

# Child Care plus+

## + Picture This: Inclusion in Children's Books

Early childhood professionals in quality programs provide children's books about a variety of people and situations that reflect diversity of race, culture, and gender. Many providers are adding books that reflect diversity of development and ability as well. They understand that offering children's books that incorporate young children and adults with disabilities in everyday activities presents the crucial message that having a disability is just another part of life in the real world.

As more books include characters who are children or adults with disabilities, it has become increasingly important to look for ways to measure quality. The following guidelines have been developed to help you make your selection wisely.

**Author/Illustrator** - Have the author and/or illustrator accurately portrayed the topic or disability? When the sources are qualified to produce a book that includes a character with disabilities, the content of the book helps children gain an accurate understanding of both the topic and the disability.

**Story/Illustrations** - Would this story embarrass or humiliate a child or adult with a disability? Is the story of interest even if one of the characters has a disability? The story being told and the accompanying pictures or photographs should represent natural and positive examples of individuals with disabilities meeting challenges, solving problems, and resolving conflicts in the context of family and community activities. The story line and illustrations should not stress the character's differences but describe the disability or the person with the disability realistically. The principle that "disability is natural" suggests that you look for stories that describe a person's profession, talents, and actions without emphasizing the person's disability.

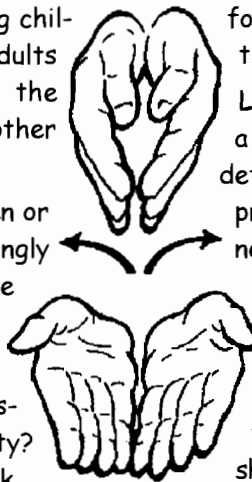
**Relationships Between Characters** - Is this what would happen if this character did not have a disability? Critical decision-making and successful resolution of challenges should frequently be done by the character with the disability

not for him or her. While negative as well as positive consequences for an individual's actions may naturally and realistically occur, consequences should not be based on the person's having a disability. The story's resolution should foster the attitude of "one of us" rather than "one of them."

**Language** - Does this story talk about the disability as a trait the character happens to have or as what defines the character? The author should use appropriate language. Avoid books that use words with negative overtones (weak, lazy, victim, suffer); outdated language (retarded, handicapped); or give characters superhuman capacities inconsistent with their roles. Choose books that use person-first language—that means putting the person first and the disability second in a sentence. For example, it should say "child with autism" not "autistic child."

**Presentation** - Is the style of illustrations similar for characters with and without disabilities? Does the portrayal of physical or cognitive limitations promote empathy, not pity, and acceptance, not ridicule? Children's books with Braille or simple sign language paired with words or pictures are worthy additions to any bookshelf.

Standards for books embracing developmental or physical diversity are very similar to standards for books about other types of individual and family diversity. When you ensure that the books you offer represent the diversity in the world, you help young children in your program feel accepted and accept one another as well. + SLM



"BOOK"

+ In This Issue	
+ In Focus	+ Putting It Into Practice
+ Try It Out	+ Question
+ Connecting With Families	+ Resource Review

## + IN FOCUS

Your children's bookshelf should include books that represent developmental diversity whether or not your program currently includes a child with disabilities or developmental delays. In addition, the interests, developmental stage, and day to day reality of each child currently enrolled should be reflected in your book selection. As children who live with a disability enroll in your program, you honor them as well by providing books with stories and pictures about people living their lives in similar situations.

You help children feel accepted as well as learn to readily accept one another by providing books about individuals with disabilities in various kinds of families, circumstances, and professions. You show sensitivity and appreciation for young children with disabilities (and their families) when you make this effort. Imagine the delight and feelings of acceptance of a parent or other family member who notices these books in your book area.

Children benefit from peeking into the lives of real people who are both like and unlike themselves, and, once in a while, you can help them be the boy or girl in their own made-up stories as well. Children learn best from being exposed to the excellent examples the world has to offer from people who have varying levels of ability. + SLM

## + TRY IT OUT

While appropriate stories and pictures in books are excellent ways to celebrate individual and unique abilities and qualities, there is nothing like listening to a real person tell his or her own story. Having guest presenters and taking field trips offer natural opportunities for parents and other individuals with disabilities to share stories about their work, family, and day to day lives as contributing members of the community. These personal stories will naturally include accounts of important accomplishments, strengths, and abilities.

Make it a point to be aware of people who work in your community so you have an ongoing list of potential visitors and field trip sites. Whenever possible, select the guest or site that will allow children to learn about an interesting topic and interact naturally with people with diverse abilities. Adults who visit your program or facilitate tours will also benefit from being reminded that they have a lot to offer children in supporting their awareness of people and places in the community. You will want to help them remember that young children are naturally curious, and that they learn best when they have many opportunities to touch, smell, and taste as well as see and hear. + SLM



## + CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

Families are often your best resource for children's books about children and adults with the same disability as their child. They can readily tell you what they like and what they do not like about the books they have already discovered. They will also tell you about their child's favorite story books, which may or may not include characters with disabilities. All of this is important information as you respond to the child's interests and offer appropriate materials for that child and the other children in your program both today and for years to come.

If you have not already asked parents in your program to compile and send a book of pictures of their child and their family, you may wish to start expanding your bookshelf this way. The picture book may include grandma and grandpa, mom and dad, brothers, sisters, therapist, aunts, uncles, neighbors, pets, house or apartment, yard, etc., whatever is important to that child. Not only is this family book a valuable tool for calming and reassuring an anxious child, but it can be the foundation for a host of individualized learning opportunities related to communication, literacy, and social skills. Labeling the pictures or writing down the child's story about each one provides yet another opportunity for learning. Further, the child can use the book to share his or her story with peers or other adults in the program.

When families are unable to provide pictures, you can offer them a disposable camera or lend them a camera or digital camera, if you have one, and ask them to take pictures that you then have developed and organize into a book. You can also make the book yourself by taking pictures of the child and family when they are in your program and/or on home visits. Of course, you will need parent permission to have this book on the bookshelf in your program. + SLM

## + PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The following children's books have been evaluated and assessed as appropriate for use in the early childhood classroom. These books are written primarily for children ages 3 and up. As of March 2005, these books are available both new and used at Amazon.com.

***A Place for Grace*** by J.D. Okimoto and D. Keith (1993). Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books. Grace is a little dog with big dreams. After discovering she's too small to become a seeing-eye dog, she meets Charlie, a man who believes Grace would make the ideal hearing-aid dog. Grace provides an inspiring model for any child facing obstacles at school or at home. It gives readers the opportunity to learn the American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet.

***Be Quiet, Marina*** by K. DeBear (2001). New York: Star Bright Books. The story of two young girls who learn to play together in preschool. Marina has mild cerebral palsy, and Moira has Down syndrome. They enjoy many of the same things in school, playing with dolls, dancing, and dressing up. But Marina gets very noisy when she is upset and this bothers Moira. They become good friends and play happily together as Moira learns to tell Marina when her screaming bothers her, and Marina learns to find other ways to express her frustration.



***Dad and Me in the Morning*** by P. Lakin (1994). Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman Company. In a special morning interlude, a young boy awakens his father, and they go down to the beach to watch the sunrise. Dealt with simply, as part of the reality of their relationship, the boy's deafness is unobtrusively woven into this story about a father and child sharing a moment in time. In tune with



the sensitive tone of the text, Steele's atmospheric

watercolor illustrations capture the rising light of dawn as well as the love between the boy and his father.

***Friends in the Park*** by R. Bunnett and C. Sahlhoff (1993). New York: Checkerboard Press. In this picture-book, a group of friends, some with disabilities, get together for a wonderful day of playing in the park.

***Mama Zooms*** by J. Cowen-Fletcher (1993). New York: Scholastic Press, INC. A young boy sits in his mother's lap and "zooms" with her into space, across the desert, and through the Wild West . . . all in her wheelchair.

### ***Mama Zooms***

Jane Cowen Fletcher



***My Brother, Matthew*** by M. Thompson (1992). Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House. Though David knows frustration and resentment at times, he feels he understands his little brother (who has multiple disabilities) even better than his parents; together the two boys experience a great deal of joy.

***A) Russ and the Apple Tree Surprise*** (1999); ***B) Russ and the Almost Perfect Day*** (2000); ***C) Russ and the Firehouse*** (2001) by J.E. Rickert and P. McGahan. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House. These are stories about Russ, a child with Down syndrome, who a) longs for a swing set in his backyard instead of a boring apple tree until he and his Dad pick apples, he and his Mother and Grandmother bake an apple pie, and Russ discovers the apple tree has an extra surprise for him; b) finds a five dollar bill while walking to school and is then forced to make a difficult decision about what to do with the money; and c) gets to help out at the fire station.

***We'll Paint the Octopus Red*** by S. Stuve-Bodeen and P. Devito (1998). Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House. Emma and



her father discuss what they will do when the new baby arrives. When the baby is born with Down syndrome, they talk about what new things they might need to do (or not) with the baby. A sequel to this book is coming out in June 2005 called ***The Best Worst Brother***.

Emma is learning to get along with her now three-year-old brother, Isaac. +

## + QUESTION

**QUESTION:** I am trying to find books about people with disabilities to buy for my program. I found a few children's books with cute little animals with disabilities but I am unsure whether they are a good investment or not.

**ANSWER:** Guidelines for assessing quality are really the same whether the book's characters are real people, mythical or cartoon characters, or animals with human characteristics. However, it is generally considered best practice in the field of early childhood education for caregivers/teachers to provide many learning opportunities that build upon the real world experiences children have every day. According to *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs-Revised* (NAEYC, 1997), "children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them" (p. 13).

While imagination and creativity are important aspects of children's development, their richness and value are heightened when they emerge from inside the child and are fostered by caring adults who honor the results. Fantasy characters have their place, and it is evident that children enjoy them. But a steady diet of fantasy will not provide the experiences children need to live in—and learn about—the world around them. With this in mind, the books about animals in an early childhood program should most often be about real animals doing real animal things. And the books about children or adults with dis-

abilities should represent children and adults doing the real things young children and adults do. + SLM

## + RESOURCE REVIEW

The following sites have booklists for all ages reflecting all kinds of disabilities. Star Bright Books at [www.starbrightbooks.com](http://www.starbrightbooks.com) publishes books on inclusion. Woodbine House at [www.woodbinehouse.com](http://www.woodbinehouse.com) is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of offering a special needs collection. A disability and diversity booklist can be found at [www.co.josephine.or.us/jcmhd/toparent.htm](http://www.co.josephine.or.us/jcmhd/toparent.htm). A character education booklist can be found at <http://eev2.liu.edu/dream/jmr/charedbook.htm>. And an inspiration and hope booklist is available at <http://lifecenter.ric.org/topic/8/?subtopic=267&sort=title&count=all>.

*CHILD CARE plus+* is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

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