

Promoting disability inclusion through reading



# THE FULL STORY



## **FOREWORD**

We are proud to be adding to the union's *Breaking the Mould* series of resources, which support early years and primary phase teachers to think about the books they are using in their classrooms. Using a wider range of good literature is a practical, positive and effective way to promote inclusion.

The *Full Story* will help you to promote disability inclusion and good outcomes for children and young people through reading about the world around us.

We have based this resource on the social model of disability, which means recognising that people are disabled by the attitude and structures around them, in society, rather than by their individual impairments. It is society that needs to be adapted, not Disabled people.

The resource is designed to help you include every child and make sure every child sees themselves, their families and friends represented positively in their school.

Order these books for your school or classroom. Share this resource with colleagues and discuss attitudes towards disability in your staff meetings and training days. Reflect with colleagues on what opportunities are being missed to talk positively about the experiences and perspectives of Disabled people, within your day-to-day teaching. This can help build understanding that Disabled children are equal and usual rather than different, special or hidden.

This guide will help you to think about how your school can use books and reading across the whole of your curriculum and create a sense of place and belonging for your students.

We think you will enjoy reading about these fantastic books!

*Kevin Courtney      Mary W. Bousted*

**Kevin Courtney and Dr Mary Bousted**  
Joint General Secretaries, National Education Union

# INTRODUCTION

This resource considers how books for early years and primary age children can be used to promote disability inclusion. It follows the NEU's earlier Every Child, Every Family and Breaking the Mould resources which look at LGBT+ identities and gender stereotypes.

Literature is vital in helping children to explore and learn about the world. Books are key tools in promoting inclusion and challenging prejudice, but to be effective they need to include everybody. All children need to see themselves in books – and to see a full range of other diverse characters as well.

People are not defined solely by their ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, sex or gender – or their abilities. Arguably, the group least well served by children's literature are Disabled people. Depictions of disability are still relatively rare. Where they do occur, they are often part of bullying narratives or feature people 'overcoming' their impairments to achieve great things, neither of which necessarily aids inclusion. In the best titles, Disabled characters are shown to enjoy many of the same things and to have much in common with the rest of us. They are neither victims nor heroes – just ordinary people getting on with the business of living.

Many Disabled people still have to navigate a world that sees their impairments first and everything else second, and makes assumptions about their needs and abilities based on one aspect of their lives. Literature can act as a powerful counter to this by showing us a world in which disability is acknowledged but not necessarily remarked upon and where people are defined by their interests and aspirations rather than other people's assumptions.

The books in this resource take a number of approaches. Some talk specifically about diversity in all its forms and can be used to ensure that disability is included in wider conversations about both our differences and the many things we have in common. Some feature Disabled protagonists (although their impairments are not what defines them) and many just include Disabled children as part of the action. All have value but, arguably, this last group are the most important. For some children, the first people they may associate with disability are Paralympians or someone like Stephen Hawking. Such high

achievers are valuable in terms of how, for example, they challenge common stereotypes about disability – but their lives do not reflect those of most Disabled people.

Reading stories that feature familiar situations and in which disability is just one aspect of many people's lives is one of the best ways of promoting disability inclusion. We have also largely avoided narratives that feature bullying since these frequently show Disabled characters as excluded and focus almost entirely on that one aspect of their experience. Our suggested books also include a range of ethnicities, faiths, sexual orientations and other differences since Disabled people are as diverse as everyone else, and fictional depictions should reflect those intersectional identities.

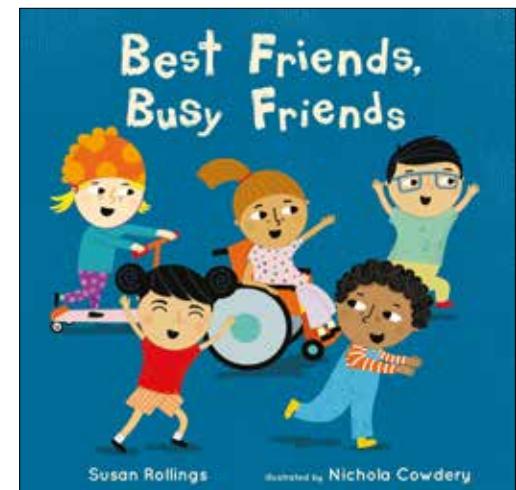
Just as thinking about everything we have in common is at least as important as identifying our differences, thinking about how we can include Disabled people by making positive changes is likely to be more beneficial than focusing on negative aspects of their experience. Many of the books exemplify the social model of disability which recognises that people are disabled by the attitudes and structures of society rather than by their impairments. It is because the world is 'set up' for people who are not disabled that many of the barriers faced by Disabled people exist. These barriers can be physical but may also be seen in the way some people perceive or behave towards people with impairments. Understanding this is the key to creating change – it is society that needs to be different, not Disabled people themselves. We can all be a part of this change – for example, by not assuming that Disabled people can't do certain things. The rounded, integrated portrayals in these books help to challenge narrow, stereotypical views of disability.

The selection isn't exhaustive – there are many books we do not have space to include here. Think of this resource as a guide to the types of books that are likely to be most effective at promoting disability inclusion. We have sometimes suggested titles for particular ages but most will work for a wide age range – you and your pupils will be the best judge of the books they enjoy.

Remember as well that people with impairments should be included and visible across the whole curriculum. For instance, it is often noted that relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) can fail to include Disabled people. Think about everything from classroom displays to the examples you create for maths and science problems. Just as materials should include a range of ethnicities, faiths, sexual orientations and genders (and challenge stereotypes about all these), so should they regularly include representations of disability. And, rather than focusing primarily on one-off displays or events that foreground disability, ask yourself whether ensuring the integration of such representation across the whole school isn't, ultimately, more beneficial. Celebrations needn't be one-off affairs – they can also be about increasing representation in everything we do.

Teaching will always be both demanding and hugely rewarding. Educators enlighten, inspire, challenge and inform. They also have the power to change lives. I hope that you and your pupils enjoy these books. They will help you to reflect the diversity within your classroom and broader society. Here's to a more inclusive world!

**Mark Jennett**

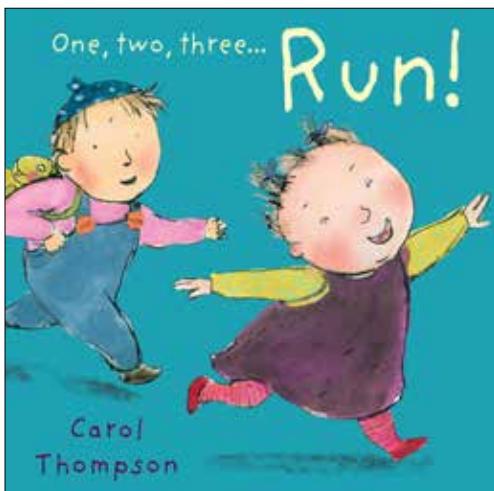
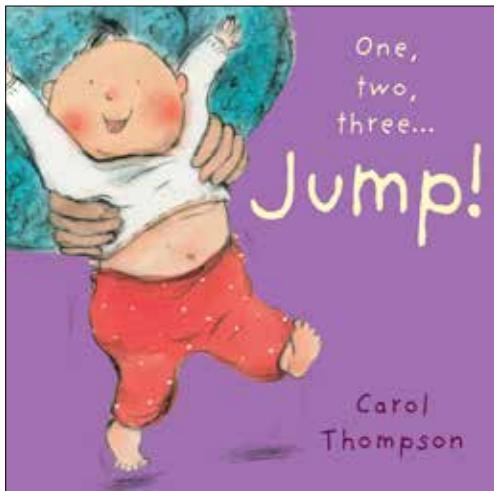


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# BOOKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



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**One, Two, Three... Jump! by Carol Thompson**

**One, Two, Three... Run! by Carol Thompson**

**Mary had a Little Lamb by Marina Aizen**

**Zeki Can Swim! by Anna McQuinn and Ruth Hearson**

Children of any age may be disabled or have family members with impairments and it is important that all children see disability as part of everyday life. Literature is a powerful way of enabling children to reflect on their identities and become familiar with those who may differ from their own. Whatever their age, they deserve to see both themselves and the full diversity of humanity in the stories they read.

Here are four titles that are suitable for the very young and feature Disabled characters with different degrees of prominence. They are about playing and having fun with family and friends but all of them also place disability in the context of a broad spectrum of difference. We will talk more about books that focus on celebrating diversity itself in the next section.

One, Two Three... Jump! is part of a series of beautifully illustrated picture books – with a couple of words of text on each page – that explore a range of different movements (running, crawling, climbing etc). They can be used as early readers and alongside movement games to build confidence and have fun. As well as jumping, this title includes related activities such as falling over ('bump!') and demonstrates that you can jump while sitting down or holding onto something to help you balance. Included in the pictures, children may notice leg splints, a cochlear implant and a safety helmet as might be worn by a child with epilepsy, haemophilia or balance disorders.

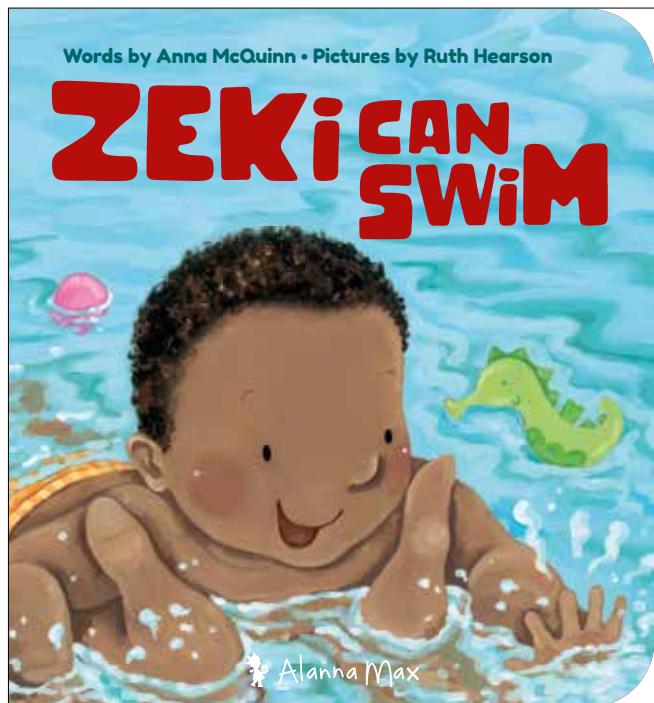
This is a title toddlers will happily return to many times. You could just enjoy it with them or, sometimes, notice the full range of differences on display – from the multicultural cast of characters to the range of clothing and hats – alongside those related to ability.

## Ask

- How many different ways can you move from one place to another?
- What can help you to move?

One, Two Three... Run! features just two children, one of whom has Down's syndrome. It is rare to see a book in which Down's children (as well as their siblings and friends) can recognise themselves and, as such, it is a powerful aid to inclusion. Use it just as you would the other titles in the series and don't feel you need to point out the protagonist's identity. Some children will notice it straight away, others may ask about it and some may see it but feel no need to mention it. Either way, using the book signals that people with a range of impairments – and none – enjoy and excel at many of the same things.

Mary had a Little Lamb is a small board book with cutout pages and has more text than the others in this section. It builds on the traditional rhyme and you can read it with children although the pictures tell the story clearly as well. By the end of the book, Mary seems to have acquired quite a lot of lambs!



*Zeki Can Swim!* by Anna McQuinn and Ruth Hearson  
ISBN-10: 1907825134  
ISBN-13: 978-1907825132  
Publisher: Alanna Books (25 Feb. 2016)

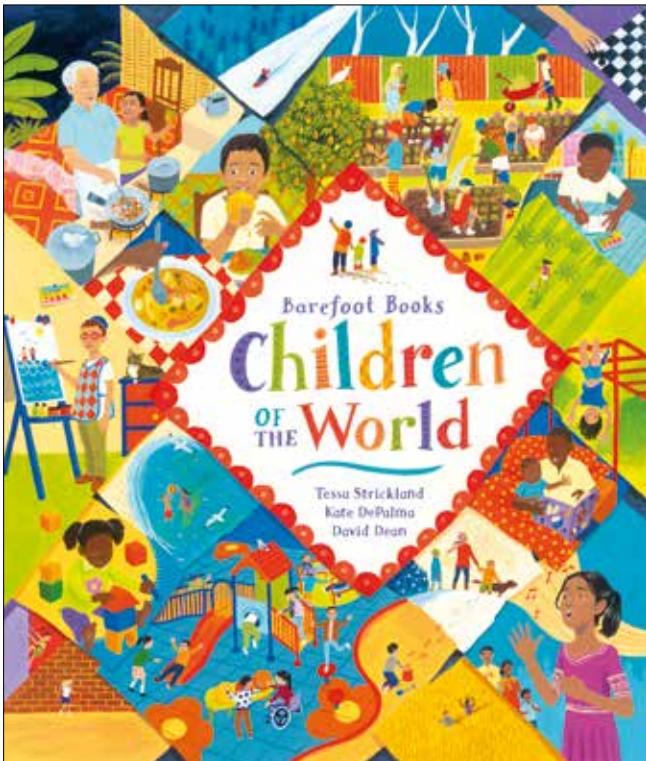
This is a nice example of implicit, intersectional inclusion. As well as a child who uses a wheelchair (and also appears elsewhere without it), there are others with a hearing aid and arm splint. The book also includes a range of accessibility aids such as a hearing loop and textured pavements. It speaks to the social model – here is a world aware of inclusive practice – and you can ask if children have seen these things elsewhere and how they could be useful.

#### Ask

- How do some pelican and puffin crossings make it easier for people with visual impairments to cross the road safely?

*Zeki Can Swim!* is part of a beautifully illustrated series about Zeki and his family. Today Zeki's dad is taking him swimming so cue lots of splashing, splashing, kicking – and being a baby fish. Children may notice that one of the toddlers joining in with the fun has a shortened arm. This is just one of many 'differences' to be found in the pictures – including both male and female carers.

# FOCUSING ON DIVERSITY



Cover illustration from *Children of the World*

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**Children of the World by Tessa Strickland,  
Kate DePalma and David Dean**

**Happy in our Skin by Fran Manushkin and  
Lauren Tobia**

**Happy to Be Me by Emma Dodd**

Disability is not well represented in children's books. When it is, it is often singled out for particular attention which can leave the impression that it is unusual and that people are defined more by their impairments than other aspects of their lives. Placing disability within a broad context of difference – where all humans are seen as combinations of different characteristics, experiences and preferences – can help to challenge this.

There are many children's books that highlight and celebrate our differences – as well as the many things we have in common – and some are better than others. Here are three that include disability holistically and unselfconsciously. Using them will help to dispel notions that disability is unusual or rare and thereby help to promote inclusion. You can simply enjoy the many things going on in the pictures or discuss some of the differences they show.

You may wish to use these books alongside the ones on diverse families included in the NEU resource Every Child, Every Family.

*Children of the World* is a book that everyone can find themselves in – as well as discovering identities they may not have been aware of. Endorsed by UNICEF, it includes sections on home, work, play, travel, food – and some you might not expect like

how we keep clean. One of the spreads illustrates how different our bodies are and includes children with Down's, a shortened limb, an eye patch and pigmentation changes alongside one using a wheelchair and another wearing spectacles.

On other pages, there are splints, mobility aids and a diabetes monitor. Signing is included on the page about languages.

## Ask

- Does anyone know how we can communicate without using our mouths? Learn some basic signing with the children (many classes may already use Makaton signage). Explore other ways of communicating.

Some of the images are ambiguous – one might refer to alopecia or to treatment for cancer or another condition. Do we always need to know why someone looks a certain way – or can we just accept that they do?

Of course, no book can show everything and you could talk about the hidden differences, including disabilities, that some of us have. One page challenges us to think about how different people in the pictures might be feeling and could be an opportunity to mention things like depression or other mental health impairments.

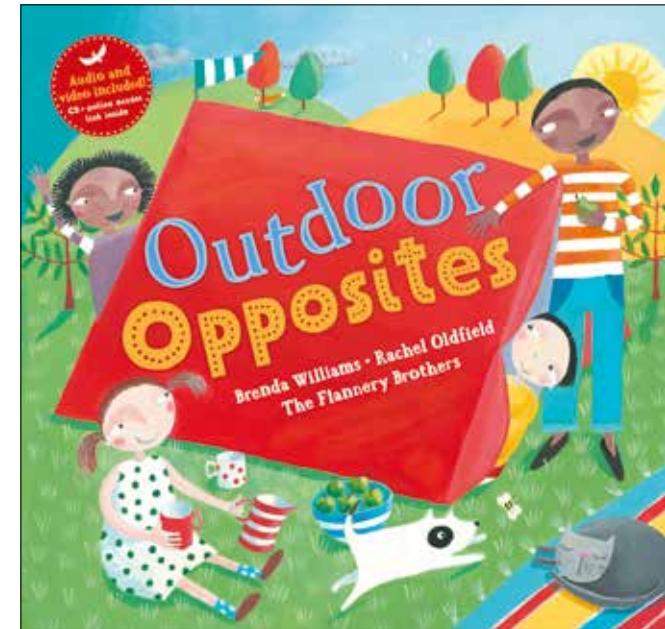
This is a big, encyclopaedic book that will work across a large age range. Younger children will enjoy the colourful spreads with relatively brief text and older ones (and adults) can explore the notes at the back that expand on each section – and remind us, among other things, that all bodies both change and work differently from each other.

Happy in our Skin joyfully celebrates how clever and useful our skin is – as well as ‘keeping the outsides out and your insides in’, it grows, heals and responds to the environment. And skin comes in all sorts of different shades and colours as well. This book is perfect for KS1 with lovely pictures, rhyming text and lots of cuddles, affection and fun.

The disability representation is subtle and very much part of a wider discussion of diversity. It is good to see vitiligo, birthmarks and freckles shown as just another way in which all our skins are different.

Happy to Be Me, also for younger readers, celebrates the things our bodies can do, reminds us that all of them are different and includes and acknowledges disability through the illustrations. In particular, it explicitly challenges the idea that people with impairments can’t or don’t do certain things – a child wearing a hearing aid is involved in a whispering game and another wearing thick-lensed spectacles is reading out instructions while friends construct a robot.

All these titles offer opportunities for children to see themselves and others who are different from them while also noticing all the things we have in common.

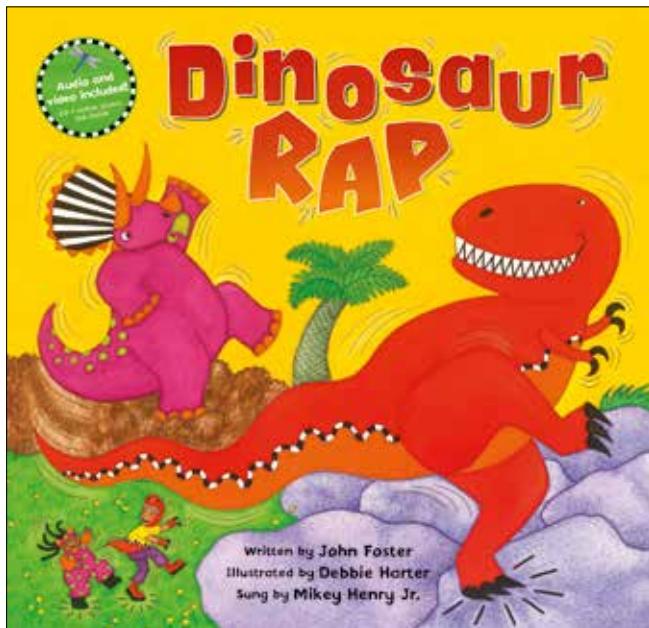


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## MULTI-CHARACTER STORIES THAT INCLUDE DISABLED PEOPLE



Cover illustration from *Dinosaur Rap*

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**Dinosaur RAP by John Foster and Debbie Harter**

**Outdoor Opposites by Brenda Williams and Rachel Oldfield**

**A Bear Hug at Bedtime by Jana Novotny Hunter and Kay Widdowson**

**Best Friends, Busy Friends by Susan Rollings and Nichola Cowdery**

While the books in the previous section focus specifically on difference – including differences in ability – the four discussed below are primarily about other things. Used together, both types of books help to affirm that the varied ways in which we all experience the world are equally valid.

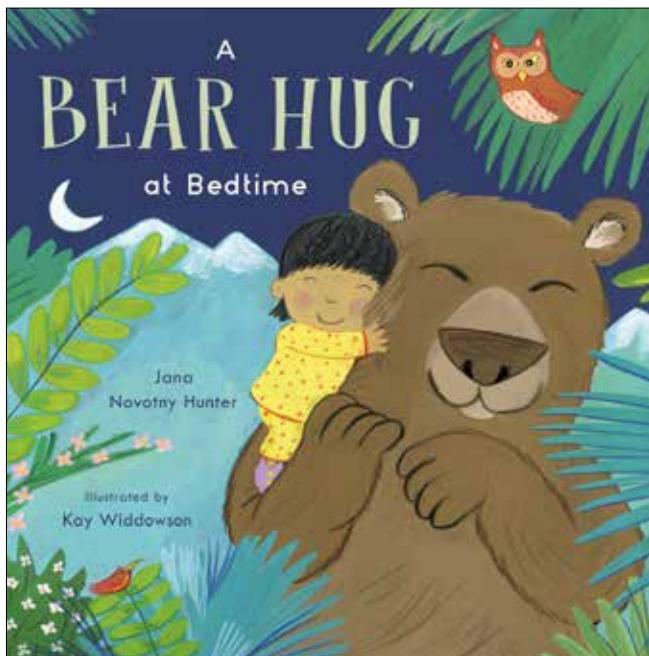
In the next section, we look at stories with Disabled protagonists leading the action – although books where they feature but do not stand out are equally important. They tell us that having a disability is one experience among many others and that it doesn't need to be remarked upon or prevent us from joining in. Nobody wants to stand out all the time and it is just as important to feel comfortable in a diverse group as it is to find your tribe.

Many schools use national or international celebrations such as history months to talk about disability and other differences, and this can be a powerful way of encouraging children to focus positively on minority identities and educating them about the importance of activism and community. However, not every conversation about disability should revolve around struggle or achievement, and Disabled people shouldn't only be talked about because of their disability. Disabled people are part

of families, present in all schools and workplaces, and take part in everything that everyone else enjoys or dislikes doing – including doing their homework or helping with the washing up! But how often do we see them doing those things in stories? A range of identities – be they related to disability, ethnicity, faith, gender, sexual orientation or anything else – need to be a part of all the stories we read.

The books discussed here include Disabled children participating in a range of activities. They affirm that having an impairment – or not – is just one of the many and changing aspects of all our lives and that most of us can do most things most of the time – even if sometimes we need a little help. There is no need to 'notice' the disabilities of the characters in these stories. If children point them out, just acknowledge them and move on.

*Dinosaur RAP* and its accompanying videos enable us all to learn and join in with the rhyming text. The illustrations suggest lots of ideas for dressing up and choreography. There is a dinosaur glossary (dinossary?) at the back and information about the ages of the dinosaurs from the Triassic to the Quaternary (aka now). The diverse cast of dancer/rappers includes a child with a hearing aid and another who uses a walking frame.



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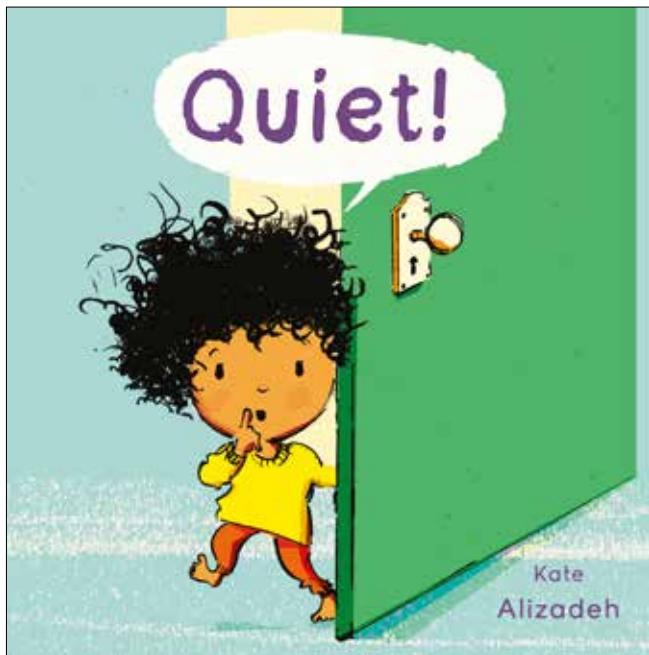
Outside Opposites also features assorted videos – sung rather than rapped – and a simpler text suitable for younger children. As the title implies, the characters – who are enjoying a camping trip – explore concepts such as high/low, fast/slow, whispering/shouting and standing up and sitting down, all culminating in a fireside barbecue. One of the children has a shortened limb.

A Bear Hug at Bedtime is a lovely story featuring a day of imaginative play in which a child who wears a hearing aid travels through jungles, deserts and oceans with their extended, mixed heritage family members envisioned as everything from a tiger to a lobster.

Best Friends, Busy Friends follows a twin brother and sister through their day from waking up in their twin beds to their birthday party in the evening. The cheerful illustrations feature an explicitly multi-ethnic cast, challenge stereotypes of gender and include one child using a white cane and another seen both in a wheelchair and using a support cushion.

All the books in this section are published by Child's Play (as are Quiet! and the One, Two, Three... books) or Barefoot Books (which also publishes Children of the World). Both companies are skilled at including diverse characters in their stories without drawing particular attention to them. Seek out other titles that feature a range of differences in their illustrations and include them in your literacy work and library so that diverse representations – both in relation to disability and other aspects of children's lives and experiences – become the norm.

# STORIES WITH DISABLED PROTAGONISTS



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**Quiet! by Kate Alizadeh**

**Amazing by Steve Antony**

**Me and My Sister by Rose Robbins**

**Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers!  
by Melanie Walsh**

It is important that children see Disabled characters in all areas of literature and not just confined to particular genres or narratives. Similarly, they should sometimes feature as part of the action but also get to star as protagonists in their own stories. Although children's books are becoming more inclusive, it is still common to see such characters in the context of overcoming bullying or succeeding 'despite' their impairments – and this, while it may generate sympathy, is not necessarily helpful in promoting genuine inclusion. We don't want Disabled children to feel that they are more likely to experience bullying or that they have to be better than everyone else – and we don't want others to see them that way either.

In this section, we focus on books that feature lead characters who are disabled. You will notice that, with one notable exception, the stories are not 'about' their disabilities per se and neither are these explicitly mentioned in the text. Just as in life, the protagonists' identities may be apparent (*Amazing*) or less obvious (*Me and My Sister*) – and some may want to talk about them (*Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Powers!*). While their disabilities may affect how they interact with the world (*Quiet!*), they do not limit their participation in it. Crucially, these characters are not primarily defined by their

impairments but by their interests and aspirations.

*Quiet!*, which could be read to or by nursery and KS1 children, describes a child's evening and bedtime routine via a huge range of sounds. It is amazing what you can hear if you stop and listen! The protagonist's visual impairment is entirely incidental to the story but subtly revealed when we see them reading a Braille book (with pages that rustle).

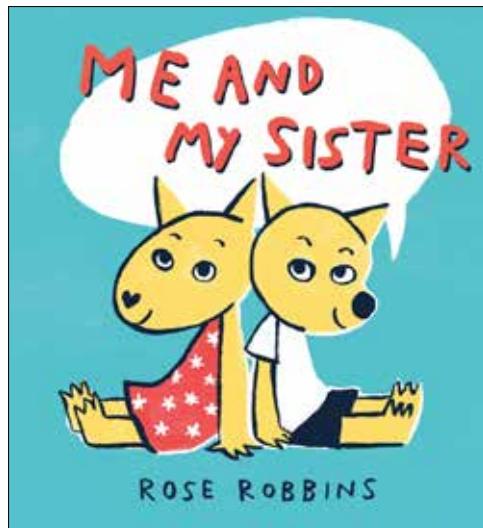
This is a story for everyone which highlights lots of things about our home environments that we take for granted. All of us perceive them in a variety of ways – we can hear, touch, see, feel, taste – and perhaps we can also learn something from people who experience the world in different ways from us.

## Ask

- What are all the different ways that we experience the world around us?
- Can you describe a particular experience in terms of all your senses – how does it sound, look, taste, smell and feel?
- Does everybody describe it in the same way?  
What are some of the differences you notice?

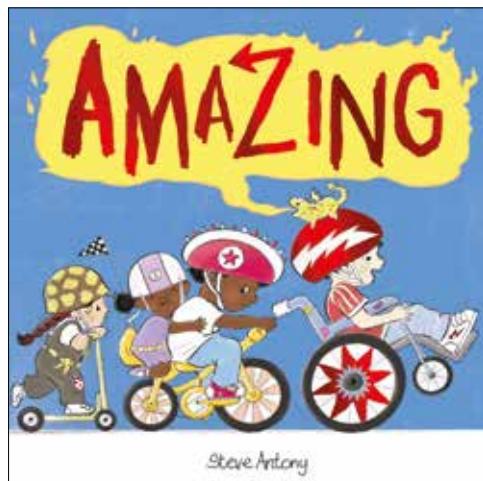
*Amazing* is full of action and joy – and features a singing, dancing, basketball-playing dragon. Zibbo belongs to a little boy who uses a wheelchair and together they take part in a huge range of activities, alone and with other children, culminating in an unfortunate candle-related incident at a birthday party. However, all's well that ends well and the conclusion that anything is possible and all of us are amazing is all we could wish.

*Me and My Sister* is about the relationship between



Author Rose Robbins

Publisher Scallyway and PB isbn  
ISBN-13 : 978-1912650002"



Author: Steve Antony

Publisher : Hodder Children's Books (2 May 2019)

a boy and his autistic sister. He discusses their similarities and differences – which will be common experiences to anyone with a sibling or close friend. Sometimes the world doesn't see his sister quite like he does – and it can be frustrating when he gets told off and she doesn't – but they love each other. He can comfort her, even if she prefers high-fives to hugs and, although she doesn't use words, she says a lot!

You could use the book to talk about how we all sometimes need to do things differently and that there are positive and negative aspects to all relationships. It is written by one of Inclusive Minds' young ambassadors ([inclusiveminds.com/inclusion-ambassadors](http://inclusiveminds.com/inclusion-ambassadors)) based on her own experience of having an autistic sibling – although there is no direct reference to autism in the text and everyone should be able to relate it to their own experiences of relationships and family.

#### Ask

- Think about your sibling – or discuss in pairs with other children. What do you have in common and what is different about you? What are some of the things you both enjoy – are there things that only one of you is interested in?
- Are there times when you like to be quiet or on your own – and other times when you don't?
- What are the different ways that you could comfort someone if they were upset?

Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers! – in which our hero (complete with cape and mask) explains his various superpowers (including knowing lots of facts and having lots of energy), discusses the challenges he faces (forgetting to say hello and taking words rather too literally), and shares his

strategies for overcoming them (using a fidget toy and looking at people's foreheads).

References to superpowers in children's books that feature Disabled characters can be controversial. However, the fantasy and science fiction genres are incredibly popular and it would be a shame if Disabled characters were excluded from them. Some adult carers have also identified a need to 'explain' disability which this book does in a clear and amusing way – Asperger's, we are helpfully reminded, rhymes with hamburgers. Crucially, the whole superhero concept is debunked at the end when Isaac reveals that he is not a superhero – it's just a game he and his brother like to play.

We've largely steered clear of books that 'explain' disability in this resource but some find them useful and this one is one of the best. Such books should not form the basis of a collection but they can add value if used with care. Unlike some, this one is hugely positive and many children who are not on the autistic spectrum will have things in common with Isaac. Of course, his is only one experience of Asperger syndrome and you may wish to share it with families of autistic children before reading it with a class as everyone's circumstances will be different.

Everyone has gifts – or superpowers, if you will – and this book could be used as part of conversations about the things that all of us are good at or love doing.

# EXPLORING THE SOCIAL MODEL

**What the Jackdaw Saw by Julia Donaldson and Nick Sharratt**

**Freddie and the Fairy by Julia Donaldson and Karen George**

The social model of disability – outlined in the introduction – argues that people are disabled not by their impairment or difference but by barriers in society. These barriers can be physical but, just as often, they are the result of other people's attitudes. Removing these barriers – which can sometimes involve quite small modifications to our own behaviour or ways of thinking – can create greater equality and promote the inclusion of Disabled people.

Just as thinking about everything we have in common is at least as important as identifying our differences, thinking about how we can include Disabled people by making positive changes is more beneficial than simply focusing on negative aspects of their experience.

## Ask

- Think about all the examples of accessible environments we see around us at school, on streets, public transport and leisure centres. How do familiar things like ramps, lifts, hearing loops, large print books or textured pavements help to make the world fairer and more accessible for people with impairments?

Consider whether, instead of focusing on how some people 'can't' do things in the same way that others can, it could be helpful to think about 'how' they do them differently.

## Ask

- Do we sometimes change the way we do things to ensure that everyone can join in with activities?
- What does our school do – and what can we do ourselves – to try to include everyone?

These two books illustrate the social model of disability in ways that are both fun and empowering.

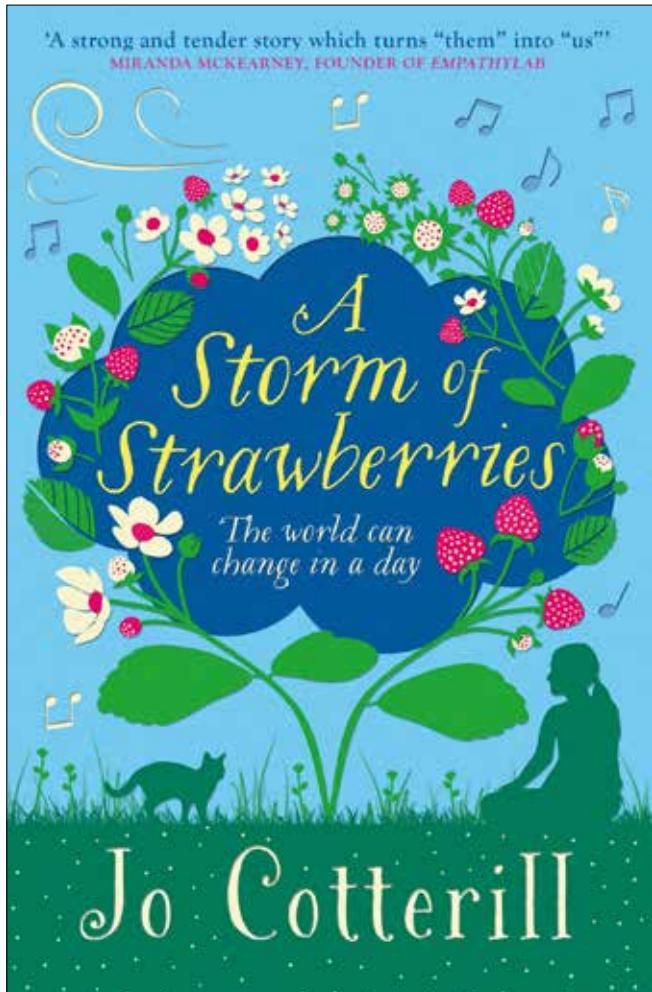
What the Jackdaw Saw is written by deaf children together with Julia Donaldson who herself has a hearing impairment. A jackdaw flies over land and sea inviting everyone to a party. Instead of just accepting the invitation, why do all the animals keep touching their heads? In fact, they have been signing the word for 'danger' – but the jackdaw doesn't understand and flies straight into a huge thunderstorm. A kindly owl explains and soon everyone joins the party. There are some handy examples of British Sign Language (BSL) at the end of the book so that all children can learn to sign the words used in the story. There is also a read-aloud CD, alongside a BSL-interpreted video version, so that everyone can enjoy the tale.

The book functions as a joyful fantasy for children with hearing and other impairments but also questions conventional assumptions by normalising something that our world perceives as unusual. The fact that most of us don't use sign language is not inevitable but happens because society is set up for the majority and this can exclude Disabled people and other minorities.

Freddie and the Fairy is about a little boy who is lucky enough to have a fairy offering to grant all his wishes. Although Bessie-Belle explains that she can't hear very well, Freddie mumbles his requests and ends up with a frog in place of a dog and a carrot instead of a parrot. Fortunately, the fairy queen is on hand to point out that all Freddie needs to do is make a few simple changes – like speaking clearly and not covering his mouth when he speaks.

The story is funny and touching and Bessie-Belle's hearing impairment is beautifully integrated. It shows how it is always helpful to try and express yourself clearly and encourages children to think about the needs of others with impairments.

## CHAPTER BOOKS AND NON-FICTION



Author: Jo Cotterill

Design: Rachel Lawston Illustration based on artwork by Sarah Dennis. “

**The Twitches Meet a Puppy by Hayley Scott and Pippa Curnick**

**A Storm of Strawberries by Jo Cotterill**

**Running On Empty by S E Durrant**

**I Am Not a Label by Cerrie Burnell and Lauren Baldo**

As with previous resources in this series, we have concentrated primarily on picture books for a variety of ages. However, it is important that children can also find chapter books and non-fiction that feature Disabled characters. Here are four books suitable for KS2 readers of varying confidence.

Some popular children's titles can be problematic (see the introduction for more on this). We have avoided books focusing on bullying or about Disabled people overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Of course, bullying narratives are important but they are unlikely to aid inclusion when they focus on already marginalised groups. And books about extraordinary achievements generally have little to do with the everyday lives of most children and young people.

We have focused here on positive stories in which the protagonists have real agency. There are challenges and, as in life, not all of them are overcome, but all the characters in these stories are defined by their interests rather than their disabilities or other people's attitudes towards them.

The Twitches Meet a Puppy is the third in a series of books about Stevie who owns a doll's house occupied by four toy bunnies. Unbeknown to their owner, they come to life whenever her back is turned. So begins two parallel narratives about the disruption caused to the household when Stevie's dad moves in to look after her while mum is away working. Along with dad comes his husband, Stuart, and Stuart's new puppy who brings mayhem in his wake.

The real joy of this story lies in the fact that the inclusive elements – dad's husband, Stevie's mixed heritage friend Eshe, Stuart's prosthetic leg – are very clearly shown but never remarked upon. We only know that Stuart has a disability because it is apparent in the illustrations. No one in the story, it seems, deems any of these relationships or identities worthy of comment. Implicit inclusion at its best.

The book is probably best suited to year 3 and 4 readers and is one of a relatively new but very popular genre of highly illustrated chapter books.

A Storm of Strawberries is told in the first person by 12-year-old Darby who has Down's syndrome. She is looking forward to the family's annual chocolate hunt – although the event is overshadowed by worry over the damage done to her parents' strawberry farm by a series of storms – and the arrival of her sister Kaydee's friend, Lissa. As the story unfolds, we realise that Kaydee and Lissa are in love and Darby fears that Kaydee will have less time for her.

Here is a coming of age story about the challenges of dealing with changing relationships – and not always having things exactly as we would like. Darby is an exceptionally likable and perceptive narrator – and, while the story touches on bullying, she is in no sense a victim. She understands that love is important and that people who love each other should be together. She knows how valuable it is to show people love – and that doing so can make things better. And she learns that there is plenty of love to go around – when someone loves somebody else they don't stop loving you.

Perfect for years 5, 6 and beyond.

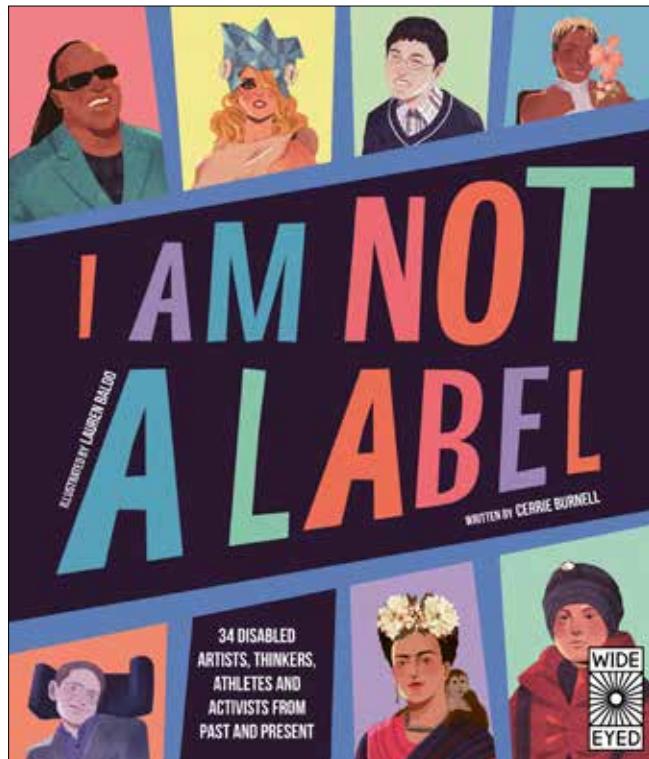
Running On Empty is about 11-year-old AJ who loves to run and is a carer for his parents who have learning difficulties – although, as AJ puts it, “I don’t look after them, we look after each other”. Life is okay until AJ’s beloved grandfather dies and he finds himself dealing not only with grief (“a huge space where he used to be”) but a bewildering world of paying bills and the practicalities of living on a limited income.

The book deals realistically with the challenges and rewards of caring for others and illustrates all too clearly how problems can be magnified by a society that sometimes doesn’t appreciate, or fails to acknowledge, the needs of Disabled people. At the same time, the story of AJ’s ambition to compete in the cross country trials offers a realistic story of dedication, dealing with setbacks and living hopefully.

Despite its acknowledgement of life’s sometimes harsh realities, this is an uplifting tale that challenges assumptions about disability. It is full of small kindnesses and highlights the importance of community and doing things you love. Without sugar-coating reality, the book shows how there can be positives to living with an impairment or caring for someone with a disability. Like all the books in this resource, it takes something which is not part of everyone’s experience and makes it highly relatable, promoting empathy without a whiff of pity.

Any confident year 5 or 6 reader will be able to relate to AJ – and the combination of warmth, humour and suspense make his story perfect for reading aloud.

I Am Not a Label offers brief, beautifully illustrated accounts of the lives of a number of Disabled artists, scientists, athletes, activists and others. One of its strengths is that it shows how commitment and hard work are as much a part of success as talent, and that achievement is not primarily measured by fame or financial rewards. Focus on the achievements of these people rather than their disability – and challenge any sense in which their success has been attained ‘in spite of’ their impairments. Books like this one are celebrations of often excluded minorities and, used judiciously, are valuable tools for promoting inclusion. Remember that the lives they celebrate are unusual and use this book alongside others in this resource whose stories and characters have more in common with the lives most of us will lead.



The book includes less familiar and 'hidden' disabilities, and mental as well as physical impairments. It features people, such as fashion designer Isabella Springmuhl Tejada, who confound stereotypes about the kinds of careers open to Disabled people and explains how artists like Matisse adapted their working practices in ways that changed how we appreciate art. The achievements of astronomer Wanda Diaz-Merced show how extraordinary scientific advances have come from the passionate desire for knowledge. Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah's gentle activism is inspiring and it is good to see model Aaron Philip included when so many trans and non-binary Disabled people struggle to have their identities acknowledged. Perhaps best of all is comedian Stella Young who rejects the idea that she is in any way 'inspirational' or a hero: "Stella knew the truth: disability was normal. It could be wonderful, it could be tedious, it could be hilarious. Just like anyone else's life."

*Author: Cerrie Burnell and Lauren Baldo*

*Publisher: Wide Eyed Editions*

*ISBN: 9780711247444*

*Edition: Illustrated Edition*

# THE BOOKS

Full details of the books included in this resource

**Amazing by Steve Antony**

ISBN 978-1444944716

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**A Bear Hug at Bedtime by Jana Novotny Hunter and Kay Widdowson**

ISBN 978-1846439889

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**Best Friends, Busy Friends by Susan Rollings and Nichola Cowdery**

ISBN 978-1786284655

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**Children of the World by Tessa Strickland, Kate DePalma and David Dean**

ISBN 978-1782853329

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**Dinosaur RAP by John Foster and Debbie Harter**

ISBN 978-1782853022

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**Freddie and the Fairy by Julia Donaldson and Karen George**

ISBN 978-0330511186

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**Happy in Our Skin by Fran Manushkin and Lauren Tobia**

ISBN 978-1406378887

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**Happy to Be Me by Emma Dodd**

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**I Am Not a Label by Cerrie Burnell and Lauren Baldo**

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**Outdoor Opposites by Brenda Williams and Rachel Oldfield**

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**What the Jackdaw Saw by Julia Donaldson and Nick Sharratt**

ISBN 978-1447280842

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**Zeki Can Swim! by Anna McQuinn and Ruth Hearson**

ISBN 978-1907825132

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# THIS RESOURCE WAS WRITTEN BY MARK JENNETT

## **The books are available from Letterbox Library ([letterboxlibrary.com](http://letterboxlibrary.com))**

Letterbox Library, a not-for-profit social enterprise and workers' co-operative since 1983, is an online bookseller for schools and nurseries committed to celebrating equality, diversity and inclusion in the best children's books. Their titles show people traditionally under-represented in children's literature including people of colour, Disabled people, LGBT+ people, diverse families, refugees and migrants. All of their books have been pre-selected by a team of independent volunteer readers which includes teachers, carers and librarians. Selection services and curated book packs for schools include Disability Book Packs (made up of storybooks starring Disabled protagonists). Letterbox Library also runs the Little Rebels Children's Book Award.

UK Disability History Month takes place from mid-November to mid-December each year – find out more at [ukdhm.org](http://ukdhm.org)

## **Other NEU resources**

### [Every Child, Every Family](#)

looks at a range of picture and chapter books that can be used to support LGBT+ inclusion.

### [Breaking the Mould](#)

is a suite of resources which support schools to challenge gender stereotypes in the classroom and includes advice (It's Child's Play) on using children's literature.

Using a capital D for the word Disabled emphasises a disabled identity and shows it is important to recognise that society continues to create barriers for people with impairments, and those barriers need to be removed.



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