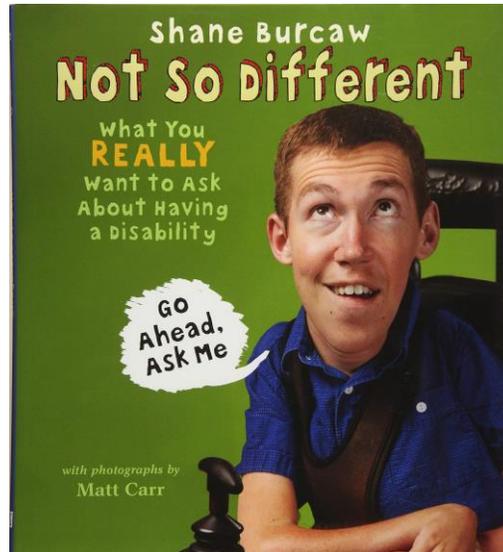


Second Reaction: We Really Aren't So Different

Burcaw, Shane. *Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask About Having a Disability*. Illustrated by Matt Carr. New York: Roaring Book Press, 2017. Print.

Dani Pizzella



You can tell that children are very engaged in a story when they just keep trying to get closer and closer to the book. As I looked up after reading the third page of *Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask About Having a Disability* by Shane Burcaw, I saw that the group of kindergarteners I was reading to had all moved within a foot or two of me. Many were sitting on their knees and attempting to peer around their friends to get a closer look. They could not take their eyes off the colorful photos and comic book style text and graphic art. I made sure to hold the book up while reading as the images were very clearly engaging.

In *Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask About Having a Disability* Burcaw explains what it is like to live with spinal muscular atrophy through short vignettes following commonly asked questions. He describes how the disease impacts his body as well as his daily life. He describes the daily tasks that he engages in independently as well as those that involve the support of his family and friends. He discusses his favorite foods and the mechanics of his wheelchair. While these topics may seem heavy for a group of young readers, Burcaw's story keeps students engaged through funny graphics and anecdotes such as a page where he compares himself to a T Rex as well as a story about

creating a pulley system with his brother, a basketball hoop, and his motorized wheelchair. Throughout the book, the children laughed along with Burcaw's jokes.

Matt Carr's images were a favorite of the students. The book features many full-page glossy photos of Burcaw engaging in everyday activities. Most are silly, such as an image in which Burcaw and his brother pop a wheelie with his wheelchair, while others are more practical such as an image of Burcaw using an elevator instead of a staircase. The counterbalance of these photos kept the students interested in the book while making sure that they could still focus on the message without the book being too silly.

I was unsure about how this group of kindergartners would react to the book as it contains quite a bit of text, and it was late on a Friday afternoon. I was worried that the theme may be too mature; however, the class was engaged the entire time. After I finished each page, I was met with a flood of raised hands with questions. As I was reading, students would frequently interrupt to ask about the images and ask for clarification about Burcaw's perspective as some of the language was slightly above their understanding. Throughout the book, Burcaw answers many of the questions that children may have for him about his personal life, his wheelchair, and his body. Often, a child would ask a question for Burcaw to answer it on the next page.

What I found most surprising while reading the book was the focus of the children's questions. No one said anything that could have been viewed as mean or insensitive. The questions came from a place of genuine curiosity. After reading a page about how Shane could not drive because his arm muscles were weak, one student asked if, since Shane's muscles in his hands were weak, could he write with a pencil? Towards the end of the book, Shane addresses the issue of bullying and discusses how sometimes people make fun of him. The students I was reading to were confused and asking why someone would be mean to him just because of how he looks.

I would absolutely recommend this book to parents and educators. I believe it would be beneficial for children in kindergarten through third grade. Throughout this text, Burcaw helps children understand that individuals with disabilities, while they may need additional support, are people who want to be treated with respect. The book also allowed children to gain information about questions they may have had in regard to disability supports but had not had the opportunity to ask.

About the Author

Dani Pizzella is a doctoral candidate and adjunct faculty member at the University of Missouri St. Louis. She has a master's degree in special education and is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). She

works as a special education administrator where she oversees behavior analytic programming from students receiving special education services. Dani's specializes in the areas of classroom management, culturally responsive programming, and social skill interventions.