



Using Children's Books to Promote Inclusivity of Children with Disabilities & Differing Needs

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WriteForKids.org

Illustration by Maria Koch

This presentation...

- Addresses **children's books as educational tools** for promoting awareness, understanding, acceptance, and **inclusion** of children with disabilities or differing needs
- Provides **strategies to incorporate “bibliotherapy” into classrooms** and other settings in noninvasive and time-effective ways.
- Provides **questions to facilitate discussion** that simplifies difficult concepts , such as “fair isn’t always equal” through application to the storyline.
- Provides persuasive **evidence** from scholarly journals that can be brought to management for justification.
- Discusses **generalization of this topic to diversity** in general (racial, ethnic, cultural, etc.)
- Provides **resources** including recommended book titles, websites, articles, and more.

Bonus: Fills you with hope for the future in all its biblio-awesomeness...

And when he swung on a rubber band
and sang a little song, there was no one
to sing along.



- Children with disabilities or differing needs are often socially excluded.
- Mainstreaming due to legal and cultural shifts have improved “integration” but we’re aiming for INCLUSION.

“A sense of belonging is the heartbeat of inclusion.” – Unknown

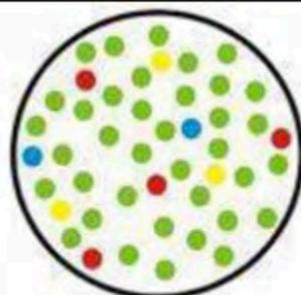


The Art of Autism

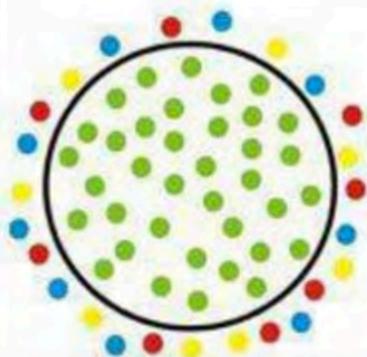
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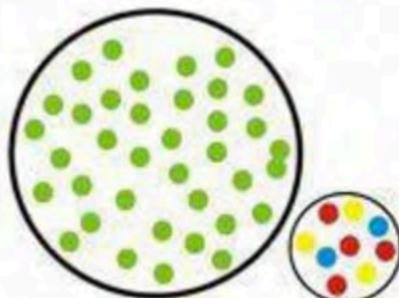
a visual depiction of #Inclusion



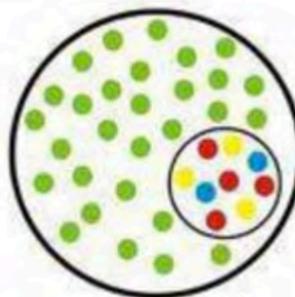
Inclusion



Exclusion



Segregation



Integration

Inclusion
isn't
just
BEING
included,
it's
FEELING
included.

(Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson,
2010)

Studies show...

- Children with disabilities are more often socially excluded; leading to decreased participation in activities, correlated with quality of life. (Coster et al., 2013; Dahan-Oliel et al., 2012)
- Children learn about themselves through engagement with their world: Less participation means less learning of their own identity, ability, knowledge, values, etc. (Contributing to a vicious cycle of falling behind developmentally.)
- Importance of inclusion on self-esteem, self-concept, psychological development, and participation in activities of daily life.
(Dahan-Oliel, Shikako-Thomas, & Majnemer, 2012; Gebarski et al., 2013; Houtrow, 2012; Turner, 2006)
- Children are well aware of the difference between “forced” (adult-driven) versus “desired” inclusion. (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010)

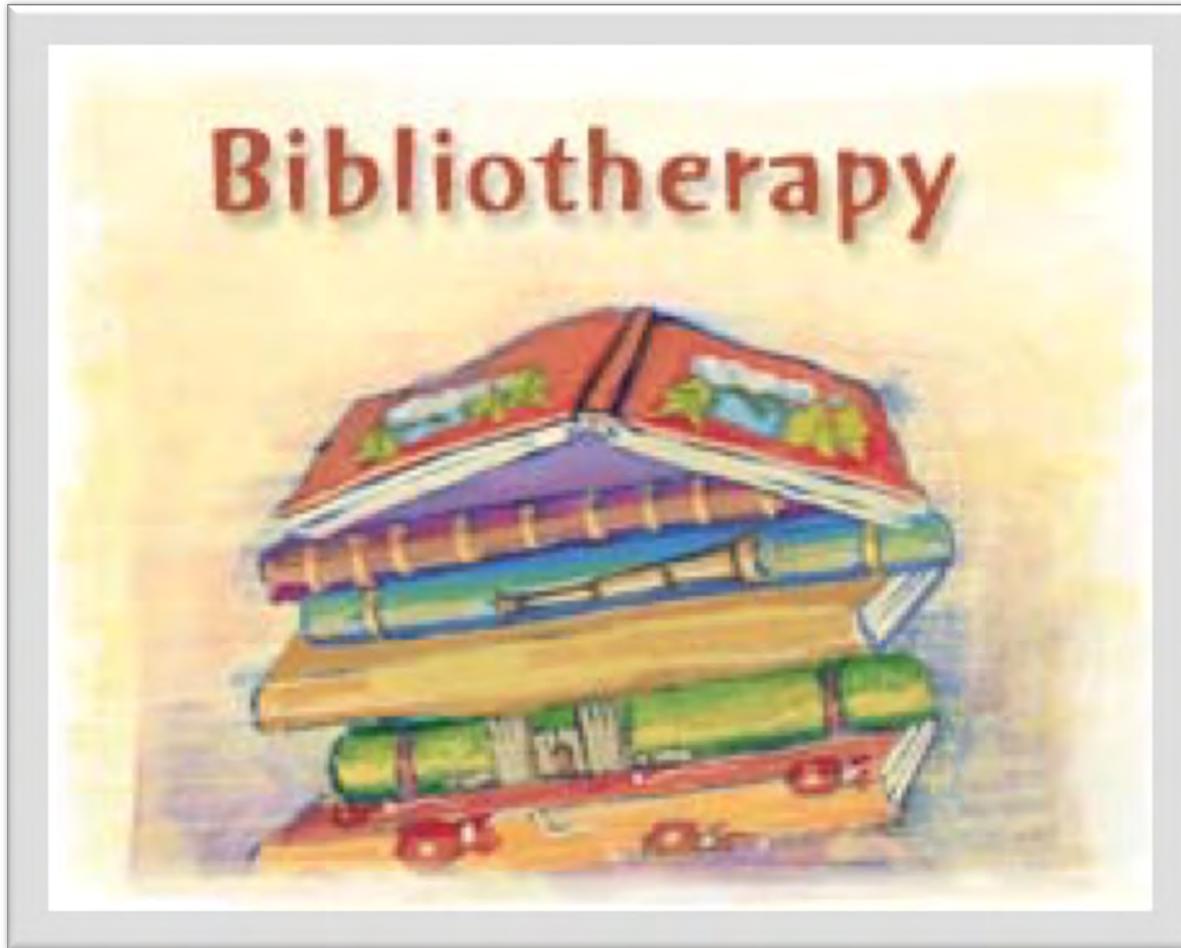
See References for specifics

...So....

How can we help our children gain awareness and understanding in ways that will help them **want to** include children who are different from themselves?

Suspenseful Pause

(Pretend there's a clever Powerpoint effect here)



Behold the therapeutic power of books!!!!

Safe place to explore: Mirrors and windows...

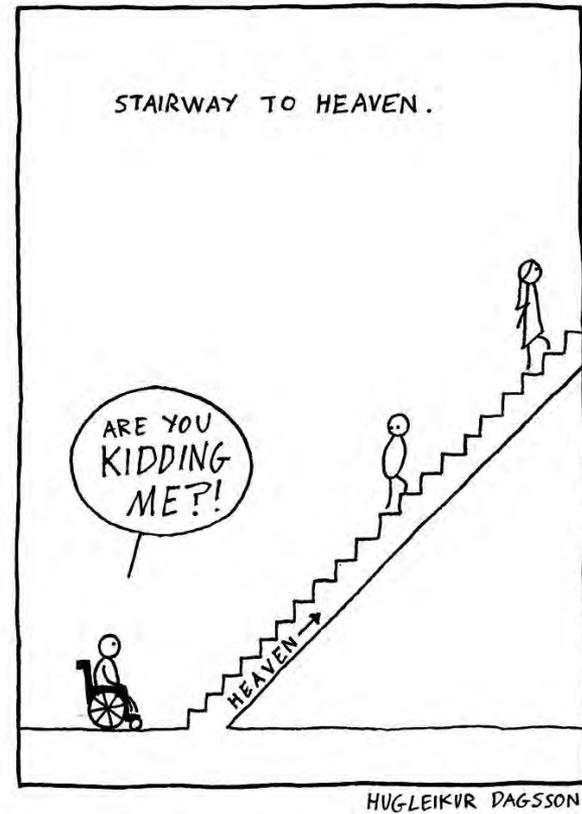
When all the child's wishful thinking gets embodied in a good fairy; all his destructive wishes in an evil witch; all his fears in a voracious wolf; all the demands of his conscience in a wise man encountered on an adventure; all his jealous anger in some animal that pecks out the eyes of his archrivals — then the child can finally begin to sort out his contradictory tendencies. Once this starts, the child will be less and less engulfed by unmanageable chaos. (Bettelheim (1976) as cited in Montgomery & Maunders, 2015, p. 66)

Studies show...

- The power of children's books as educational tools for teaching facts and abstract concepts, including "socioemotional competence (Gebarski et al., 2013; Kara, Aydos, & Aydin, 2015)."
- Ability of children's books to change attitudes and also behaviors
- Children's books can be used for disability awareness (Pardeck, 2005). That's good because....
- Children (and many adults!) without disabilities are often lacking awareness and understanding of disabilities. (Hurst, Corning & Ferrante, 2012; Nowicki, Brown, & Stepien, 2014)
- **Increased awareness & understanding → increased acceptance → increased likelihood of being socially accepted and valued by peers!!**

*****INCLUSIVITY*****

See References for specific studies



Let's start walking...

Step 1: Figure out issues to address

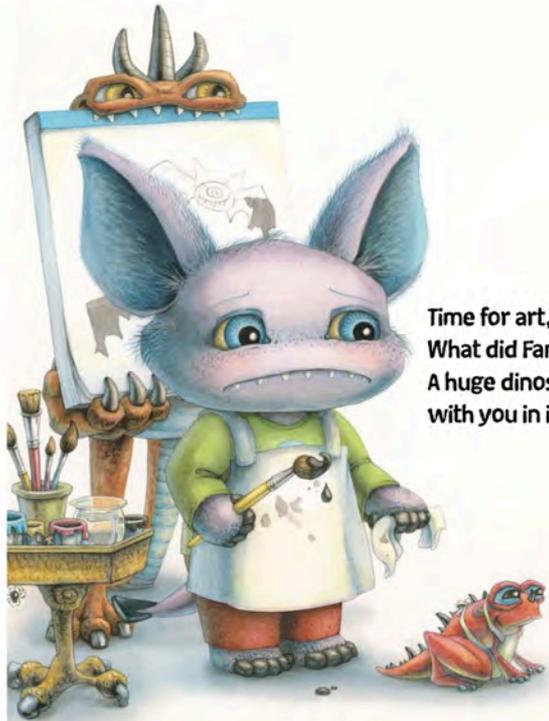
Inclusivity can be affected by many factors...

- Misinterpretations/Misunderstandings
- Difficulty grasping challenging concepts
- Developmental stages – “us vs. them,” comparisons
- Desires for “sameness,” blending in
- **Ignorance: lack of exposure, awareness, understanding** (Nowicki, Brown, & Stepien, 2014)

FEAR AND AVOIDANCE GO HAND IN HAND WITH IGNORANCE

*If you're into scholarly research, my doctoral capstone goes into great detail on reasons for social exclusion, primarily provided by children in qualitative studies.

Misunderstanding the actions of others...



Time for art, Little Monster.
What did Fang draw?
A huge dinosaur
with you in its jaw!



Don't fret, Little Monster.
It's only pretend.
I think Fang is saying
he wants to be friends.

(Go to School, Little Monster! By Helen Ketteman)



Believing in stereotypes or assuming the worst...

FAIR IS NOT ALWAYS EQUAL.



Kids go to a doctor **with different needs:**



What if the doctor said the **same thing** to all of them?



Only **one kid** would get what he needs.



And that's **not fair.**

It's the same thing in a classroom.

Every student has **different needs:**



So **different students** should get **different things** to help them succeed.



And that's what makes a classroom **fair for everyone!**



Adapted from Teaching Everyone by Whitney Rapp and Katrina Arndt and Universal Design for Learning in Action by Whitney Rapp. www.brookespublishing.com | 1-800-638-3775

Difficult Concepts...

- “Fair is not always equal”
- “Sometimes rules DO need to be broken....” (gasp)
- “Not everything is black and white.”
- We all have similarities AND differences
- Others may have different feelings than me.

The lion put his big front paws up on the circulation desk and looked at Mr. McBee.

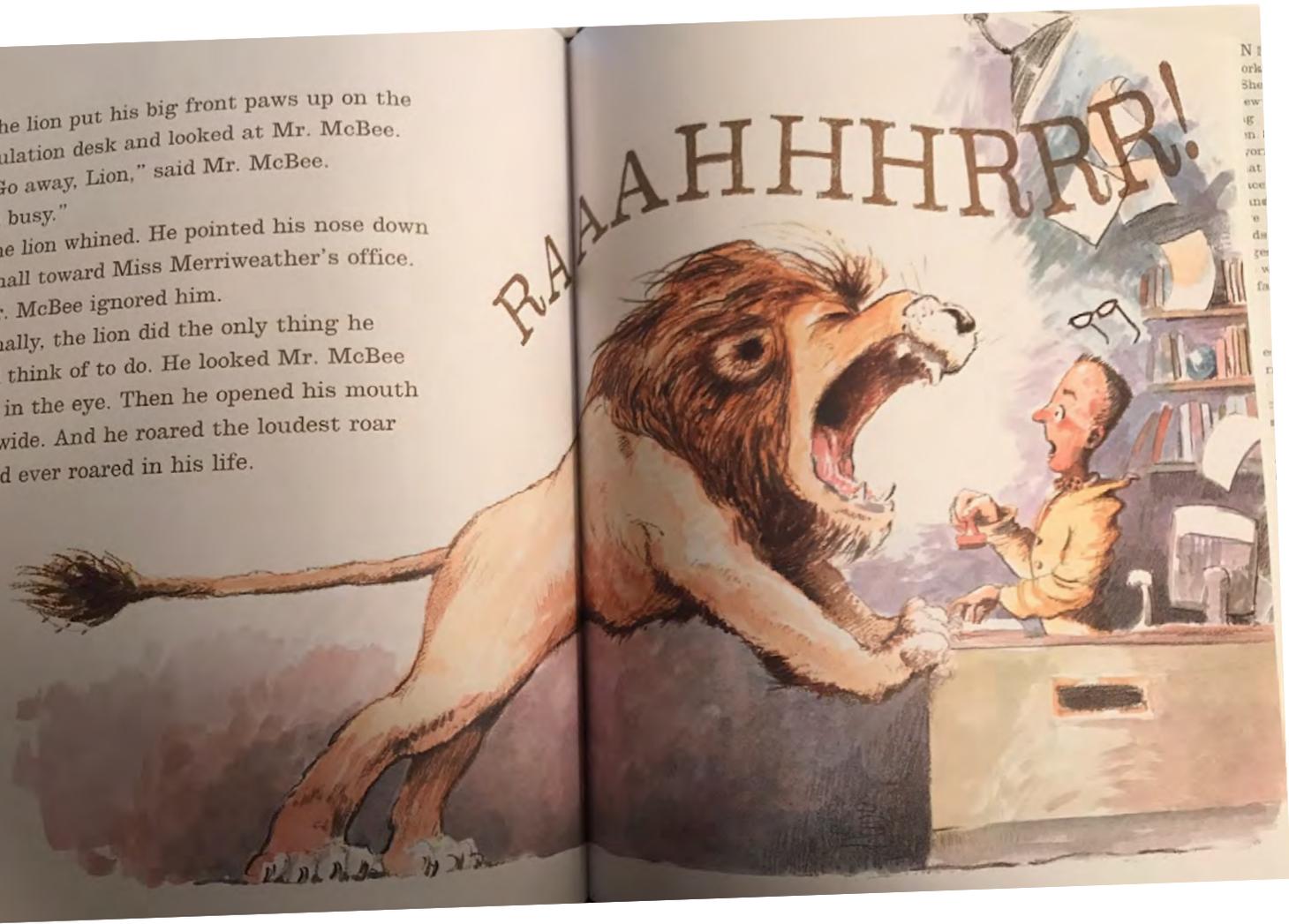
"Go away, Lion," said Mr. McBee.

"I'm busy."

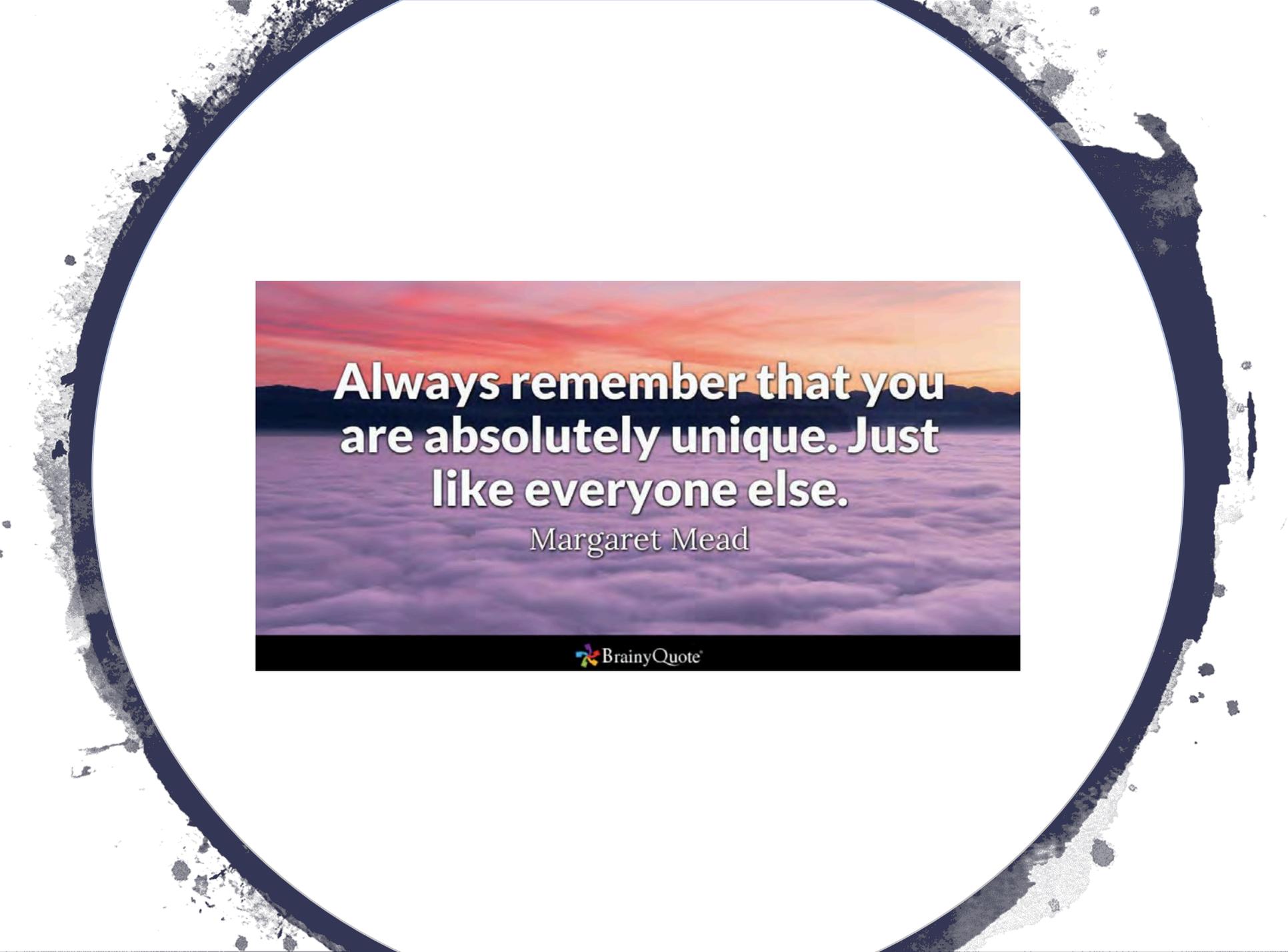
The lion whined. He pointed his nose down the hall toward Miss Merriweather's office.

Mr. McBee ignored him.

Finally, the lion did the only thing he could think of to do. He looked Mr. McBee right in the eye. Then he opened his mouth very wide. And he roared the loudest roar he had ever roared in his life.

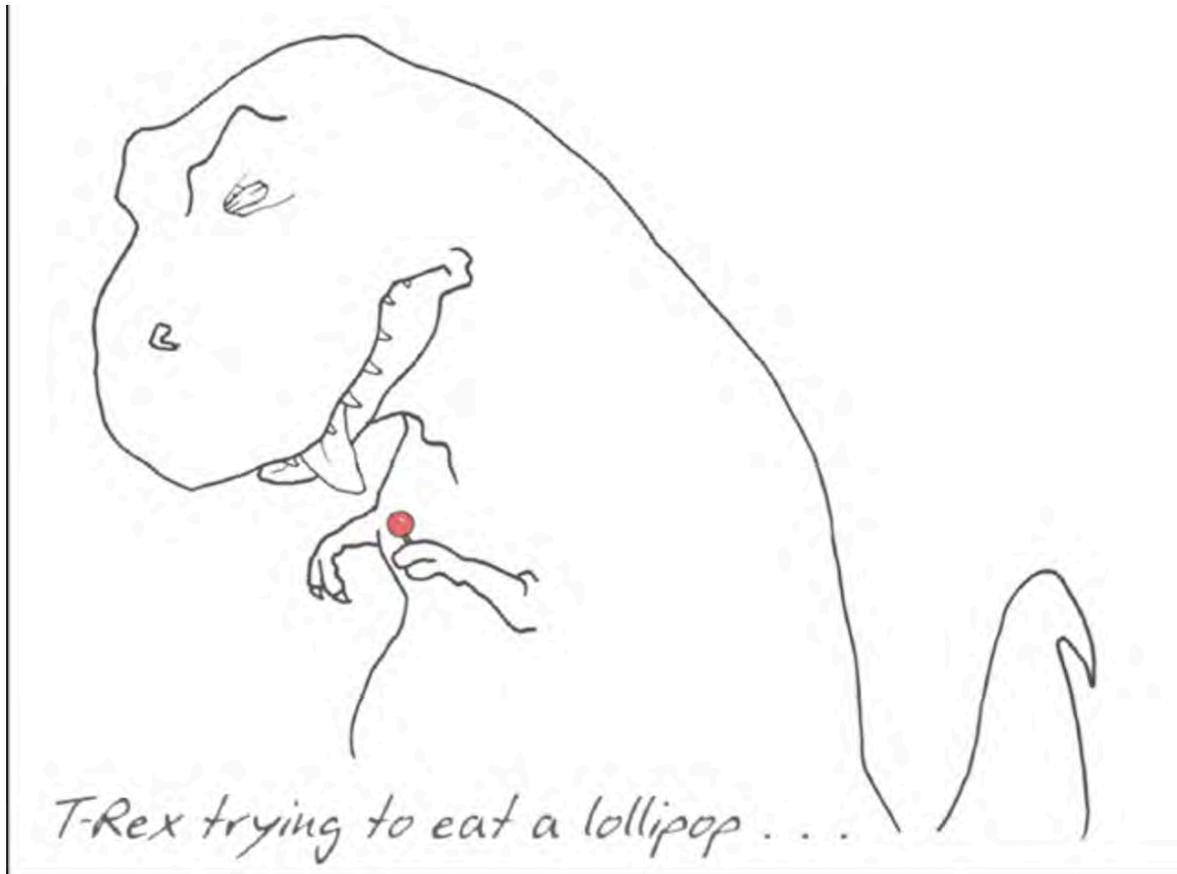


Library Lion BROKE THE RULE...because it was the only way he could let Mr. McBee know that the librarian was badly hurt in the other room! (Library Lion, by Michelle Knudsen)



**Always remember that you
are absolutely unique. Just
like everyone else.**

Margaret Mead



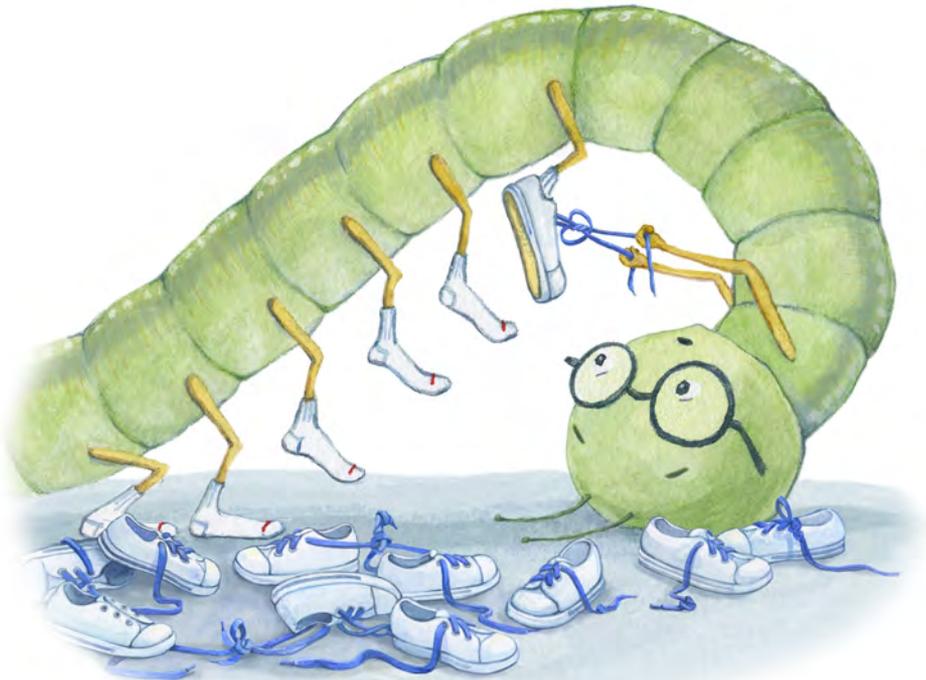
“T-Rex Trying and Trying” by Hugh Murphy is filled with poor T-Rex trying to do basic daily tasks...is it okay he may need to do things differently?

OT Rex: Our
Mascot in
Occupational
Therapy 😊

UNSTOPPABLE



Ben has a disability called “low vision” where even with glasses on he can’t see very well. It makes his shoelaces look like a “jumble of spaghetti.” Color-contrasting shoelaces will help a lot, but he’ll look different. Hmmm...



“The Centipede Who Couldn’t Tie His Shoes”

Written by Karen Dobyms, OTD, OTR/L

Illustrated by Maria Koch

Tying 100 shoes will take forever. His friends only have 2 to 12 shoes to tie. He’d have to spend his entire recess tying shoes. Boo.

Step 2: Hunt down books on those issues

- Much easier now, thanks to advocates and activists like “We Need Diverse Books.” (Books featuring children with disabilities are still underrepresented!)
- Picture books are often the best when it comes to turning difficult material into digestible bits – even for older children and adults.
- Warning: Read the book fully before sharing it – many books start out promising and then have an ending that ruins your whole point! Avoid stereotypical books.
- There are now a lot of great sites with wonderfully curated book lists. If you search Pinterest for combinations such as children’s books and disability/inclusivity/diversity, you’ll find awesome collections and blogs....

Think about it: Where would your book go?

Step 2: The hunt continues

- **Little Parachutes:**

<https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/health/disabilities/>

*Elementary school – picture books

- **Disability in Kidlit:** <http://disabilityinkidlit.com/honor-roll/>

*Middle grade, young adult literature portraying disability

Others:

- Scholastic.com/bookclubs, Collection by “We Need Diverse Books”

- College library’s collection of children’s literature involving disabilities:

<http://www.uwosh.edu/library/collections/emc/childrens-young-adult-literature/bibliographies/disabilities-books-about>

- Where to Find Diverse Books: <https://diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/>

Keep in mind while hunting....

Many types of children's books about disability:

- *Purely informative, on very specific disability
 - *Storyline, focus is on the disability
 - *Child has a disability within storyline, but that's not the main focus (most ideal overall)**
 - *Disability is discussed educationally by child themselves, parent, sibling, or friend
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And...it doesn't have to include disability at all.

- Kindness, empathy
 - Differences in general (Spork)
 - Difficult concepts (Library Lion)
 - Bravery
 - Making friends (Two Shy Pandas)
-

Step 3: Familiarize yourself

- Many books, especially those related to educational topics, now come with glossaries, discussion questions, activity suggestions, resources, and more. Look through entire book to see if the author or publisher has done some of the work for you!
 - Do a search online for the book along with key phrases or terms you're wanting to address, to see if someone (with a brilliant mind like yours, of course) has shared anything.
 - Consider how you want to approach it. Is the emphasis going to be on inclusion, or only indirectly? Do you want students to verbally discuss it, or write about it? Are you focusing on education about a particular disability/issue, or more on a concept such as fair isn't always equal? Different speeds, different needs?
-
- Or...fly by the seat of your pants. Up to you. (JUST READ IT FIRST)

Resources to help with inclusivity discussion

- Diversity Discussion Starters: <https://www.mentoring.org/new-site/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Diversity-Discussion-Starters.pdf>
 - Inclusion Lab: Tips and Takeaways for Teaching All Kids <https://blog.brookespublishing.com/category/fair-is-not-always-equal/>
 - Disability Awareness for Kids <https://www.scarymommy.com/disability-awareness-for-kids/>
 - Ways to show children that diversity is a strength <https://blog.brookespublishing.com/8-ways-to-show-young-children-that-diversity-is-a-strength/>
 - How to Raise Tolerant and Inclusive Kids <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/for-parents/articles/2018-04-13/how-to-raise-tolerant-inclusive-kids>
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Information for Young Readers

Ben has a disability called “low vision.” For him, this means even the strongest glasses aren’t enough to help him see as well as other kids. That’s why he sits in the front row, and his work is magnified. When Ben was learning to tie his shoes with only a single-colored lace, it looked like a jumble of spaghetti. Once Ben had a lace that was half-black, half-white, the color contrast made it easier for him to learn. It’s easier for ALL kids to learn with color-contrasted laces.

Miss Amanda, the lady who taught Ben to tie his shoes, is called an occupational therapist, or “OT.” Part of her job is helping kids find ways to do things that make everyday life a little easier! Since he has so many feet, she also showed him no-tie laces so he didn’t have to spend all his time re-tying a bazillion shoes.

Here are some things to think about:

Do you think it would have been okay if Ben hadn’t learned to tie his shoes? Why?

What do you wish you could tell Robert, who teased Ben about his “baby shoes”?

What kinds of things are easy for you to do? What kinds of things are hard for you? Can you figure out why some things are easy for you, while other things are more difficult?

Thanks for reading my book!

Karen

P.S. I know, I know. Ben looks more like a caterpillar than a centipede. And most centipedes don’t really have 100 legs. They don’t have hands, either. I’m using “artistic license” as my excuse.





Information for Adult Readers

Ben learned the “bunny ears” method for shoe-tying because the shapes of the laces stay consistent, so it’s sometimes easier for kids with visual challenges. Children with hand–eye coordination difficulties may find shoe-tying easier using the “standard” method rather than the “bunny ears” method. Most kids benefit from a consistent rhyme or chant to go with the movements. Some benefit from learning hand placement on the laces with you behind them (lap) or beside them, rather than across from them.

There are great resources and products on the Internet to help with shoe-tying. If your child is consistently struggling to master developmental milestones, contact a pediatrician and/or occupational therapist to learn more about ways to help and empower your child. The American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org has helpful information, as does TherapyFunZone.net, MamaOT.com, and many other great OT blogs.

I encourage you to use this book as a starting point for discussion. Suggested topics: how all children have differing strengths, weaknesses and needs; bullying; the impact of disability; the importance of inclusion; acceptance of children who need accommodations or modifications; fairness; peer support; problem-solving; shoe-tying techniques and strategies; frustration tolerance; occupational therapy; and how ultimately, even in all our differences, we can always find similarities.



Step 4: Read the book with child(ren)

WARNING

- Don't force-feed or spoon-feed the lesson.
- Don't hammer a moral into their heads.
- Don't hand them a perfect conclusion tied up with a bow.

HINT: If the book itself hands the moral over to the child within the storyline, the true moral of that story was “adults don't trust that children can come up with their own conclusions.”

During, and after, the reading, facilitate discussion with open-ended questions. Allow them to process.

Keep this in mind if you write a book!

More resources to help with discussion

- **Reader Response Strategies:** Helping them deepen their understanding of the texts
<http://www.createarizona.org/curricular-experiences/story-interactions/reader-response-strategies/reader-response-strategies>
- **Wowlit.org**, recommended by We Need Diverse Books as a “reputable resource” with great resources for teachers in both children and adolescent literature.
- Talk about:
 - Similarities*****
 - Differences
 - What a character may feel like – have you ever felt that way?
 - Strengths and weaknesses – what are yours?
 - How things made them feel

(How to Raise Tolerant & Inclusive kids has great tips)

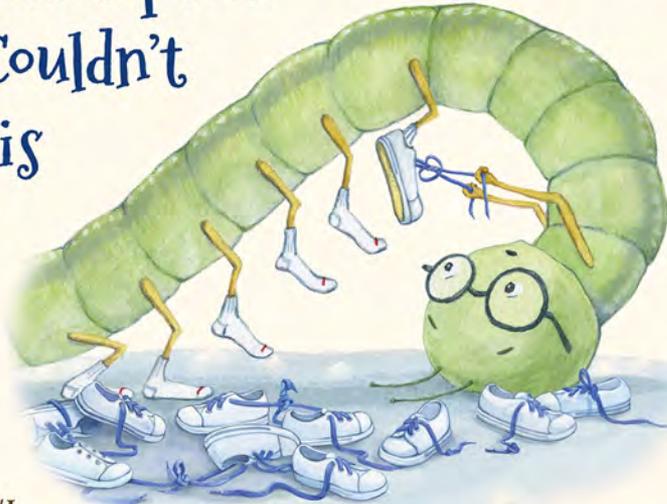
<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/for-parents/articles/2018-04-13/how-to-raise-tolerant-inclusive-kids>

Overall things to remember...

- Even children with the same disability (autism, cerebral palsy) are different from each other, so different books should reflect that.
 - Be a role model – embrace diversity.
 - Inclusion is ultimately about being valued for being exactly as they are – some books focus on “change” but the goal should be acceptance/belonging AS IS.
 - Educators: This can slide smoothly into your science lessons if you choose a physical disability, or art if you get creative with expression of emotions, or social studies if you discuss diversity and advocacy. It can be written about a million different ways in literature.
 - You can promote inclusion and have wonderful thought-provoking discussions with your kids without doing any research or preparation in advance at all.
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The Centipede Who Couldn't Tie His Shoes

by
Karen
Dobyns
OTD, OTR/L



- My first (and only...so far) picture book
- Illustrated by Maria Koch (her 1st picture book too!)

Available on Amazon

<https://www.amazon.com/Centipede-Who-Couldnt-Tie-Shoes/dp/1945033401/>

More information at www.missawesomeness.com/books

Reminder to your Inner Writer...



- If I can do it, you can do it.
- Don't let your quest for perfection paralyze you. Focus on forward momentum.
- Listen to your critique group, but don't always take their advice. Listen to your gut (unless they turn into a rioting mob, then maybe you should reconsider)
- Inner critics are louder than inner coaches. Tune into the coach who's encouraging you.
- The number one way to become a writer? Just start doing it.
- If this helps you feel better: Most best-selling authors had to climb a mountain of rejection letters to get to the top.



The End

Well, almost the end.

Questions, Comments?

Please contact me at
karen.dobyns@gmail.com or head
over to
www.missawesomeness.com/books!



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