

ISSN 2577-0527



WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME V, ISSUE 4

Summer 2013

Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities



WOW Review: Volume V, Issue 4
 Summer 2013
 Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities

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Introduction and Editor's Note

Around the world people of all ages face challenges in their everyday lives owing to emotional, perceptual, intellectual, and physical disabilities. This issue of *WOW Review* showcases children's and young adult literature that authentically and sensitively provides insights into the lived disability experiences of people across the globe. Taking the lead on this issue is the USBBY (US Board on Books for Young People) committee that biennially selects titles from books sent by publishers to submit to IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) as nominees for inclusion in the IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities (<http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=271>) award list and annotated catalogue. USBBY is the national section of IBBY that "was founded to promote international understanding and good will through books for children and adolescents." This mission reflects the continued goals of *WOW Review*—in this case, understanding the lives of those for whom some type of disability influences how they live, make decisions, and view society. Reviews of other titles suitable for young people with disabilities or with powerful insights into disability experiences that are not part of the IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities award list are also included in this special issue.

All the books reviewed challenge assumptions. *Green*, an inventive picture book, brings dramatic conceptual, visual and linguistic surprises to every page. Able to be read and understood at a variety of levels, this book will delight young readers with special needs. It is no wonder that "wonder" appears in three different titles of the books reviewed in this issue; the protagonists with disabilities we meet leave us in awe of their wisdom and abilities while simultaneously battling prejudice and discrimination on multiple levels. Exploring such narratives allows readers to reflect upon their lives as both similar to and different from the characters with disabilities that they encounter, and to consider how to meet life's challenges with resilience and hope.

In several stories, in place of simplistic medical interpretations that frame disability as an abnormality to be cured or a personal tragedy, readers are presented with *affirmation* models of disability, learning that the experience of disability can contribute positively to the identity of an individual or a group. This is especially true of two books that transport us into Deaf culture. For instance, in *The Smart Princess and Other Deaf Tales*, a thought-provoking collection of stories written and illustrated by Deaf contributors, readers come to appreciate the advantages of signing over speech. In *Wonderstruck*, we learn that deafness can be an asset, as when Ben uses his deaf ear to tune out his bullying cousin's annoying CB radio. These titles also include occasional sign and finger spelling visuals that may force hearing readers to slow down and give Deaf readers an advantage in understanding what is being communicated.

Themes of discrimination and prejudice are explored with great sensitivity in several of the books included in this issue, especially those that feature characters with developmental disabilities. Auggie Pullman, the 10-year old protagonist in *Wonder*, loves eating ice cream and riding his bike, but a congenital disorder has left him with severe craniofacial differences—no ears, eyebrows or cheekbones, a sagging face, as well as a protruding nose and bulging eyes. By the time Auggie enters 5th grade after a period of homeschooling, he is already accustomed to

people recoiling or staring. But at his new school, Beecher Prep, he experiences teasing, disappointing friends who bow to peer-pressure, and bullying. In *Words in the Dust*, we meet Zulaikha, an adolescent girl who lives in a village in Farah Province in Afghanistan during the US military occupation. Born with a cleft palate, Zulaikha experiences incessant bullying and humiliation. In a society where a woman's worth is measured according to her marriage prospects, Zulaikha believes that she has little to offer. Franny, the 14-year narrator of *The Lovely Shoes* has many things going for her, but a "birth defect" has left her with an undeveloped leg, a foot that curls under, and a limp. Walking in her heavy orthopedic shoes, peers call her "gimp" or "crippled." At first, Franny responds by being super pleasant and overly generous, but after a mortifying experience at a dance, she retreats to her bedroom and vows she will never come out. In all three of these novels, readers learn that discrimination and prejudice are deeply connected to societal pressures for normalcy. Such pressure not only undermines tolerance, it interferes with our coming to terms with our own bodies. Although Auggie, Zulaikha and Franny each wish to go unnoticed and at the beginning of their stories believe that surgery or ways of disguising their disabilities will improve their lives, ultimately they come to the mature realization that self-acceptance is an important factor in battling societal intolerance.

Several of the titles draw our attention to the fundamental role of mentor relationships. In *Junkyard Wonders*, a special education class with individuals who have diverse needs and very obvious abilities, the astute teacher, Mrs. Peterson, mentors the students to appreciate their own and others' qualities and aptitudes. In *Samurai Kids Book 1: White Crane*, the legendary samurai master, Ki-Yaga, welcomes a group of students into the "Cockroach Ryu" who have been rejected from other samurai schools owing to their orthopedic, perceptual and emotional differences. Through Ki-Yaga's unwavering belief as well as his exacting lessons, the remarkable students learn to overcome their fears, find their inner powers, work together, and teach others important lessons in humanity. Across the books, we learn that brilliant mentors are not always teachers in schools or devoted parents. Melody, the 11-year old narrator with cerebral palsy who cannot independently walk, talk, or eat, in *Out of My Mind*, has several mentors, but perhaps the one with the greatest insight into Melody's intelligence and desire to communicate is the tough love and great expectations of her next-door neighbor. *Waiting for No One* is another novel with a female protagonist, Taylor Jane Simon, who tells her own story. Taylor is eager to get a job and to move away from home, but she knows she needs to work on aspects of her life that are associated with Asperger's syndrome. Taylor becomes an advocate for Martin Phoenix, who has cerebral palsy. Taylor's struggles to understand nuanced language and behavior, and her battle to be taken seriously, make her especially cognizant of the need to support Martin's developing linguistic skills and to protect him from being babied.

This special issue of WOW Review provides insights into diverse disability experiences. Although many of the titles deal with painful issues of discrimination, readers will be inspired by their resilient and hopeful characters who prove unafraid to battle injustice. This is only a sampling of relevant titles that broaden perspectives on disability, so we welcome your suggestions and additions.

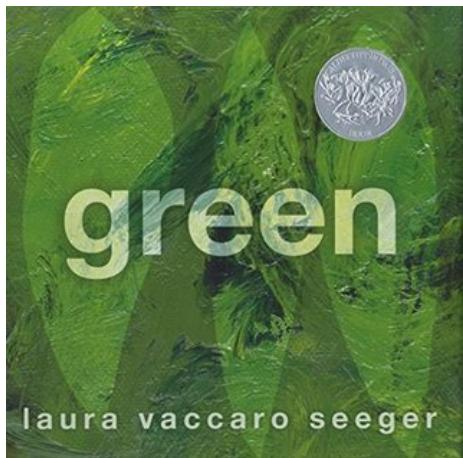
Chloë Hughes

Chair, USSBY committee on Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities
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**Green**

Written and illustrated by Laura Vaccaro Seeger
Roaring Brook Press, 2012, pp.
ISBN: 978-1596433977

A master of concept books, Laura Vaccaro Seeger has created a book that indulges readers in the color green through images and a few carefully selected words. The various shades of green represent contexts of different global communities that are connected from page to page by the intersecting colors and die cuts that provide a peek from one

illustration to the next. Sensory imagery abounds visually and linguistically, intersecting with the tactile, imagined scents, sharp tastes, and distinctive sounds. The limited verbiage takes readers to deeper levels of conceptual understanding through adjectives such as “wacky,” “slow,” and “glow” followed by yet another perspective on green-related concepts through conditional descriptors: “all green,” “never green,” “no green,” and “forever green.”

Seeger received a BFA degree at the School of Fine Art and Design at New York State University at Purchase and began her career in the field of animated television. Once she began publishing children’s books, her unique concept books claimed many honors, including the Caldecott Honor Book, Geisel Honor Book, Globe-Horn Book award, and ALA Notable Book Award as well as the Children’s Literature Assembly’s Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts award list and the IRA Teachers Choices award lists.

Green is Seeger’s second Caldecott Honor Book and was nominated for the IBBY Books for Young People with Disabilities list. *Green* is an excellent example of one type of book considered for this award because the book can be a significant text for young people with language-disabilities or difficulties with visual perception. By exploring the many ways in which a basic color can be described and how it is identified throughout the natural world, readers can internalize relevant language use, extend their vocabulary, and build upon their understandings of sensory imagery and concepts. Clear colors and contrasts are essential for those challenged with visual perceptions. Seeger’s book capitalizes on this artistic focus with bold colors reflecting the diversity of contexts in which the color green is predominant.

As a book identified to be exceptional for children with disabilities—especially those with challenges of language and conceptual understanding—*Green* encourages all readers to be more aware of the many variations of color around them, both green and other hues. A discussion with younger readers might invite them to share where they observe green in their communities and how they might describe this particular green. Seeger’s vocabulary use is minimal but specific in that it categorizes each shade according to where it is found in nature. It is interesting to note that the only “never green” instance is one that is man made—a stop sign.

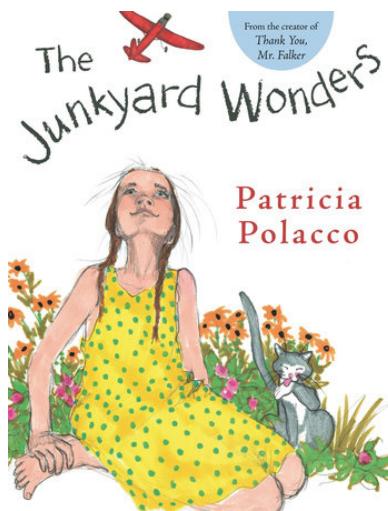
Other books that might encourage the development of language and concepts as well as visual acuity can be found in Seeger's own creations: *First the Egg* (2007), *Lemons Are Not Red* (2004), and *The Hidden Alphabet* (2003). To continue exploring the many dimensions of color, *Green* might be followed by *The Black Book of Colors* (Menena Cottin, 2010), *Red Sings from Tree Tops, A Year in Colors* (Joyce Sidman, 2009), *One* (Kathryn Otashi, 2008), or *A Blue So Blue* (Jean-FranCois Dumont, 2005).

Janelle Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

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Junkyard Wonders

Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco

Philomel, 2010, 48 pp.

ISBN: 978-0399250781

Tricia's hopes of a new start in a new school where no one knows she has dyslexia are dashed when she discovers she's been assigned to Room 206, the "junkyard" with other students with special needs. Jody Beach grows too fast, Gibbie McDonald has Tourette syndrome, Stuart Bean has diabetes, and Tomm has vision problems and likes ballet. Tricia is upset at first but, gradually, as she gets to know her classmates and her teacher, Mrs. Peterson, she becomes

comfortable in her classroom community. One day, though, after Barton Poole bullies Tricia and her friends, calling them "weirdos" and "retards," Mrs. Peterson works to change her students' perceptions. She explains that a junkyard is not a place for throwaways and things nobody wants, it is "a place full of wondrous possibilities!" She takes them to a real junkyard and has the children collect things they think they can turn into something new. A few weeks later the groups share their creations. When Tricia's group presents their model airplane, the class decides to raise money for a motor to make it fly. Jody proposes they name the plane the Junkyard Wonder "because we made it out of junk and because we Junkyard Wonders made it. That plane is us!" After some heart-breaking happenings, the class flies the plane and, in Gibbie's words, it goes, "straight to the moon."

This inspiring and touching story celebrates the uniqueness and genius in every child and the power of a talented and insightful teacher to draw that out and help the child and those in the surrounding community know and appreciate it. While the story is complex in places, the characters are endearing and authentic and the story is riveting and believable. The detailed pencil and marker illustrations are recognizably Polacco's. The expressive faces portray a range of emotions the children feel, from sad to fearful to broken-hearted to joyous, as well as the dedication and passion of Mrs. Peterson.

Polacco based the story on events in her childhood. Diagnosed with dyslexia as a child, she had difficulty learning to read and spent time in special education classrooms. When she entered the "junkyard" with Mrs. Peterson and her classmates, she came to appreciate her own and others' talents and strengths and understand the meaning of true genius. An appended end note provides information about the remarkable and successful lives of her close friends in the junkyard.

Junkyard Wonders would work well in a text set with books about extraordinary teachers helping students find their "genius." These books might include *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Patricia Polacco, 1998) and *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day* (Colin McNaughton, 2005). In a text set on being smart and creative, it could be paired with

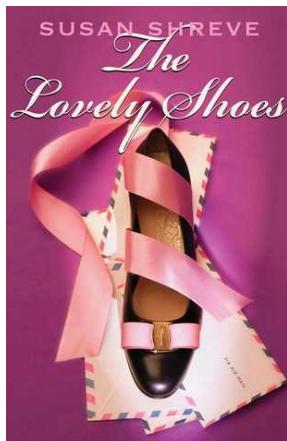
Odd Boy Out: Young Albert Einstein (Don Brown, 2004) and *How We Are Smart* (W. Nikola-Lisa, 2009).

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The Lovely Shoes

Written by Susan Shreve

Arthur A. Levine Books, 2001, 252 pp.

ISBN: 978-0439680493

What is more difficult than being a 9th grade girl living in Ohio in the 1950s? How about being a 9th grade girl living in Ohio in the 1950s with a birth “defect” that causes her to limp and wear heavy orthopedic shoes. Drawing from her own personal experience, Susan Shreve weaves a tale of the bonding between a mother and daughter in a journey across

the globe to search for comfort within custom-made footwear. With an overprotective, optimistic mother and a pessimistic father who tells her to focus on finding a profession, Franny begins to wonder about her future.

When Franny tries to fit in with her high school friends, her mother teaches her how to dance and they shop for the perfect dress and shoes for the first dance of the school year. However, after an embarrassing incident at the dance, Franny hides in the girls’ restroom and makes the decision to hide in her room for the “rest of her life.” Secluding herself for eight days, her only communication with her family is by writing notes under the bedroom door to her younger brother, Zeke. Franny’s mom derives a plan to help her cope by writing a letter to Signor Salvatore Ferragamo, a shoemaker from Italy, asking if he will make shoes for her daughter’s “crippled” foot. The story ends with a flight to Italy, a portrait, a childhood romance, a pair of soft, black leather shoes, and many school dances in Franny’s future.

The authenticity of this book is easy to assess as it is inspired by author Susan Shreve’s own painful childhood. She caught polio at 18 months, was paralyzed for several weeks, underwent multiple surgeries, and never fully regained muscle function in both legs. Not letting this hold her back, Shreve became a high school cheerleader, attended many school dances and has written more than twenty fiction books for adults and children. Her work for young readers is touching and entertaining, with stories often portraying a character’s coming of age under difficult circumstances. Two of her most current books, *Blister* (2001), an ALA Notable Book and a Publishers Weekly Best Children’s Book and the currently published sequel *Kiss Me Tomorrow* (2006), depict a young girls’ resiliency when her mother loses a baby, her father moves out, and she begins her own quest with dating.

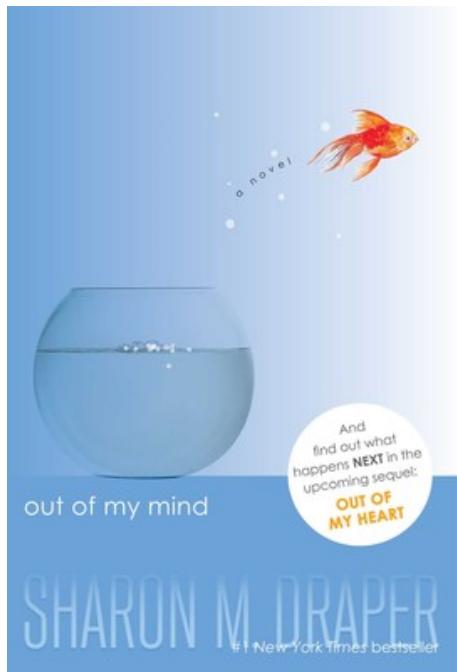
The Lovely Shoes might be paired with *Slippery Willie’s Stupid, Ugly Shoes* (Larry Peterson, 2011). In this children’s book Willie had to wear special shoes because his feet were so slippery and like Franny, Willie was made fun of for wearing different shoes. Both stories teach children about differences and how we treat others and would work well in a classroom setting.

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Out of My Mind

Written by Sharon Draper
 Atheneum, 2011, 295 pp.
 ISBN: 978-1416971719

"It's like somebody gave me a puzzle, but I don't have the box with the picture on it. So I don't know what the final thing is supposed to look like. I'm not even sure if I have all the pieces." (p. 293)

Melody is an 11-year-old girl who has cerebral palsy, unable to talk, walk, sit, or eat without support and assistance. The novel begins with Melody describing the meaning and power of words in her life. “Words

have always swirled around me like snowflakes—each one delicate and different, each one melting untouched in my hands” (p. 1). We soon find out that Melody hangs on to and listens to every word because she cannot articulate her own words. Through her parents’ endless hope and the championing of their loving neighbor, Mrs. V, Melody finds her voice using speech generation technology. She tells her story with an eloquent honesty that reveals the heart and mind of a young adolescent alienated from peers and family. But, with the support of her neighbor and through her own determination, Melody has the opportunity to grow.

Draper confronts powerful issues related to students with disabilities. Through the characters of Claire and Molly, she exposes how other students often treat peers who are different. With great care, she juxtaposes two teacher extremes through Mr. Dimming who is assuming and unkind and Mrs. Lovelace who is loving, kind, and appreciated by Melody. Finally, the most powerful issue Draper challenges is the assumption that students like Melody are not intellectually capable. Through Melody we experience the frequency of this assumption and appreciate her mission to prove her intellectual excellence. Melody tells her story in a way that is real and sincere so that anyone can understand and empathize with the challenges she faces every day, even someone who is an outsider to this culture.

It should be no surprise then that *Out of My Mind* was a New York Times Bestseller for nine weeks, and has received more than twenty awards including the Josette Frank Award. This award itself recognizes a book of literary merit that demonstrates how a young person faces challenges in a positive yet realistic way. This text also received the 2011 IRA Teachers’ Choice Book Award and the 2011 IRA Young Adult’s Choice Award.

While this text could stand alone and incite extensive discussion because of its depth, it would also pair well with *Mockingbird* (Kathryn Erskine, 2011). *Mockingbird* is narrated by a young female character –Caitlin–who has Asperger’s syndrome. Melody and Caitlin experience

different challenges in their lives, yet have similar encounters with peers and teachers. Melody's experiences of using speech generation and learning to advocate for herself could also be compared and contrasted with those of the male character, Martin Phoenix, in *Waiting for No One* (Beverly Brenna, 2010) and *The White Bicycle* (Beverly Brenna, 2012) in her Wild Orchid trilogy.

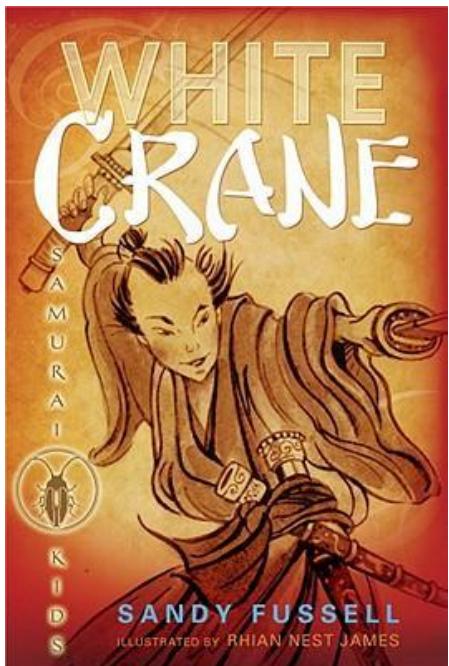
Dr. Sharon Draper, a Cincinnati resident, has been a prolific author for young people. Her compassion and empathy for children comes through clearly in this text. While Draper herself is not an insider to this culture, she has parented a child who, like Melody, is trapped inside her own body. Her years of experience as an educator, the time she spent at summer camps for children with disabilities, and the countless hours with her daughter, have allowed her to imagine and comprehend the experiences of a student like Melody.

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Samurai Kids Book 1: White Crane

Written by Sandy Fussell

Illustrated by Rhian Nest James

Walker Books, Australia, 2008, 245 pp.

ISBN: 978-1921150203

This historical fiction novel tells the story of Niya Moto, a samurai boy with one leg in feudal Japan, and his four fellow students who also have disabilities; one is missing an arm, one is blind, and another has extra fingers and toes. Niya's own words "We're the unwanted. Unwanted everywhere else" (p. 14) indicate how prejudice has dominated their lives. One samurai school, Cockroach Ryu, which is led by the legendary samurai master Ki-Yaga, accepts the students and slowly changes their lives by giving them hope and helping them achieve success. Ki-Yaga teaches them Bushido (the samurai code)

including "Chi, Jin, Yu (wisdom, benevolence, courage)" through lessons that include sword fighting, wrestling, archery, calligraphy, origami, and haiku poetry. The teacher also helps the students find their own talents and spirit totems. For example, Niya's totem is a White Crane because he is good at standing on one leg and his strength is archery, which is all about balance. Learning Bushido and recognizing their talents and spiritual totems help these unusual samurai kids develop physical competence as well as mental and spiritual skills.

What the students learn at Cockroach Ryu leads them to great accomplishments. In the Annual Samurai Trainee Games, they defeat the strong Dragon Ryu team and eventually win first place. Ki-Yaga's encouragement "Working together, our spirit totems are strong. Maybe even powerful enough to defeat a Dragon" (p. 81) inspires them. They apply their talents and assist one another to overcome fear and self-doubt, and that ultimately generates a bond powerful enough to win the game. At the end of the story, Niya proudly says, "Armless, legless, sightless, sad and different. We're not like that anymore" (p. 245). Bushido as well as friendship give them wisdom, benevolence, and courage, which are more powerful than a samurai sword.

Through Niya, the story invites readers to experience injustice, inequality, and bias against people with disabilities. Such experiences encourage readers to develop emotional connections and empathy, find meanings in their own lives, and transform the ways in which they think about themselves and others (Rosenblatt, 1995). The author also invites readers to gain a sense of the diversity and complexity within Japanese culture. They learn how the samurai legacy continues to have an impact on the Japanese people's daily lives in the modern age, although samurai themselves no longer exist. For example, the social gesture of "bowing" in everyday greetings and at sporting events shows a sincerity and respect that is rooted in the samurai ethos.

The author, Sandy Fussell, is an award-winning Australian children's writer. *Samurai Kids*

Book 1: White Crane was published in Australia in 2008 and in the U.S. in 2010. The novel was honored by IBBY in the 2011 list of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities. Fussell utilizes her detailed research about the ancient history of Japan, geographic areas, and cultural values and beliefs to beautifully craft the story. The occasional drawings and chapter banners with black and white brush paintings and works of calligraphy by Rhian Nest James are well placed to trigger the imagination of readers. Subsequent volumes in the series include *Samurai Kids Book 2: Owl Ninja*, *Book 3: Shaolin Tiger*, *Book 4: Monkey Fist*, *Book 5: Fire Lizard*, *Book 6: Golden Bat*, and are now available to American readers.

Based on the theme of disabilities, this novel can be read alongside *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Sherman Alexie, 2007), the story of a fourteen-year-old Indian with water on the brain and ten extra teeth who lives on a reservation in Spokane, WA, and *Warrior Scarlet* (Rosemary Sutcliff, 1994), about a warrior with a withered right arm who overcomes his physical challenges with courage and friendship during the Bronze Age in Britain.

Reference

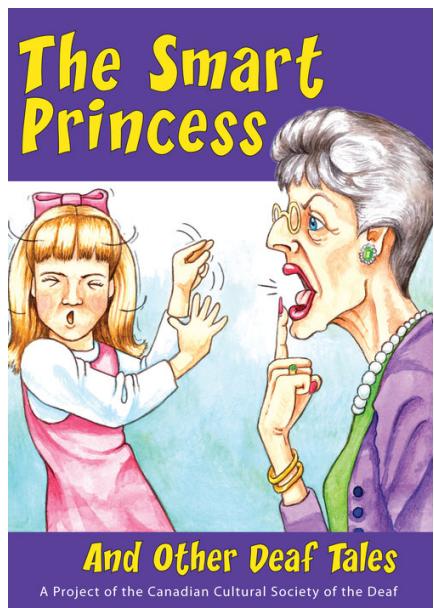
Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). *Literature as exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association of America.

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The Smart Princess and Other Deaf Tales

A Project of the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf

Written by Kristina Guevremont, Keelin Carey, Nicole Marsh, Nicolas Meloche-Kales, and Dena Ruiter-Koopmans

Second Story Press, 2006, 148 pp.

ISBN: 978-1896764900

The Smart Princess and Other Deaf Tales contains five stories that are all written from a Deaf person's perspective about the challenges and misconceptions Deaf people face when interacting with a hearing counterpart. The stories also deal with the topic of loneliness.

The first story, "The Smart Princess" by Dena Ruiter-Koopmans, is about a Deaf child, a princess named Lyla, who despite being diagnosed by the doctor as not having the ability to learn, successfully learns sign language. Princess Lyla's family learns sign language, except for snooty Aunt Belle who decides that Princess Lyla needs to stop the nonsense of signing and learn to speak when she visits her. Distressed, Princess Lyla waits till nightfall and runs back to the palace where she can once again feel smart and communicate in sign. Upon finding out what had happened to their daughter, the king and queen order Aunt Belle to learn sign language. An illustration for this short story underscores the attitude against signing as a preferred and dominant method of communication. Aunt Belle is depicted pointing to her lips—a common sight in many tedious speech therapy sessions often forced on the Deaf against their will.

"Earth 2" by Nicolas Meloche-Kales is an interesting satire that places six astronauts, three deaf and three hearing on an exploratory mission, with only one of the hearing astronauts possessing the ability to sign. The other two hearing astronauts, Joe and Joshua, criticize the Deaf astronauts for not having cochlear implants, and for not speaking, but when they land on Earth 2, an almost entirely Deaf planet where everyone uses American Sign Language, the cultural strata is reversed. Now it is Joe and Joshua who are seen as having "special needs" and must be accommodated until they learn the language of Earth 2. The illustration supports the storyline by including drawings of sign language.

"My Life Changed" by Nicole Marsh is an account of her experience attending a hearing school. The author recounts the isolation she felt surrounded by hearing peers who teased her and let her take the blame for their mischief. An accompanying illustration shows two children caught "red handed", yet since Nicole cannot defend herself, this scene of juvenile mischief transforms into one of great unfairness. Marsh shares that she was later placed in the Newfoundland School for the Deaf where she flourished and learned to sign. Never forgetting her first schooling experiences, she warns that it may not always be possible for the

Deaf and the hearing to learn together, because there is a risk that a shy Deaf person could forever be lost in the corner.

“My Tiger” by Keelin Carey is the story of a Deaf girl who signs to her favorite stuffed toy, a tiger. After several nights of wishing that her tiger could come to life, it finally does one magical night. Her tiger is the imaginary friend she can play with and count on for help.

“Best Friends” by Christina Guevremont is a story of an elephant and a mouse, both deaf, who travel to Mikula the Wise to inquire how they can learn to understand each other’s signs, since Morty the mouse is too little, and Ernie the elephant is too big. Along the way, the two become the best of friends by sharing stories and utilizing a note pad for communicating. In the end, Mikula the Wise helps them solve their problem by having Morty permanently perch himself on Ernie’s trunk, thus enabling Ernie to read Morty’s tiny sign language gestures.

This book is a collection of stories written and illustrated by winners of The Ladder Awards, a competition for members of the Deaf Community sponsored by the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf.

Because of their Deafness, each author brings a unique perspective to the literary world, and although these stories are written at a level suitable for nine year olds, they contain weighty cultural issues and personal challenges that are important to all members of the Deaf Community. This collection of stories is refreshing in that it expresses the views of Deaf people and not merely someone closely associated with Deafness, such as a parent of a deaf child, or a child of a Deaf adult (CODA). The first two stories in particular, “The Smart Princess” and “Earth 2,” challenge long held, societal views regarding speech and hearing that are accepted by the hearing population. Having been a Deaf Educator at both the primary and secondary levels, I recognize the concerns and struggles of the Deaf emanating from these stories. These are struggles that typically begin early in life, usually at home with hearing relatives, and continue on into adulthood. Stories written by Deaf authors give Deaf Communities a much needed voice and unified representation.

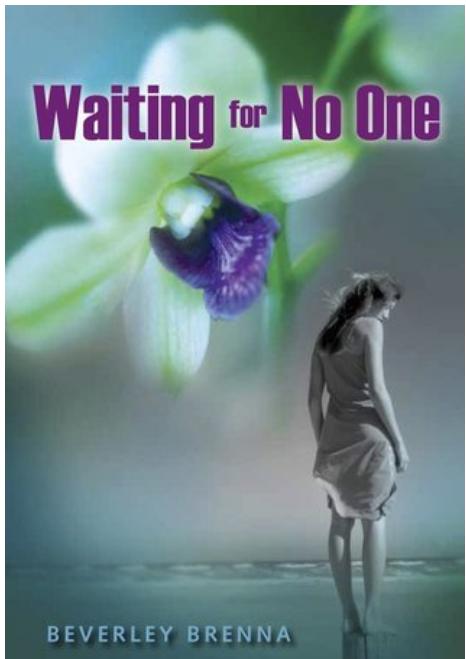
Other novels that may also assist students in comprehending the Deaf Culture from a Deaf perspective are: *Deaf Child Crossing* (2004) by Marlee Matlin, *Nobody’s Perfect* (2007) and *Leading Ladies* (2007) by Marlee Matlin and Doug Cooney, and lastly, *A River of Hands, Deaf Heritage Stories* (2000) an anthology from the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf.

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Waiting for No One

Written by Beverley Brenna
Red Deer Press, 2010, 187 pp.
ISBN: 978-0889954373

The idea that someone could have a different perspective than me used to be confusing. (p. 57)

Taylor Jane Simon is age 18 3/4 and a “would-be bookstore employee” if she could muster the courage to apply for the job and face addressing her Asperger’s syndrome with a complete stranger. Applying for the job may also mean controlling her swearing, her dislike of the color yellow, and her avoidance of other people, which are all things she is working on. Taylor wants to

live independently but knows that she must attend to other aspects of her life that are related to her Asperger’s before independence can become a possibility.

Waiting for No One presents Taylor Simon as someone who often negotiates the world in a very literal fashion while also attempting to understand the nuances of both the behavior and language of those around her. Readers will be delighted with Taylor’s frank and often comical perspective of the world; she is a young woman with an uncanny way of pointing out the discontinuities of life around her. They will also begin to see aspects of their own lives as they face the same struggles Taylor attempts to tackle as a teen, wanting to be independent but not quite ready to take it on alone. Through Taylor’s eyes, readers become aware of the social strangeness of their communities and their interactions with other people, and throughout the text they will also begin to wonder why it is so hard to just accept others as they are. Indeed, Taylor’s towering strength is that she knows how to reach out and advocate for others with extreme challenges. This is especially the case with the character Martin Phoenix who has cerebral palsy and uses a speech generation device to talk.

Beverley Brenna is a writer and assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. She has written a number of books including *Wild Orchid* (2005) and *The White Bicycle* (2012), both of which round out Taylor Simon’s story. Winner of the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award for *Waiting for No One*, more information about Brenna can be found on her website (<http://www.beverleybrenna.com/>). In an interview at the end of the book, Beverley Brenna shares her purpose for writing, which is as enlightening as the text itself.

Written with upper middle and high school students in mind, *Waiting for No One* would

make a great companion to texts such as *Marcelo in the Real World* (Francisco X. Stork, 2011), *Probably Still Nick Swanson* (Virginia Euwer Wolff, 2002), and *Stuck in Neutral* (Terry Trueman, 2012) to address themes about teens with disabilities attempting to live independently in spite of the adults around them. To extend understanding about individuals with cerebral palsy and little or no speech, Martin Phoenix's experiences could also be compared and contrasted with the character Melody in *Out of My Mind* (Sharon Draper, 2011).

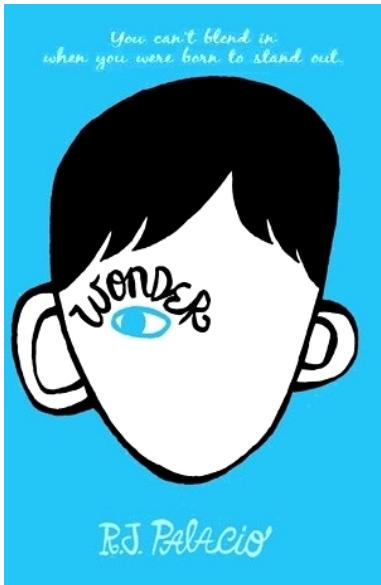
What is often missing in the texts written about young people with disabilities is the voice of the young person or novels that allow that person to be the protagonist. The five novels listed above present young people as the protagonists of their own lives. Teachers may wish to address the issue of who speaks for those with disabilities as well as how to have frank conversations about and with youth with disabilities, as these are often missing in classrooms.

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Wonder

Written by R. J. Palacio
Knopf, 2012, 320 pp.
ISBN: 978-0375869020

August Pullman (Auggie) is a 10-year-old boy who likes such ordinary things as playing ball, eating ice cream, riding his bike. Owing to a genetic condition, Auggie was born with no ears, eyebrows, eyelashes, and cheekbones that has caused his face to sag, his nose to protrude, and his bulging eyes to be asymmetrical and lower on his face. After homeschooling Auggie for years, his parents decide that he should begin 5th grade at Beecher Prep. Auggie describes himself as having a “mushed-up face” and even though he has become accustomed to people recoiling, looking away, or staring, he

is nervous because he fears he'll never be an ordinary kid who has friends, the empathy of others or the freedom to be himself.

Auggie initially tells his story from his point of view. He describes his family, including his parents and older sister, Via; growing up, having 27 surgeries; and, his difficult struggles when beginning school at Beecher, where he is teased and bullied. Through his voice readers come to appreciate Auggie's sense of humor, intelligence, gentleness, courage, and honesty. Then a range of voices (i.e., Via, two of Auggie's first friends, Jack and Summer) continue the story from their points of view. These voices provide different perspectives on Auggie and how he and his condition affect those who love and care about him. Auggie's voice comes in again to bring his story to a close. The varying voices reveal the changes that occur not only in Auggie but in all those around him.

In this unforgettable, moving novel Palacio gracefully weaves Auggie's story together through different voices that converge around compassion and acceptance. The idea for the different voices came to the author when she realized that Auggie would not know the extent of his impact on others. Using different perspectives, Palacio skillfully explores the cruelties that may exist in school life, such as prejudice and bullying, but ends on a note of hope, showing the power of kindness, loyalty, and friendship. Readers can't help but cheer for Auggie and agree with his mother who ends the book stating, “You really are a wonder, Auggie. You are a wonder.”

Wonder is Palacio's first novel, after years of being an art director and designer in New York which she continues to do. The idea for the novel grew from an experience she had with her two children outside an ice cream shop (Palacio, 2013). When they happened to sit next to a mother and daughter with a severe craniofacial difference, her younger son, looking at the young girl, started to cry. As she hurriedly gathered her children and left, spilling shakes in the process, Palacio heard the mother calmly say, “It's time to go” to her

daughter. Reflecting later on the incident, Palacio thought about the hundreds of times the mother and daughter must have had similar experiences and wished she had instead set an example and talked to the mother. The idea for *Wonder* was born that evening and she spent weeks researching genetics and craniofacial anomalies in children to write the story. While she was never bullied as a child, she did experience social isolation, ridicule, abandonment by friends, and knew kids who gained a sense of power by putting others down. Though her experiences were never to the extent of Auggie, they helped her envision how he and others felt (Palacio, 2013).

Wonder would work well with a text set for middle school readers on friendship and kindness. Other books in this text set might include *Freak the Mighty* (Rodman Philbrick, 2004) and *Out of My Mind* (Sharon Draper, 2012).

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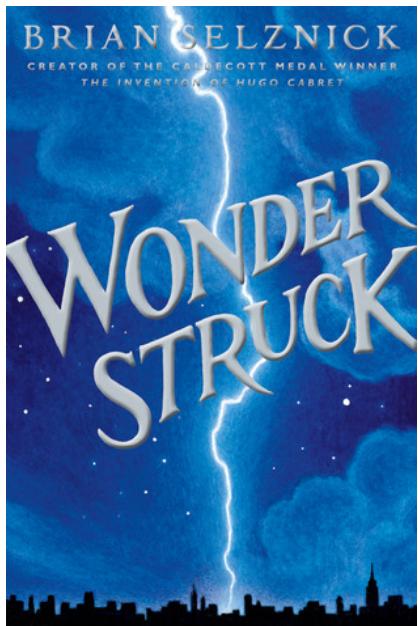
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Wonderstruck

Written by Brian Selznick
 Scholastic, 2011, 608 pp.
 ISBN: 978-0545027892

After the sudden death of his mother, Ben has to live with his well-intentioned, financially struggling aunt and uncle, sharing a room with his cousin, Robby, who delights in bullying him. Desperate to find out more about his father whom he has never known, Ben is drawn back one night to the cottage where he and his mother used to live and, in the middle of a lightening storm, finds a clue about his father that persuades him to run away to New York City. Fifty years earlier, Rose feels stifled by her life with her father in Hoboken, New Jersey, and is frantically trying to connect with her film star

mother whose life she tenderly documents in a scrapbook.

Caldecott medal-winning author, Brian Selznick, intertwines two lives—Ben's told in words and Rose's in drawings. Both are searching for love and belonging. Both collect objects and facts that connect them to the world. Both are deaf, but have come to deafness in different ways. Readers certainly empathize with Ben's and Rose's struggles, but they also become acquainted with their obvious strengths. Selznick reveals that deafness itself can be an asset, for example, by having Ben use his deaf ear to tune out his cousin's annoying CB radio. In the field of Disability Studies, Swain and French (2000) have contrasted the medical model of disability (as an abnormality to be cured, a personal tragedy, a charity case, etc.) with the affirmation model where disability has a positive identity for the individual or the group. Ben and Rose clearly represent the affirmation point-of-view.

Although more than 600 pages long, over 460 pages convey the story through illustrations that engage younger and older readers alike and support individuals who experience reading difficulties. With compassionate prose and spellbinding graphite drawings that transport us from Gunflint Lake, Minnesota, in 1977, to Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1927, we are swept up in a mesmerizing journey through movie theaters, book stores, the American Museum of Natural History and the Queens Museum of Art in New York City. Selznick is masterful at varying the tempo of the narrative. At times, we share Ben and Rose's panic as they search for family members; at other moments we pause to absorb the intricate details of the "Cabinets of Wonders" and the "Panorama." When Ben starts to use fingerspelling toward the end of the storyline, the reader must slow down to work out what he is saying, and to fully appreciate his new self-empowerment.

In the Acknowledgements, readers learn that Selznick, whose brother was born deaf in one ear like Ben, carefully researched Deaf culture as well as the transition from silent films—

where deaf and hearing audiences could enjoy the world of cinema together—to the “talkies” that, by their very nature, excluded deaf film goers. Selznick’s story shatters the monolithic term “the deaf” by including two very different portrayals of deafness where the individuals use a variety of means to communicate, including ASL, fingerspelling, writing, lip-reading as well as some speech. The author’s attention to detail and socio-historical accuracy, ground this fantastic story in reality. A discussion and exploration guide for educators is available.

Scholastic provides Intriguing essays by scholars on Deaf culture, silent to sound film, the American Museum of Natural History, etc., as well as an interactive game to learn how to fingerspell.

Educators should acquaint themselves with the history and diversities within Deaf culture in the United States and also with the disturbing ignorance and prejudice towards deafness within the hearing world. The documentary, *Through Deaf Eyes* (Diane Garey and Lawrence Hott, 2007), and Myron Uhlberg’s memoir about growing up as the hearing son of deaf parents, *Hands of My Father* (2009), influenced Selznick’s writing and are thought-provoking resources for educators. To extend understanding about deaf experiences with young readers using exquisite storytelling and illustration, *Wonderstruck* can be paired with Andrea Stenn Stryer’s *Kami and the Yaks* (2007) and Myron Uhlberg’s *The Printer* (2003) and *Dad, Jackie, and Me* (2006). For readers in the secondary grades, Anthony John’s *Five Flavors of Dumb* (2010) challenges assumptions about deafness and disability in a sassy and sensitive way. Educators will undoubtedly want to heighten appreciation for Selznick’s craft as an author illustrator by connecting readers to his other major works. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) shares common themes with *Wonderstruck*—films, orphans, survival and self-discovery—and are both complemented by fine graphite drawings. In both novels Selznick provides a refreshingly affirmative understanding of disability experiences.

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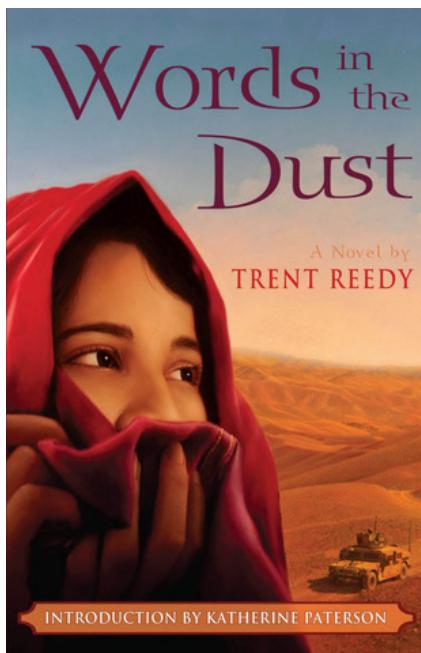
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Words in the Dust

Written by Trent Reedy

Arthur A. Levine Books, 2011, 272 pp.

ISBN: 978-0545261258

Trent Reedy's first book takes readers into the home and life of a young Afghan teenager, Zulaikha, a girl with a cleft lip and palate. Her family lives in a village in the mountains during the U.S. military occupation. Zulaikha and her older sister Zeynab have humble aspirations. While Zeynab wishes to marry, Zulaikha dreams of learning how to read. Her craniofacial difference, however, constitutes a great impediment in this traditional society with no access to modern corrective surgery. She suffers from bullying by the village boys and thinks she will be a burden to her family for the rest of her life. The lives of both young girls soon change.

Zeynab is married and Zulaikha clandestinely learns how to read through the support of Meena, a friend of her dead mother who is also a retired professor. The second hopeful event for Zulaikha is when a U.S. soldier helps her get corrective surgery from the army.

This book, written after Trent Reedy's tour of duty in the National Guard, is grounded in his personal and professional experiences. He did indeed meet a young girl with a cleft lip in Afghanistan, and he and his fellow soldiers pooled funds to provide a similar operation. Reedy's study of the hardships that Zulaikha encounters is clearly emotionally charged with personal memory and empathy.

According to a video clip on his web site, Trent Reedy first went to Afghanistan on his military tour of duty with a deep mistrust of Afghan people and anger regarding 911. He ends up challenging his own assumptions while helping the country rebuild. His novel is remarkable in that he gives deep insights into the life style of Afghan people in such a way that we understand the universal commonalities of people of another culture. The inner thoughts and self dialogue of a child's struggle with disability and hopes for education are realistic. Because the anguish expressed about the disability is told in the first person, and in understated touches throughout the book, we do not fixate on that aspect of Zulaikha. She is not a caricature. We experience her love of learning, her love of her family, and her love for her country. The descriptions throughout the book are vivid, genuine, clearly emotionally charged with personal memory and empathy, and written in a simple, direct, and sometimes poetic prose.

On his web site the author states that he had to infer many of the thoughts of the young girl he helped, because he was not allowed to visit her. This and the pre-wedding, traditional, all-women party, would be hard to describe for a male and a foreigner. Trent Reedy explains in an online interview that he overcame this by reading many books and interviewing friends in Afghanistan as well as Afghan-Americans (Griffen, 2011).

In the Author's Note at the end of the book, he explains that he was living in a compound in the village of An Daral while he and his fellow soldiers waited for Afghan contractors to finish constructing their base outside of the city. For this reason Reedy lived close to the people he describes, because he was not in a military environment. Upon his return from Afghanistan he studied and used extensive notes, photographs and videos he took while on duty. The research together with a pronunciation guide and a list of recommended titles about Afghanistan help to establish a story that is culturally authentic and realistic.

This moving and well-crafted story is a beautiful reminder of how precious education is. This book will encourage young readers to open their minds to a part of the world that may seem very different from their own and to challenge pre-conceived ideas about young people with disabilities.

Books which could be read in tandem with *Words in the Dust* to provide insights into the harshness of traditional culture in Afghanistan include *Shadow* by Michael Morpurgo (2012) to understand the scope of hardships of children during the war and as refugees in England; *My Name is Parvana* by Deborah Ellis (2012), a sequel to the *Bread Winner* series, which focuses on the struggle for girls in Afghanistan to get an education; and *Extra Credit* by Andrew Clements (2011) where a young American girl becomes the pen pal of a young boy in Afghanistan who has to write under the name of his sister, as tradition would not allow a boy and a girl of different families to have any sort of contact. This book could also be paired with *Wonder* (R. J. Palacio, 2012), another debut novel, which also gives insights into craniofacial disabilities.

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