

Inclusive Reads: Children's Books Featuring Characters with a Disability
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Reading has many benefits. It promotes the development of language and listening skills, and empathy. Reading allows us to enter another life. When reading, we are granted the unique opportunity to see the world through different characters' eyes. This is a wonderful way to cultivate empathy for adults, but even more so for a child, whose views on the world are still being established. This is why it is essential that there is a wide array of children's books featuring diverse characters, especially those with different abilities.

In *The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin* by Julia Finley Mosca, the first book in this educational non-fiction picture book series, Temple Grandin, an animal scientist with autism, uses her ability of being a visual thinker to connect with animals, and design cruelty-free livestock facilities all over the world. Speaking of animals, *Hello, Goodbye Dog* by Maria Gianferrari is a picture book about Zara, a girl in a wheelchair, and her loyal, loving dog, Moose, who is willing to follow her anywhere she goes, including places he shouldn't, like school.

Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco is another excellent picture book based on the author's own experience. The story follows Trisha, a girl who wants so badly to read, but struggles to learn to do so. When a kind teacher, Mr Falker, though, realizes the reason Trisha struggles is because she has dyslexia, he works with her so she can accomplish what she's wanted for so long.

A Boy and a Jaguar by Alan Rabinowitz is a non-fiction picture book about the author's journey to becoming a wildlife conservationist. Alan has a stutter, and struggles to speak with people. Animals, however, are a different story. After seeing the great cat house at the Bronx Zoo, Alan is determined to fight for the animals. Can he do that, though, with a stutter?

El Deafo by Cece Bell is a graphic novel memoir about the author's experience of starting a new school, where she is the only deaf girl. All Cece wants is to make friends. Her phonic hearing aid, though, seems to repel potential ones. When Cece realizes that she can hear her teacher wherever she is in the building, this could be a game changer. Will this superpower help her make friends? *Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen* by Sarah Kapit is a middle grade novel about 11-year old, autistic, Vivy, who loves baseball. When a coach offers her a spot on a local team, Vivy is thrilled. However, this great opportunity comes with challenges in the form of bullying classmates.

Aven Green Sleuthing Machine by Dusti Bowling tells the story of third grader, Aven, who loves solving mysteries. Can she solve two of them, though: her teacher's missing lunch bag, and her

great grandma's missing dog? With no arms, Aven believes her arm cells went to her superpowered brain, so if anyone is sure to crack the cases, it's her! Older readers can also find Aven in *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus* and *Momentous Events in the Life of a Cactus*.

Lila and Hadley by Kody Keplinger is another great middle grade read. Hadley is angry. She's angry that her mom is going to jail, and that she has to leave behind her friends and school to live with an older sister she hasn't spoken to in 5 years. Most of all she's angry because she's going blind. Then she meets an abandoned dog, Lila, at the local animal shelter. She brings Lila home to foster. Struggling to learn to use a cane, and train Lila, Hadley needs to learn to let go of her anger if she's going to get Lila trained and adopted.

Please visit or call the Rizzo Children's Library at 201-891-4866, x3 for suggestions on finding great reads for children of all ages, and ask about joining one of our book clubs for children in grades 1-5.

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