book naturally lends itself to young readers because it essentially invites readers to explore the similarities between ClaraBelle and themselves. Immediately after we are introduced to ClaraBelle on the first page, the text invites readers in by providing an open dialogue in the form of a plausible reaction: “Now you might look and say, ‘UH-UH! ClaraBelle Blue is different in every way!’” (Nelson unpagged). I believe this reaction can be reassuring to children who do not have experience using a wheelchair or having a friend who uses one. From there the story of ClaraBelle develops by following her through her day and showing readers that she can do many of the activities that they do. Even when it seems like ClaraBelle can’t jump rope or run around in a game of Duck,Duck Goose, she shows the reader that she can participate by twirling the rope or zooming by in her speedy chair.

Meanwhile, the term “special needs” is introduced, explaining this concept in a simple and direct way: “It means it takes her a little bit longer to do every day things” (Nelson unpagged). The author

is keen to repeat the phrase “tiny things” when mentioning special needs throughout the book. This has power to teach young children that special needs do not make up one’s entire identity.

I shared this book with a colleague’s children, aged 7 and 4, both girls. As they saw ClaraBelle get ready in the morning, participate in school, play on the playground or just share sweet moments with her mother, the common experience of just being a kid was apparent. They both enjoyed that the story was written in rhyme and they quickly caught on to the rhythmic structure, being able to finish the popular refrain, “just like you!” when it appeared. One sister shared with me that she is friends with a fellow classmate who uses a wheelchair and she was excited to share this book with him. She wondered who would push ClaraBelle Blue’s wheelchair when she needed it. The younger sister thought ClaraBelle was a girl who liked to do the same things as her. She especially laughed when ClaraBelle put underwear on her head. When I asked them about the concept of special needs, they understood that it can be a distinguishing difference between people, but as ClaraBelle’s experience proves, a special need can be just one part of one’s life. Like the girls told me: people with special abilities can do the same activities they do, just in a different way. Both girls shared their enthusiasm for learning more about ClaraBelle and her future endeavors.

I believe this book is an extraordinary choice for students in pre-K through 2nd grade. The message about inclusion is present in the storyline and reinforced in the colorful illustrations. The concept of special needs is demystified through language the very young can understand. Like my audience, I too, am hoping for a series of ClaraBelle Blue books that explore the ways in which our protagonist engages with the world around her.

About the Author

Cindy Kalachek has been an English educator for over 13 years. She currently teaches at Notre Dame High School in St. Louis, MO.