

Editorial: Exploring Disability & Inclusion in Children’s Literature

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“Your kids are going to stare. And that’s perfectly okay.... If you tell them not to stare, or discourage them from asking questions because you think it might upset us, you’re teaching them that looking different is something to be ashamed of. It’s not” (Young).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 7.1 million public school students in the United States received Special Education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This represents 14% of the total public-school enrollment, and we know it does not accurately represent all children with disabilities in the United States. We can assume a much higher percentage by knowing that 26% of adults have some type of disability in the US, approximately 1 out of every 4 adults (CDC 2018). Despite the fact that disability will no doubt impact all people in the United States at some point in their lifetime, there is still very little representation in literature, mainstream media, and other sources of information. Specifically, representation in widely recognized children’s literature is scarce; what little exists is often based on stereotyped perspectives of disability that can be more harmful than supportive of understanding the experience.

With the passing of IDEA, children with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, with a vision of providing students with access to educational opportunities equaling those of their peers without disabilities. School personnel are charged with designing inclusive classrooms, materials, and activities that support the learning of all of their students, including those with disabilities. For this edition of *First Opinions, Second Reactions*, we explored five texts that provide varying perspectives of disability geared for the young reader. In addition, we gathered a diverse group of reviewers to provide thoughts on how these perspectives engage children or young adults on understanding the disability experience.

Jennifer Bumble, Christopher Worth and Juliet Salih-Worth reviewed the *The Big Umbrella* by Amy June Bates which is a brightly illustrated picture book that aims to encourage discussion of inclusion through the metaphor of an umbrella.

Micah Fialka-Feldman, Emma Fialka-Feldman, and Tara Uliasz reviewed *When Charley Met Emma* by Amy Webb, providing critical perspectives on the feelings, questions, and responses to difference and how we might support young children in communicating with those who appear different from themselves.

In contrast, Carlos Lavin and Cindy Kalechek reviewed *Meet ClaraBelle Blue* by Adiba Nelson, which emphasizes similarities among children. ClaraBelle Blue may look different physically from many of her peers; however, the author highlights similarities and strengths as a means of promoting inclusion.

Doris Villarreal and Dani Pizzella reviewed *Not so Different: What you Really Want to Ask About Having a Disability* by Shane Burcaw. This collage-style book was written by a person with a disability who shares common questions and answers that he has been approached with over the years. The author's straightforward approach includes refreshing humor and sometimes personal content that disrupts many stereotypes that exist.

Lastly, Melissa and Samantha Harding review *Copyboy* by Vince Vawter, a novel that explores a coming of age journey for a young man seeking to find purpose and meaning in his life.

The reviewers have provided us with a wide range of perspectives by using these titles, emphasize the importance of including, understanding, and empowering the voices of individuals with disabilities while highlighting the idea that disability is a natural part of the human experience and essential to a truly inclusive world.

Works Cited

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