

## Repositioning Disability in Children's Picture Books Through Classroom Read-Alouds

Angela M. T. Prince and H. Emily Hayden

Teaching Exceptional Children (2021)

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599211038299>

## Re-positioning Disability in Children's Picture Books Through Classroom Read-alouds

*Ms. Martinez, a special education teacher, and Ms. Nguyen, a general education teacher, co-teach in a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom at Parks Elementary School. During one of their recent co-planning sessions for English Language Arts, Ms. Martinez expressed interest in expanding class read-aloud selections to include more protagonists with disabilities. Both teachers want to promote more equitable, accepting views of disability in their classroom. They also wanted to be sure they are choosing exemplary books for read-alouds and sharing these books in ways that will advance educational goals for all their students both holistically and individually.*

Teachers want their classrooms to be supportive environments for all students. Inclusive practices require teachers to reflect critically on the experiences of their students, including how students are positioned in the classroom context and in society. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) described the “isms” (p. 65) that stratify American society, including but not limited to racism, sexism, and ableism. Schools are not immune, as students with disabilities may be positioned as “less than” their able-bodied peers in inclusive classrooms.

One way teachers can push back on the “isms” that signify inequity is to critically evaluate the children's literature they select for their classrooms. Picture books that feature protagonists, who represent the range of diversity in our world can promote equity and acceptance (Adomat, 2014; Dyches et al., 2006; Leininger, et al., 2010; Wopperer, 2011). The

protagonist is the main character in fictional works or the most prominent figure in a true-life text, and researchers have examined how picture book depictions have evolved for women protagonists (McCabe et al., 2011), protagonists from culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Leland et al. 2018), and gender fluid protagonists (Malcom & Sheahan, 2019). Representations typically evolve to mirror changes in how society perceives diversity, and in some cases, picture books may even initiate changes in societal awareness and perception, as in the case of *William's Doll* (Zolotow, 1972), a book that set the stage for conversations with young children about gender roles and gender diversity. Children's literature has the potential to raise awareness and initiate similar conversations about disability, pushing back on deficit, ableist notions (Emmerson et al. 2014). Bishop (1990; 2012) proposed that when students see protagonists who mirror their experiences, or see protagonists who are different from themselves presented in ways that allow them to become immersed in other life experiences, their abilities to "see, understand, and value themselves and others" (Authors) are enhanced. Unfortunately, not many books feature protagonists with disabilities, (Pennell et al., 2018) and some available books reinforce ableist views of disability through text, illustrations, or characterizations (Kleekamp & Zapata, 2019).

Literature can be used to naturally initiate conversations about diversity, including disabilities, in the classroom (Curwood 2013) and read-aloud activities extend these opportunities to young children, allowing them to share their thoughts aloud. The resulting conversations lay the foundation for later more specific instruction of reading skills and strategies (Schickedanz & Collins, 2012), including comprehension skills needed to utilize text evidence, follow lines of reasoning, and understand different genres and organizational styles (Beers & Probst, 2016). Sharing books with positive representations of protagonists with

disabilities provides all students with opportunities to build these literacy competencies while promoting strengths-based views of disability among typically-developing peers (Adomat, 2014; Wopperer, 2011). Positive portrayals of disability in children's books can have broad effects, impacting beliefs of not only the children who read or listen to them, but also the teachers, parents, and caregivers who encounter these books through their work with children (Pennell et al., 2018). When teachers select inclusive books to share with children, they can inspire critical conversations about disability, paving the way for authentic social change in how it is viewed (Emmerson et al., 2014).

### **Developing a Respectful Learning Environment**

While scholars have noted the powerful impact that seeing protagonists like themselves in stories can have on children's reading behaviors and sense of self (Bishop, 2012; Reese, 2018) protagonists with disabilities are largely absent from children's picture books (Crisp, et al., 2016; Hughes, 2012; Koss, 2015). This lack of representation may negatively impact reading success for students with a disability (Hughes, 2012) who comprise more than 10% of school aged children with individualized education programs ([IEPs]; U. S. Department of Education, 2020). Conversely, sharing books featuring protagonists with disabilities can provide opportunities for all students to develop more positive, agentive views of disability, especially when those books foreground strengths-based views that focus first on "what each person is able to do and to be" (Shogren et al., 2017, p. 22). Below, we propose a process that teachers can use to select and share picture books featuring protagonists with disabilities and advance progress toward mastery of literacy standards at the same time.

#### **Step 1: Choosing and Evaluating Books**

*Ms. Martinez and Ms. Nguyen are eager to choose and share books featuring*

*protagonists with disabilities in their read-aloud activities. They are intrigued by the potential of meeting literacy standards in an inclusive, interactive way. As they talk about the possibilities, the teachers determine that the books they share need to meet two criteria: they should represent people with disabilities in positive, strengths-based ways while also providing literary features that will support students' developing literacy skills. As they plan their read-aloud instruction, the teachers review each book with these twin criteria in mind.*

Three sources often used to identify books that include protagonists with disabilities are the Innovative Resources for Instructional Success (IRIS) Center's *Children's Books: Portrayals of People with Disabilities* (2020), the Schneider Family Book Award (American Library Association, 2020), and the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award (2020). Supported by the U.S. Department of Education, the IRIS Center is a clearinghouse of free online resources about evidence-based instructional and behavioral practices for students with disabilities. The Schneider Family Book Award, awarded annually by the American Library Association (2020), honors authors and illustrators whose books embody the disability experiences of children and adolescents. In collaboration with Brigham Young University and the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities, the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award recognizes books whose protagonists have developmental disabilities.

Books that teachers present in the classroom should be examples of high-quality literature, and while there are no flawless criteria to identify positive portrayals of disability, certain characteristics of books need to be considered (Hughes, 2012). While many books from the recommended websites above will promote strengths-based view of protagonists with disabilities, teachers would be remiss to select picture books without also evaluating the literary features and illustrations. Six questions can guide their book selections.

### ***Is the Protagonist Multi-Dimensional?***

The most common feature contributing to positive characterizations of people with disabilities is complexity: the protagonist should evolve and change over the course of the book or story (Dyches et al., 2006; Dyches et al., 2009; Hughes, 2012; Wheeler, 2013) and their identity should be well-developed. Perhaps of greatest importance is that the protagonist is not defined by their disability (Curwood, 2013). They should not be portrayed as someone to be pitied but instead as having depth and a story that is interesting (Pennell et al., 2018; Wheeler, 2013). Ideally, this protagonist will also represent racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Based on the recommended picture books from Table 1, only two – *Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah* (Thompson, 2015) and *My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay* (Best, 2015) – include racially or ethnically diverse protagonists. Content analyses have noted the lack of picture books that represent the intersection of ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity with disability (Authors; Crisp et al., 2016; Koss, 2015).

### ***Is the Theme Appealing to Children?***

When the theme of a book is familiar, young children can connect with it more quickly. Recognizable themes such as making friends, sibling conflicts, and school issues help young children engage with a book or story, promoting and sustaining interest (Wyse & Goswami, 2010). Within these themes, teachers should consider the model of disability that is being portrayed. Commonly, there are two – the medical model and the social model. Generally, the medical model describes disability as a result of a health condition, disease, or trauma that impacts a person in a physiological or cognitive way (Disability in Public Health, 2021). The medical model focuses on the prevention, treatment, or cure of the disabling condition. Conversely, the social model focuses on barriers facing people with disabilities (Disability in

Public Health, 2021). From this view, a person's activities are limited not by the disability but by societal expectations and perceptions about disability. When teaching this aspect of theme teachers will need to be explicit in their instruction and discussion (Bialka, et al., 2019), because young children may attribute problems a protagonist experiences to their disability rather than to the limitations of societal expectations and perceptions.

### ***Is the Characterization Strengths-Based?***

When analyzing picture books for young children, teachers should look for depictions of self-advocacy and agency. Representation of protagonists with a disability should focus on strengths and abilities (Shogren et al., 2017) rather than limitations. Examining how the author integrates a strengths-based lens through the thoughts, words, or actions of the protagonist can reveal this complexity (Curwood, 2013) and includes such aspects as depicting them as an individual with a unique personality, interests, and goals (Hughes, 2012; Wopperer, 2011). The biography *Emmanuel's dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah* (Thompson, 2015), depicts the difficulties Emmanuel faced when he was born with a limb difference. This included his father leaving the family, believing Emmanuel was cursed. Emmanuel's goals included going to school, and he is shown finding ways to travel to and from school, and eventually riding his bicycle 400 miles in ten days to advocate for changed perceptions about people with disabilities in his home country of Ghana, West Africa.

### ***Is the Plot Realistic?***

Books about disability have often reproduced the medical or charitable model of disability, presenting a protagonist with a disability as pitiable (Curwood, 2013) or as a token to promote change in the able-bodied people in the book (Dyches et al. 2006). However, teachers should also exercise caution on the other end of continuum, namely, the protagonist should not

be portrayed as a superhero (Martin, 2017) nor should they be “cured” of their disability (Beckett, et al., 2010). When a family member or caretaker is portrayed, this individual should not be viewed as a “saint” in their caregiving role. In *My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay* (Best, 2015), Zulay is a student who is blind and is learning how to use her probing cane. She is motivated to learn this skill to participate in a partner race during her school's field day. At the end of the story, she participates in the race with her orientation and mobility teacher as partner. Zulay is not “cured.” Instead, she grows and changes during the story, learning to use both the probing cane and the support of her teacher.

### ***Is the Character with a Disability Included in Society?***

Protagonists with a disability should be portrayed as included in multiple everyday tasks and settings including school, home, and community (Hughes, 2012; 2017). Illustrations should be analyzed as well as text, because both contribute to the messages conveyed and the overall literacy experience. When the illustrations reflect the text, readers are better able to draw emotional significance from books (Kachorsky et al., 2017; Sipe, 2000). However, illustrations and text can sometimes present conflicting messages (Adomat, 2014). For example, one book listed on the IRIS website is *Dana Deserves a Playground Too* (Manor, 2016). Dana has multiple disabilities, including an orthopedic impairment that requires her to use a wheelchair. Acknowledging the inequity of having a playground that Dana cannot access, her peers work to update their park. At the end of the story a new, accessible playground is revealed. However, Dana remains with her adult caregiver in all the illustrations and is never depicted interacting independently with accessible playground activities or her peers.

### ***Whose Story is It?***

Finally, teachers should consider the narrator's point of view. Wheeler (2013) described

the power of narrator's perspective for "revealing a character's inner self" (p. 341) and potentially opening the door to empathy and understanding. Depending on the disability of the protagonist, the story or action may be told from the perspective of a family member (Dyches, et al., 2009). Ideally, teachers should choose picture books where the story or action is told from the perspective of the person with the disability, as in *Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask About Having a Disability* (Burcaw, 2017) or in third person limited form (Prater et al., 2006), as in *I Am Helen Keller* (Meltzer, 2015). Figure 1 applies these six evaluation criteria to an exemplar book chosen from one of the recommended sources: *Baxter Turns Down His Buzz: A Story for Little Kids About ADHD* (Foley, 2016).

<Insert Figure 1 here>

## **Step 2: Shared Readings and Class Discussions**

*Ms. Martinez and Ms. Nguyen identify nine books that meet their criteria for strengths-based disability representations and exemplary literary features. They note the Lexile level and genre of each book (Table 1), since their standards documents utilize Lexile scores to determine appropriate books for reading or sharing aloud at particular grade levels. Their standards also emphasize the use of both narrative and informational text. With books selected, the teachers design their read-aloud instruction, keeping in mind the standards they need to address.*

<Insert Table 1 here>

In states that measure students' academic achievement using Common Core State Standards for literacy ([CCSS]; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) teachers can use shared reading of picture books to provide standards-based literacy instruction. Depth of Knowledge (DOK) descriptors aligned with CCSS (Hess, 2013) describe what students will need to know and do to progress in their literacy development. For example, Speaking and

Listening standards include specific skills at DOK Level 1: Recall and Reproduction. To meet these standards, students describe events, characters, settings, or other features of a book or story, retell or paraphrase text events, and support their ideas with verbatim or slightly paraphrased details from the text. Read-aloud activities provide conversational opportunities for teachers to scaffold comprehension for all students as they work toward mastery of speaking and listening standards. When teachers share picture books that include a protagonist with a disability, this mirror (Bishop, 2012) may help students with disabilities feel more comfortable contributing to discussions, and may enhance their ability to use the comprehension scaffolds teachers provide to add these key details to their descriptions and retellings.

Sharing books that feature protagonists from diverse backgrounds, including disability, can be valuable as students move past Level 1 literal interpretations to negotiate differences and similarities between their own thoughts and experiences and those of others. DOK Level 2: Skill/Concept goes beyond recalling or reproducing a response, requiring both comprehension and processing of text. These deeper understandings are demonstrated by paraphrasing both questions and answers to predict logical outcomes and summarize major events. Children working at this level begin to distinguish perspective and use skills to predict what happens next (Schickedanz & Collins, 2012) or infer what the author has left unsaid (Beers & Probst, 2016).

At DOK Level 3: Strategic Thinking, deeper knowledge is the focus. Students are encouraged to go beyond the text, but are still required to demonstrate understanding of ideas in the text (Kachorsky et al., 2017) and are urged to explain, generalize, or connect ideas and support their thinking. Author's purpose enters the comprehension process here. Children can be invited to propose revisions, question the author, and describe the author's choices (Beers & Probst, 2016). Teachers can support their students during read-alouds of books featuring a

protagonist with disability as they begin to critically reflect on strengths-based narratives in well-chosen books, and perhaps even question how society views disability and how to position people with disabilities more equitably.

<Insert Table 2 here>

Table 2 provides selected specific standards for reading literature (RL) and spoken language (SL) from CCSS, with associated DOK descriptors illustrating what students will need to know and do to progress. Generic discussion questions for each standard and DOK level are provided as well. Table 3 illustrates how these generic discussion questions can be refined and revised for *Baxter Turns Down His Buzz: A Story for Little Kids About ADHD* (Foley, 2016), demonstrating how RL and SL standards at grades 1-3 can be addressed while using a text that features a protagonist with a disability.

<Insert Table 3 here>

### **Step 3: Assessment of Learning**

*Last month, Ms. Martinez and Ms. Nguyen participated in Zoe's IEP meeting along with the school administrator, Zoe's legal guardian, and Mr. Cho, the speech-language pathologist. Mr. Cho interpreted recent evaluation data, and the team developed an annual goal based on Zoe's individual communication needs: "given a structured classroom task (i.e., book, app, craft), Zoe will answer WH questions about the task (who, what, when, where, why) with 80% accuracy as measured by observation in five data collection opportunities across multiple school environments." Like most students with IEPs, Zoe spends the majority of her school day in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Because her IEP goal included a generalization component of "across multiple school environments," the read-aloud activity provided an opportunity for teachers to monitor Zoe's progress toward her IEP goal in*

*the general education classroom. This data will support Mr. Cho's progress monitoring and allow for other school personnel, such the media center specialist or the school counselor to assess Zoe's progress in other school environments.*

Assessment practices include both formal and informal techniques used to identify students for special education services and to measure progress on annual goals in the IEP (McLeskey et al., 2017). Strengths-based discussion prompts that address CCSS can also be used to collect data for IEP goals. The use of *wh-* questions is one strategy to promote a language rich environment for students with language and communication disorders (Stehle Wallace et al., 2021). Young children may be prone to respond that the “problem” with the story is that the protagonist had a disability. Artman-Meeker et al. (2016) acknowledged the likelihood of difficult topics emerging in these conversations and provided the following suggestions: be mindful of the needs of students with disabilities during these discussions and avoid singling them out, be aware of non-verbal communication indicating that a student is uncomfortable with the discussion, and consider how your own responses influence the class.

*Following the read-aloud of The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin (Mosca, 2017), Ms. Martinez asked Zoe five WH questions about the story. Using the progress monitoring tool developed by the IEP team, Ms. Martinez marked a correct response with a plus (+) sign, an incorrect response with a minus (-) sign, and no response with a circle (o), calculating a percentage of correct responses (see Figure 2). Zoe's response to question five – “Why did <insert protagonist's name here> have trouble in this story?” – indicated to her co-teachers the need to be more explicit in their instruction and discussion, by emphasizing social constructs that limit the person with a disability.*

<Insert Figure 2 here>

### **Conclusion**

While the number of students who receive special education services in general education classrooms is increasing (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), students with disabilities may not see themselves represented in children's picture books in early elementary classrooms (Pennell et al., 2018). For educators, selecting and evaluating books that feature a protagonist with a disability can be challenging. Literary characterizations, illustrations, and instructional value should all be considered (Adomat, 2014; Prater et al., 2006). Infusing picture books that feature positive, strengths-based portrayals of individuals with disabilities into classroom activities can present new opportunities to develop respectful, inclusive learning environments, help students meet CCSS, and collect progress monitoring data for IEP goals.

## References

- Adomat, D. S. (2014). Exploring issues of disability in children's literature discussions. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 34(3). <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3865/3644>
- American Library Association. (2020). *Schneider family book award*.  
<http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award>
- Artman-Meeker, K., Grant, T. O., & Yang, X. (2016). By the book: Using literature to discuss disability with children and teens. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48(3), 151-158.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059915618195>
- Beckett, A., Ellison, N., Barrett, S., & Shah, S. (2010). 'Away with the fairies?' Disability within primary-age children's literature. *Disability & Society*, 25(3), 373-386.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09687591003701355>
- Beers, K. & Probst, R. E. (2016). *Reading nonfiction: Notice and note stances, signposts and strategies*. Heinemann
- Best, C. (2015). *My three best friends and me*, Zulay. Macmillan.
- Bialka, C. S., Hansen, N., & Wong, S. J. (2019). Breaking the cycle: Preparing pre-service teachers for disability-related discussions. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 42(2), 147-160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406418754326>
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), 9-12.
- Bishop, R. S. (2012). Reflection on the development of African American children's literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 38(2), 5-13.
- Bryant, J. (2016). *Six dots: A story of young Louis Braille*. Knopf.

Burcaw, S. (2017). *Not so different: What you really want to ask about having a disability*.

Roaring Book Press.

Crisp, T., Knezek, S. M., Quinn, M., Bingham, G. E., Girardeau, K., & Starks, F. (2016). What's on our bookshelves? The diversity of children's literature in early childhood classroom libraries. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 42(2), 29-42.

Curwood, J. S. (2013). Redefining normal: A critical analysis of (dis)ability in young adult literature. *Children's Literature in Education*, 44(15), 15-28.

Disability in Public Health. (2021). Compare and contrast different models of disability.

Retrieved from <https://disabilityinpublichealth.org/1-1/>

Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award (2020). *Book lists*.

<https://www.dollygrayaward.com/home>

Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Jenson, J. (2006). Portrayal of disabilities in Caldecott books.

*Faculty Publications*, 1551. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1551>

Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Leininger, M. (2009). Juvenile literature and the portrayal of developmental disabilities. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 44(3), 304-317. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24233477>

Emmerson, J., Fu, Q., Lendsay, A., & Brenna, B. (2014). Picture book characters with disabilities: Patterns and trends in a context of radical change. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 52(4), 12-22.

Foley, J. (2016). *Baxter turns down his buzz: A story for little kids about ADHD*. Magination Press.

Hess, K. (2013). *A guide for using Webb's depth of knowledge with common core state standards*. The Common Core Institute, Center for College and Career Readiness.

<https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Evaluation-System/How-to-Design-and-Select-Quality-Assessments/Webbs-DOK-Flip-Chart.pdf.aspx>

Hughes, C. (2012). Seeing blindness in children's picture books. *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 6(1), 35-51. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/467062>

Innovative Resources for Instructional Success (IRIS) Center. (2020). *Children's books: Portrayals of people with disabilities*. <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/books/>

Kachorsky, D., Moses, L., Serafini, F., & Hoelting, M. (2017). Meaning making with picturebooks: Young children's use of semiotic resources. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 56(3), 231-249.

Kleekamp, M. C. & Zapata, A. (2019). Interrogating depictions of disability in children's picturebooks. *The Reading Teacher*, 72(5), 589-597.

Koss, M. D. (2015). Diversity in contemporary picturebooks: A content analysis. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 41(1), 32-42.

Leininger, M., Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A. & Heath, M. A. (2010). Newbery award winning books 1975-2009: How do they portray disabilities? *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(4), 583-596.

Leland, C. H., Lewison, M., & Harste, J. C. (2018). *Teaching children's literature: It's critical!* Routledge.

Lexile Framework for Reading. (2020). *Lexile: Find a book*. <https://hub.lexile.com/find-a-book/search>

Manor, Y. (2016). *Dana also deserves a playground*. Createspace Independent Publishing

- Platform. McLeskey, J., Barringer, M-D., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M., Jackson, D., Kennedy, M., Lewis, T., Maheady, L., Rodriguez, J., Scheeler, M. C., Winn, J., & Ziegler, D. (2017). *High-leverage practices in special education*. Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CEC-HLP-Web.pdf>
- Martin, J. J. (2017). Supercrip identity. In J. J. Martin *Handbook of disability sport and exercise psychology*. Oxford Scholarship Online.
- McCabe, J., Fairchild, E., Grauerholz, L., Pescosolido, B. A., & Tope, D. (2011). Gender in twentieth-century children's books: Patterns of disparity in titles and central characters. *Gender & Society, 25*(2), 197-226.
- Malcom, N. L., & Sheahan, N. (2019). From William's doll to Jacob's new dress: The depiction of gender non-conforming boys in children's picture books from 1972-2014. *Journal of Homosexuality, 66*(7), 914-936.
- Meltzer, B. (2015). *I am Helen Keller*. Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Miles, B. & Patterson, C. (2015). *How I learn: A kid's guide to learning disability*. Magination Press.
- Mosca, J. (2017). *The girl who thought in pictures: The story of Dr. Temple Grandin*. The Innovation Press.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. Washington D.C.
- Pennell, A. E., Wollak, B. A., & Koppenhaver, D. A. (2018). Respectful representations of disability in picture books. *The Reading Teacher, 71*(4), 411-419.

Reese, D. (2018). Twelve picture books that showcase Native voices.

<https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=1809-Native-Voices-American-Heritage>

Schickedanz, J. A. & Collins, M. F. (2012). For young children, pictures in storybooks are rarely worth a thousand words. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(8), 539-549.

Sensoy, O. & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Teachers College Press.

Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Schalock, R. L., & Thompson, J. R. (2017). Reframing educational supports for students with intellectual disability through strengths-based approaches. In M. L. WEhmeyer & K. A. Shogren (Eds.), *Handbook of research-based practices for educating students with intellectual disability* (p. 17-30). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Sipe, L. R. (2000). The construction of literary understanding by first and second graders in oral response to picture storybook read-alouds. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(2), 252-275.

Stehle Wallace, E., Senter, R., Peterson, N., Dunn, K. T., & Chow, J. (2021). How to establish a language-rich environment through a collaborative SLP–teacher partnership. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059921990690>

Thompson, L. A. (2015). *Emmanuel's dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah*. Schwartz & Wade.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *The Condition of Education: Students with Disabilities*.

[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgg.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp)

Wheeler, E. A. (2013). No monsters in this fairy tale: Wonder and the new children's literature. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 38(3), 335-350.

Wopperer, E. (2011). Inclusive literature in the library and the classroom: The importance of young adult and children's books that portray characters with disabilities. *Knowledge Quest*, 39(3), 26-34.

Wyse, D. & Goswami, U. (2010). Early reading development. In J. Larson and J. Marsh (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed), pp. 379-394. SAGE Publications.

Zolotow, C. (1972). *William's doll*. Harper Collins Publishers.

Table 1.

*Select children's picture books with a protagonist who has a disability.*

<b>Book</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Lexile (L) Score</b>	<b>Genre</b>
<i>Baxter turns down his buzz: A story for little kids about ADHD</i> (Foley, 2016)	ADHD	610-800	Fiction
<i>Emmanuel's dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah</i> (Thompson, 2015)	Orthopedic Impairment	AD 770	Biography
<i>How I learn: A kid's guide to learning disability</i> (Miles & Patterson, 2015)	Learning Disability	410-600	Fiction
<i>I am Helen Keller</i> (Meltzer, & Eliopoulos, 2015)	Deaf-blindness	570L	Biography
<i>My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay</i> (Best, 2015)	Blindness	610-800	Fiction
<i>Not so different: What you really want to ask about having a disability</i> (Burcaw, 2017)	Orthopedic Impairment	860	Biography
<i>Six dots: The story of young Louis Braille</i> (Bryant, 2016)*	Blindness	590L	Biography
<i>The girl who thought in pictures: The story of Dr. Temple Grandin</i> (Mosca, 2017)**	Autism	AD 680L	Biography
<i>The William Hoy story: How a deaf baseball player changed the game</i> (Churnin, 2016)	Deafness	620L	Biography

Notes: AD = adult directed; ADHD = attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; \*Schneider Family Book Award; \*\*Dolly Gray Award

Table 2.

*Sample Discussion Prompts, Aligned with Reading Literacy and Spoken Language Standards and Depth of Knowledge Levels for Grades 1-3.*

Selected Standards, Grades 1-3	Sample Discussion Prompts
RL.1.2: Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson. (DOK 1, 2)	What happened in this story? Tell me as many details as you can. Why did the author write this story?
RL.1.3: Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details. (DOK 1)	Describe (protagonist, event, setting) with as many details as you can.
SL.1.4: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly. (DOK 1, 2)	Tell me two interesting things about (protagonist). Why are these things interesting?
RL.2.2: Recount stories... and determine their central message, lesson, or moral. (DOK 2)	What is the theme of this story? What did the author want us to learn from this?
RL.2.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges. (DOK 2)	What did (protagonist) do when (event) happened?
SL.2.3: Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue. (DOK 2)	What did (protagonist) say when (event) happened? Why did they say that?
RL.3.2: Recount stories ...determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text. (DOK 2, 3)	What are the key details of this text that helped you know the theme?
RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events. (DOK 1, 2, 3)	How would you describe (protagonist's) personality? How did that affect (events)
RL.3.6: Distinguish their own point of view (perspective) from that of the narrator or those of the characters. (DOK 2, 3)	If you were (protagonist or narrator) how would you feel/what would you think about (event)?

Notes: DOK = Depth of Knowledge; RL = Reading Standards for Literature; SL = Spoken Language;

Table 3.

*Strengths-based Discussion Prompts for Emmanuel's dream: The true story of Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah (Thompson, 2015) with corresponding literacy standards.*

Specific Discussion Prompts	Standards and Depth of Knowledge Levels
What is something that Emmanuel did well?	RL.1.3, DOK 1 RL.2.3, DOK 2 RL.3.3, DOK 1, 2, 3
If Emmanuel was your classmate, how would you describe him?	SL.1.4, DOK 1,2 SL.2.3, DOK 2 RL 3.6, DOK 2,3
In what way did Emmanuel receive help (learn something new, change)?	RL 1.3, DOK 1
What are some ways you have received help (learned something new, changed)?	RL.2.3, DOK 2 RL 3.3, DOK 1, 2, 3
What's something in the story that makes you think about something in your life (text-to-self connection)?	RL 1.2, DOK 1, 2 RL 2.2, DOK 2 RL 3.2, DOK 2, 3
Why might you want to be friends with Emmanuel?	SL 1.4, DOK 1, 2 SL 2.3, DOK 2 RL 3.6, DOK 3
Is there anything about this story that you would like to change?	SL 1.4, DOK 1, 2
Would you change anything about Emmanuel? What? Why?	SL 2.3, DOK 2
Would you change anything about where the story happened?	RL 3.6, DOK 2, 3
Would you change anything about the other characters?	

<i>Baxter turns down his buzz: A story for little kids about ADHD</i>	
1. Is the main character with a disability multi-dimensional?	Baxter is a fast rabbit, in both thoughts and actions. As a character with ADHD, his quick actions sometimes push people away emotionally or even hurt them physically.
2. Is the theme appealing to children?	Getting along with friends is a common theme that most children will recognize and find appealing. However, this book does not promote the social model of disability, because Baxter's buzz is portrayed as something that needs to be fixed. This is tempered by other elements of the storyline, including the fact that Baxter is troubled when he notices that other characters are afraid or reluctant to be with him and Baxter seeks the advice and support of Uncle Barnaby.
3. Is the focus of the narrative strengths-based?	Baxter has a shared interest with his friends when it comes to participating in the races. He has difficulty getting along with his friends due to his quick actions that sometimes hurt others, but he seeks advice and applies the strategies that he learns.
4. Is the plot realistic?	Uncle Barnaby guides him on a series of relaxation and mindfulness activities to calm his body and mind. Once Baxter is aware of his actions, he learns to implement mindfulness techniques that help him focus. These strategies are similar to those taught in classroom and community settings.
5. Is the character with a disability included in society?	Baxter is portrayed as being fully included in the activities with his friends. He also interacts with a caring adult.
6. Whose story is it?	This story is told from the perspective of a narrator, rather than from Baxter's perspective (third person limited).

Annual goal: “Given a structured classroom task (i.e., book, app, craft), Zoe will answer WH questions (who, what, when, where, why) about the task with 80% accuracy as measured by observation in five consecutive data collection opportunities across multiple school environments.”

Question 1: Who the book about?

Question 2: What is something that <insert character/ person’s name here> did well?

Question 3: When did <insert character/ person’s name here> receive help?

Question 4: Where are some places where this <story / book> takes place (setting)?

Question 5: Why did <insert character/ person’s name here> have trouble in this story?

Date	Text	Question / Response					% correct
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	
2-19-21	<i>The Girl Who Thought in Pictures</i>	+	+	+	o	-	60%
Notes: Q1 - Zoe knew that the main character was Temple Grandin (TG). Q2 - TG “was good at inventing and building because she cares about animals.” Q3 - TG needed help when “she got angry.” Q4 - Zoe could not recall any of the settings in the book, even though there were multiple possible answers: home, school, and aunt’s ranch. Q5 - TG had trouble “because she had Autism.”							

Figure 2. Zoe’s progress monitoring toward completion of her annual IEP goal for speech and language.