About the Collection

Inclusive children’s literature, as a collection, is designed to feature texts that serve as mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990). Disability labels placed on children, be it by school or medical professionals, are never neutral. Rather, these labels bring with them histories of exclusion, pity and a tendency to essentialize the “disability experience.” Sharing inclusive literature with children offers an opportunity to talk with and through books that challenge ableist discourses (normative standards for the body and the mind).

The texts featured in this collection with the accompanying guiding questions are not necessarily designed to teach children about what a disability is. Rather, these texts have been selected because they include characters who have agency, are multidimensional and also carry with them the label of a disability. These texts serve as opportunities for children navigating these labels to see themselves in texts (a mirror). Simultaneously, children who have been deemed “able,” might glean insight into the lives of characters who experience the world in different, sometimes very different, ways (a window).

Criteria for Selection

Is the character multidimensional?
How much do you know about the character other than a label? In what ways does this book feature disability as well as other identity characteristics? Humanizing texts feature characters that are varied and well-developed as people, not just as invitations to define labels through single-story representations.

Whose voice is represented? From whose point-of-view is the story told? Often, characters are represented from the points-of-view of their friends or siblings who speak for the character with a disability. Texts that offer perspectives from the point-of-view of the character with a disability typically offer more humanizing representations.

How are you positioned as the reader? As a reader, how are you positioned to think about the character with a disability? Texts often evoke feelings of pity for characters with a disability, further distancing the character as Other. Humanizing representations may give insight into instances in which a character is ostracized but also offer moments of character agency and opportunities for inclusion.

Are relationships authentic? How are friendships or relationships portrayed in the book? Texts often offer one-dimensional friendships in which other children equate their relationship with a child with a disability as a favor, positioning the character in dehumanizing ways. These portrayals promote treating people as mascots or class pets in classrooms.

**Note: It is likely that many, if not most, of the books you encounter will fail to meet ALL of the criteria listed above (especially texts portraying characters with diverse cognitive abilities). This does not necessarily mean that a book is inappropriate to share as a classroom text. Rather, texts that meet most of the criteria might serve as discussion invitations to explore the ways individuals with disability labels have historically been represented. Offering opportunities for students to read with and against texts is vital to developing readers who read the word and the world in critical ways.
**Titles to Explore**

**The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin** by Julia Finley Mosca

This biographical text follows the life of Dr. Temple Grandin, an avid speaker and advocate for the autism community, from childhood through her life as an esteemed professor in the field of agriculture.

**We’re All Wonders** by R. J. Palacio

Based on the novel *Wonder*, this text explores terms like “ordinary” and “not ordinary” through Auggie, a boy who “looks different.”

**Emmanuel’s Dream** by Laurie Ann Thompson & Sean Qualls

This biographical account of Emmanuel Ofusa Yeboah takes readers on an adventure through Emmanuel’s experience of having the use of only one leg. Emmanuel’s dream, accomplished in the book, is to bicycle across Ghana as a demonstration of ability.

**My Pal, Victor/Mi amigo, Victor** by Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Written in Spanish and English, the narrator of this text shares with readers a story about his friend, Victor, discussing what makes their friendship so special. On the last page, the reader learns that the narrator uses a wheelchair.

**A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin** by Jen Bryant

Bryant shares a biographical account of Horace Pippin, who learns to navigate his love for painting after an injury to his painting arm following World War I.

**Max the Champion** by Sean Stockdale, Alexandra Strick & Ros Asquith

Max loves sports. He thinks about them night and day. This picturebook takes the reader through Max’s dreams of playing, running and jumping while including visual imagery of his hearing aids. Max’s visual character is accompanied by other children who access mobility tools/prosthetics throughout the book.

**Kami and the Yaks** by Andrea Stenn Stryer

Kami, a young Sherpa boy in the Himalayas who is deaf, uses his access to gesture as language to help his father and brother rescue a heard of yaks that have been trapped in the mountains.

**A Boy and A Jaguar** by Alan Rabinowitz

In this autobiographical account, Alan shares his love of animals, specifically jaguars. Alan opens the world’s first and only jaguar preserve in Belize. Alan stutters often when speaking with people. However, with animals, he has always been fluent, inspiring his journey as an animal activist.

**Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille** by Jen Bryant

Louis Braille, who lost his sight at age 5, attended a school for the blind in Paris. After realizing how painstaking the current system was for reading while blind, Louis decided to create his own system. We know that system today as Braille.

**The Pirate of Kindergarten** by George Ella Lyon

Ginny comes to realize that the way she experiences seeing at school is different than her peers. Ginny uses an eye patch, not only to address double vision, but to take on the role of a pirate in her kindergarten class.