



Books That Portray Characters With Disabilities

A Top 25 List for Children and Young Adults

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Our lives are full of lists. From David Letterman to college or professional sports rankings, lists of the top 10 or top 25 are readily available. In fact, the authors of this article conducted a quick Google search using the phrase *top 25* and found Web sites devoted to the top 25 highest-grossing films, innovations, executives, podcasts, lighthouses, cities for doing business in America, and many more. Even books of lists, for example, *The New Book of Lists* (Wallechinsky and Wallace, 2005), are available.

The authors of this article have collectively read and researched the portrayal of disabilities in juvenile literature for nearly 25 years. We have therefore generated our list of the top 25 children's and young adults' books that portray characters with disabilities. To select our list, we applied the Dyches and Prater (2000) guidelines on evaluating books that have high literary and artistic quality as well as multidimensional portrayals of characters with disabilities. These guidelines include analysis of the following:

- Literary quality (e.g., engaging theme or concept woven throughout the story, thoroughly developed plot, credible and multidimensional characters).

- Illustrative quality (e.g., illustrations interpret and extend the story; illustrations are of high quality, including design, layout, and style; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2007).
- Characterization of the characters with disabilities (Dyches & Prater, 2000). This guideline includes elements that are consistent with current knowledge and practices in the field: (a) accurate portrayal of the disability; (b) exemplary practices (e.g., characters are contributors in inclusive settings, with an emphasis on acceptance rather than on rejection and on similarities rather than on differences); (c) realistic sibling relationships, if depicted; (d) appropriate emotional reactions (e.g., respect rather than pity, acceptance rather than ridicule); and (e) accurate illustrations of the disability or assistive devices being used.

This article briefly describes each of the books on our top 25 list to help readers make informed decisions when selecting books that depict characters with disabilities. This list includes 14 chapter books and 11 picture books. The books span a wide range of publication dates—the oldest was first published in 1955, and the most recent appeared in 2006. They depict most of the 13 disabilities recognized by the Individuals

With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004).


To select our list, we applied guidelines on evaluating books that have high literary and artistic quality, as well as multidimensional portrayals of characters with disabilities.


Five of the books received the prestigious Newbery Medal or Honor award, and one is a Caldecott Honor Book. Five additional books earned either the Dolly Gray or Schneider Family Awards. These two awards specifically honor juvenile books that portray disabilities (see box, "Major Book Awards"). Although 14 of the selected books did not win noteworthy awards, they deserve attention for their literary and artistic qualities, as well as their appropriate and realistic portrayals of disabilities.


The following discussion presents the top 25 books in alphabetical order, not rank order. Table 1 indicates the type of disability portrayed, major awards earned, type of book, and grade levels for each of the 25 books. Table 2 presents 10 additional books that almost made the list. The box "Additional

Resources” categorizes articles that provide details about selecting appropriate books and Web sites with additional lists of juvenile books portraying characters with disabilities.

Our Top 25 Books

 *The ADDED Touch* tells the story of Matthew, a first grader who has difficulty staying focused, following directions, and controlling his body. His mother takes him to a doctor who diagnoses Matthew as having attention deficit disorder (ADD). Matthew learns that other children in his class also have ADD and that some students who do not have ADD also do not pay attention. At the end of the book, Matthew’s family and friends say that he is special, “with an ADDED touch.” The book tells the story in rhyme, and the illustrations are simple but delightful. Teachers and parents can use this book with any young child or group of children to teach about ADD.

 In *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, a Newbery Honor book, Moose Flanagan and his family, including his 15-year-old sister, Natalie, who has autistic-like characteristics, move to Alcatraz in 1935 so that his father can work as a prison guard and Natalie can attend a special school. However, the school does not allow Natalie to attend until Moose and the prison warden’s daughter seek help from an unlikely source—the most notorious criminal on the island, Al Capone. This story appeals to both boys and girls, because it weaves sports, infatuation, mystery, and intrigue throughout while depicting a realistic and loving sibling relationship.

 *The Alphabet War* tells the story of Adam, who, because of his difficulty with letter reversals and phonemic awareness, is experiencing his own alphabet war. Adam’s frustration increases, and he begins to bother other children or escape through daydreaming. In third grade, he finally receives the help that he needs; and in fourth grade, he develops the confidence to recog-

Major Book Awards

Caldecott Medal/Honor Book

The American Library Association annually awards the Caldecott Medal, named in honor of 19th-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children. Runner-up books receive the Caldecott Honor Book Award. The Caldecott Medal is the most prestigious award given for children’s picture books. For more information, see www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=bookmediaawards&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=164637 (ALA, 2007)

Dolly Gray Award

The Dolly Gray Award for Children’s Literature in Developmental Disabilities, which began in 2000, recognizes authors, illustrators, and publishers of high-quality fictional children’s books that appropriately portray individuals with developmental disabilities. Every even year, an author and an illustrator of a children’s picture book and the author and illustrator (if appropriate) of a juvenile/young adult chapter book published in the previous 2 years, receive the award. Selection criteria include high literary and illustrative quality, as well as multidimensional portrayals of individuals with developmental disabilities. The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Special Needs Project, a distributor of books related to disability issues, sponsor this award. For more information, see www.dddcec.org/secondarypages/dollygray/Dolly_Gray_Children%27s_Literature_Award.html (Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Developmental Disabilities, n.d.)


Newbery Medal/Honor Book

The Newbery Medal, named for 18th-century British bookseller John Newbery, is the most prestigious award in children’s literature. The American Library Association awards the Newbery Medal annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. Books may also receive recognition as Newbery Honor books. Those books are runners-up to the medal-winning book. For more information see www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=bookmediaawards&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=149311 (ALA, 2007).

Schneider Family Book Awards

The Schneider Family Award honors an author or illustrator who “embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience” for children and adolescents. The categories for this annual award are as follows: grade school (ages 0–10), middle school (ages 11–13), and teens (ages 13–18). The award-winning books must portray some aspect of living with a disability or having family or friends with a disability. The disability may be physical, mental, or emotional. For more information, see <http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=awards&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=163339> (ALA, 2007).

nize that he is not stupid, just different. The illustrations are the most intriguing and imaginative aspect of this book. For example, they show Adam in a cowboy outfit lassoing the letter A, Adam under a microscope (when he is being assessed), and Adam sitting on the planet Neptune and daydreaming.

 Each chapter in *The Bus People* profiles one of the passengers that

Bertram, the special-bus driver, transports to and from school each day. Each individual tells his or her own story. The types of disabilities portrayed include muscular dystrophy; traumatic brain injury; Down syndrome; communication disorders; and intellectual, orthopedic, and emotional disabilities. The uniqueness of this book is the portrayal of these individuals from their

Table 1. Top 25 Books by Disability, Awards, Type of Book, and Grade Level

Title, Author (Illustrator or photographer, if any), Publisher, and Year	Disability	Awards	Type of Book	Grade Level
<i>The ADDED Touch</i> , Robyn Watson (Susanne Nuccio), Silver Star, 2000	ADHD		Picture	K +
<i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i> , Jennifer Choldenko, Putnam, 2004	Autism	Newbery Honor	Chapter	5 +
<i>The Alphabet War</i> , Diane Burton Robb (Gail Piazza), Whitman, 2004	Learning disabilities		Picture	K +
<i>The Bus People</i> , Rachel Anderson, Holt, 1989	Various disabilities		Chapter	5 +
<i>Crow Boy</i> , Taro Yashima, Viking, 1955	Autism	Caldecott Honor	Picture	K +
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> , Mark Haddon, Random House, 2003	Autism	Dolly Gray	Chapter	9 +
<i>Dad and Me in the Morning</i> , Patricia Lakin (Robert G. Steele), Whitman, 1994	Deafness	Schneider Family	Picture	K +
<i>Flying Solo</i> , Ralph Fletcher, Clarion, 1998	Communication disorders		Picture	K +
<i>Freak the Mighty</i> , Rodman Philbrick, Scholastic, 1993	Learning disabilities; orthopedic and other health impairments		Chapter	6 +
<i>The Handmade Alphabet</i> , Laura Rankin (Laura Rankin), Dial, 1991	Deafness		Picture	K +
Hank Zipzer Series, Henry Winkler, Penguin Group, 2006	Learning disabilities		Chapter	4 +
<i>Hooway for Wodney Wat</i> , Helen Lester (Lynn Munsinger), Houghton Mifflin, 1999	Communication disorders		Picture	K +
<i>Kissing Doorknobs</i> , Terry Spencer Hesser, Delacorte, 1998	Emotional/behavioral disorders		Chapter	7 +
<i>Knots on a Counting Rope</i> , Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault (Ted Rand), Holt, 1987	Visual impairment		Picture	K +
<i>Life Magic</i> , Melrose Cooper, Holt, 1996	Other health impairment; learning disabilities		Chapter	4 +
Lois Lowry Trilogy, <i>The Giver</i> (2000), <i>Gathering Blue</i> (2002), and <i>Messenger</i> , Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2005	Various disabilities	Newbery Medal for <i>The Giver</i>	Chapter	6 +
<i>My Brother Sammy</i> , Becky Edwards and David Armitage, Millbrook, 1999	Autism	Dolly Gray	Picture	K +
<i>Rules</i> , Cynthia Lord, Scholastic, 2006	Autism; orthopedic impairment; communication disorders	Newbery Honor	Chapter	4 +
<i>See the Ocean</i> , Estelle Condra (Linda Crockett-Blassingame), Ideals Children's Books, 1994	Visual impairment		Picture	K +
<i>So B. It</i> , Sarah Weeks, HarperCollins, 2004	Intellectual disabilities	Dolly Gray	Chapter	6 +
<i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i> , Patricia Polacco (Patricia Polacco), Philomel, 1998	Learning disabilities		Picture	K +
<i>Tru Confessions</i> , Janet Tashjian, Holt, 1997	Intellectual disabilities	Dolly Gray	Chapter	4 +
<i>The View from Saturday</i> , E. L. Konigsburg, Aladdin, 1996	Orthopedic impairment	Newbery Medal	Chapter	4 +
<i>The Westing Game</i> , Ellen Raskin, Penguin, 1978	Orthopedic impairment	Newbery Medal	Chapter	4 +
<i>Yours Turly, Shirley</i> , Ann M. Martin, Holiday House, 1988	Learning disabilities		Chapter	4 +

Table 2. 10 More Books That Almost Made the Top 25

Title, Author (Illustrator or photographer, if any), Publisher, and Year	Disability	Awards	Type of Book	Grade Level
<i>The Hard Life of Seymour E. Newton</i> , Ann Bixby Herold, Herold, 1993	Learning disabilities		Chapter	2 +
<i>I Am an Artichoke</i> , Lucy Frank, Laurel Leaf, 1993	Emotional/behavioral disorders		Chapter	7 +
<i>Ian's Walk</i> , Laurie Lears (Karen Ritz), Whitman, 1998	Autism	Dolly Gray	Picture	K +
<i>My Louisiana Sky</i> , Kimberly Willis Holt, Random House, 1998	Intellectual disabilities		Chapter	6 +
<i>Risk 'n Roses</i> , Jan Slepian, Philomel, 1990	Intellectual disabilities		Chapter	5 +
<i>A Single Shard</i> , Linda Sue Park, Random House, 2001	Orthopedic impairments	Newbery	Chapter	5 +
<i>Susan Laughs</i> , Jeanne Willis (Tony Ross), Red Fox, 2000	Orthopedic impairments		Picture	K +
<i>We'll Paint the Octopus Red</i> , Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen (Pam DeVito), Woodbine, 1998	Developmental disabilities		Picture	K +
<i>Welcome Home</i> , Jellybean, Marlene Fanta Shyer, Scribner's Sons, 1978	Intellectual disabilities		Chapter	5 +
<i>Wish on a Unicorn</i> , Karen Hesse, Holt, 1991	Intellectual disabilities		Chapter	4 +

perspectives. From Micky, whose mother suffocates him with her love, to Fleur, whose loving family accepts her as she is, the book depicts many issues that affect families that include children with disabilities.

📖 Chibi, the main character in *Crow Boy*, is a young boy who has many characteristics of autism. He is different from the other children and often is alone while his classmates study and play. However, after 5 years of school, a friendly new teacher discovers that Chibi can imitate the sounds of crows, and he lets Chibi participate in the talent show. His classmates realize that they had misjudged Chibi. This Caldecott Honor book beautifully demonstrates how children can become more accepting of those who differ from themselves. The book, first published in 1955, has withstood the test of time.

📖 *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* tells the story of 15-year-old Christopher, who finds his neighbor's dog dead on the front lawn. The police arrest him for killing the dog but soon release him. He then goes to great lengths to solve the mystery of who killed the

dog. Christopher takes everything at face value and is unable to understand the behavior of others. This book portrays the thought processes of those on the autism spectrum in amazingly accurate ways. For example, because Christopher is mathematically gifted, the author uses only prime numbers to number the chapters. This book has received great literary acclaim and has won the Dolly Gray Award. (Caution: This book contains strong language.)

📖 In *Dad and Me in the Morning*, Jacob awakens to his flashing alarm clock. He puts on his hearing aids, tiptoes down the hall, and wakes his father. They walk together to the beach to wait for the sunrise. Jacob and his father talk to each other in various ways, including signing, lip reading, or "just squeezing each other's hands." This book is a tender portrayal of a boy and his father enjoying the changing colors in the clouds and sky and each other. The illustrations are vivid and striking. This book won the Schneider Family Award.

📖 *Flying Solo* tells the story of Rachel White, who becomes mute after learning of the sudden death of a

slow classmate who had an unrequited, annoying crush on her. Six months later, Rachel and her sixth-grade classmates find themselves without a teacher, and they decide to run the class. By the end of the day, the students have learned much about themselves and one another. The story resolves several issues, and Rachel regains confidence in her voice. The story is engaging for tweens who long for independence, who have concerns about being different or not in the right group, and who dream that their class lacks a teacher for a full day.

📖 *Freak the Mighty* is a story about two eighth-grade boys. Max, a large and awkward boy whose father is in prison for killing his mother and who has learning disabilities, and Kevin, his small brilliant friend who has orthopedic and health impairments, team up to become Freak the Mighty. The other students taunt and bully Max and Kevin, but Max's physical abilities and Kevin's intellectual abilities allow them to combine their strengths to fight real and imaginary bullies. When Kevin's illness takes his life, Max realizes that he can have a positive attitude about himself. The movie *The*

Additional Resources

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Prater, M. A., Johnstun, M., & Munk, J. (2005). From Spaceman to The ADDED Touch: Using juvenile literature to teach about attention deficit disorder. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 1(4) Article 4. Available online at <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol1/iss4/art4/>

Developmental Disabilities (Including Autism, Developmental Delay, Intellectual Disabilities, and Multiple Disabilities)

Dyches, T. T., & Prater, M. A. (2005). Characterization of developmental disabilities in children's fiction. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 40, 202–216.

Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Cramer, S. (2001). Mental retardation and autism in children's books. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 36, 230–243.

Prater, M. A. (1999). Characterization of mental retardation in children and young adult literature. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 34, 418–431.

Deafness/Hard of Hearing

Turner, N. D., & Traxler, M. (1997). Children's literature for the primary inclusive classroom: Increasing understanding of children with hearing impairments. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 142, 350–355.

Learning Disabilities

Prater, M. A. (2003). Learning disabilities in children's and adolescent literature: How are characters portrayed? *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 26, 47–62.

Various Disabilities

American Library Association, at <http://www.ala.org/ala/awardsbucket/schneideraward/bibliography.htm>

Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Jenson, J. (2006). Caldecott books and their portrayal of disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 2(5) Article 2. Available online at <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol2/iss5/art2/>

Hulen, L., Hoffbauer, D., & Prenn, M. (1998). Children's literature dealing with disabilities: A bibliography for the inclusive classroom. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 24(1), 67–77.


National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/bibliog/bib5txt.htm>

Penguin Group (USA). (2006). Q&A with Henry and Lin. In *Hank Zipzer: The World's Greatest Underachiever*. Retrieved January 8, 2008, from <http://www.hankzipzer.com/qa.html>

Prater, M. A. (2000). Using juvenile literature that portrays characters with disabilities in your classroom. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 35, 167–176.


Prater, M. A., & Dyches, T. T. (2008). *Teaching about disabilities through children's literature*. Westport, CN: Libraries Unlimited.


Mighty, based on this book, appeared in 1998.


 *The Handmade Alphabet* is a beautifully illustrated alphabet book that shows each letter as represented in American Sign Language interacting with an object that begins with that letter. Some of our favorite illustra-

tions include the letter I formed with the little finger extended almost touching a melting icicle, a ribbon wrapped around a hand forming the letter R, and an X-ray of a hand forming the letter X. We have included this book on our list even though it does not portray a

specific character with a disability. Teachers and parents can use this book to teach students to finger spell and to discuss how individuals who cannot hear communicate with others.

 Henry Winkler has co-written a book series entitled *Hank Zipzer: The World's Greatest Underachiever*. These books, which are partly autobiographical, describe the adventures of Hank Zipzer, who has a learning disability. We decided to include the whole series on this list rather than select favorites because we feel the same way the author feels: "Which of your books do you like the best? I cannot pick one book that I like the best. Each one of them is like my own child. Each one of them has some great detail that makes me laugh every time I think about it." (Penguin Group, 2006). Children delight in this series, which is written in a humorous tone.

 The title character of *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, cannot pronounce the letter R, so he cannot say many words properly, including his own name. When a very large rodent, Camilla, joins his class, she is bigger, meaner, and smarter than everyone else—until Rodney becomes the leader of the students' favorite game, Simon Says. When Rodney commands his classmates to do various tasks, all but Camilla know that Rodney's *weed* means *read*, *wake* means *rake*, and *west* means *rest*. Camilla makes a fool of herself, much to the delight of the other rodents. Although we generally do not recommend books that portray disabilities in animals because children may not relate to animals as well as they do to children, this tale is particularly delightful.

 In *Kissing Doorknobs*, Tara describes how her increasingly strange compulsions started to take over her life when she was 11 years old. Her compulsions began when she heard others playing the sidewalk game, "Step on a crack, break your moth-

er's back." Not only does she avoid stepping on the cracks, she begins to count the cracks between her house and school; and if something interrupts her or if she loses her count, she returns and starts over. Counting sidewalk cracks is the beginning of several compulsions that take over her life and interfere with her relationships with family and friends. The author well describes what obsessive-compulsive disorder feels like, as well as its effects on others.

📖 *Knots on a Counting Rope* presents the story of a Native American grandfather and his blind grandson. They reminisce about the boy's turbulent birth and how he received his name, Boy-Strength-of-Blue-Horses. They also recall how he learned to ride a horse and participated in a memorable horse race. The grandfather teaches the young boy that he will always have to live in the dark but that there are many ways to see. This exquisitely illustrated book emphasizes how individuals with disabilities can find strengths that more than compensate for their difficulties. The fact that the story takes place in a Native American culture adds to its appeal.

📖 In *Life Magic*, Crystal struggles as a middle child with two gifted sisters. She becomes very close to her Uncle Joe, who moved in with her family when his health began to deteriorate because of AIDS. Uncle Joe shares with Crystal that he also had difficulties learning in school. When they make snow angels together, Crystal wants one without the footprints in the snow, and Uncle Joe tells her that only a real angel can do that. In the end, Uncle Joe dies, and Crystal discovers a snow angel without footprints. Crystal's learning disabilities portrayed at the beginning of the book become secondary to Uncle Joe's health and subsequent death.

📖 Lois Lowry's trilogy—consisting of *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger*—exposes readers to futuristic communities that mandate

conformity and uniformity, that shun technology and preservation of history, that turn away immigrants, and that often "release" individuals with disabilities from society. However, the main characters with disabilities have a powerful influence for good. These characters include Kira, who has an orthopedic impairment, and the Seer, who is blind. Although the setting of these books is not the present, this trilogy provides an engaging foundation for discussing the definition, creation, and destruction of utopian societies, as well as the role of individuals with disabilities in such societies. *The Giver* received the Newbery Medal.

Select books appropriate for specific situations and individual students.

📖 In *My Brother Sammy*, Sammy's brother tells the reader that Sammy is special because he goes to a different school on a different bus and learns in different ways. He also likes to play in different ways, like watching the sand fall between his fingers rather than building a sand castle. Sammy's brother expresses feelings typical of a sibling of a child with autism—sadness, embarrassment, loneliness, and frustration. At the end of the book, Sammy learns that he is Sammy's special brother, which helps him see life from a new perspective. The brightly colored watercolor illustrations are beautiful. This book won the Dolly Gray Award.

📖 The Newbery Honor book *Rules* tells the story of 12-year-old Catherine, who reacts as a typical sibling of a brother with autism—vacillating between loving and helping David and then being embarrassed by and resentful of him. Catherine generates rules to help David and to apply to her own life. When taking David to the clinic, she meets and befriends Jason, a non-

verbal boy who uses a wheelchair. Catherine uses her artistic talents to add many pictures to Jason's communication book and begins to develop a strong friendship with him. However, she does not want her peers to know about their friendship. In the end, Jason helps Catherine see that her rules may really be excuses, and she begins to look at life differently.

📖 In *See the Ocean*, Nellie is a young girl who is blind; however, her blindness is not evident until the end of the story. The fog is thick when Nellie and her family approach the ocean on their annual visit to the beach; and for the first time, Nellie can "see" the ocean with her other senses before her brothers see it with their eyes. Nellie's blindness does not prevent her from feeding crumbs to the seagulls, throwing pebbles into ponds, and enjoying the feeling of seashells and driftwood. The beautiful oil paintings that illustrate this book hide Nellie's eyes under her hat.

📖 In *So B. It*, which has received the Dolly Gray Award, the character with a disability is 12-year-old Heidi's mother, who has intellectual disabilities and a very limited vocabulary. Heidi and her mother live alone in an apartment but rely heavily on their next-door neighbor, Bernadette, who has agoraphobia. In an attempt to discover her personal and family history, Heidi ventures from their home in Reno,



Nevada, to Liberty, New York, discovering who she is and better understanding her mother as well. This book is noteworthy, particularly because it portrays how those with significant intellectual disabilities have the capacity and desire to love and be loved.

📖 Trisha, in the autobiographical book, *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, cannot wait to start school so that she can learn to read. By first grade, however, she becomes frustrated with how easy reading seems for everyone but herself. Trisha begins to feel different and stupid. After her family relocates across the country, Trisha finds that her new school is the same as the previous one, and the other students tease her incessantly. Finally, Mr. Falker, her fifth-grade teacher, recognizes that Trisha cannot read. He and the reading teacher tutor her after school until she learns to read. After 30 years have passed, Trisha sees Mr. Falker again and thanks him for changing her life.

📖 *Tru Confessions*, tells the story of 12-year-old Tru, who has two primary ambitions in life: to produce her own television show and to cure her twin brother of his intellectual disability. Tru seems tormented that her brother has a disability although she does not. Eventually, Tru realizes that she does not need to cure her brother and that she can move on with her own life. This book is unique in that it intersperses Tru's electronic diary within the text, which makes the book particularly enjoyable to read. This book has won the Dolly Gray Award and was made into a Disney Channel movie.

📖 Mrs. Olinski, who uses a wheelchair in *The View from Saturday*, returns to teaching 10 years after a car accident has paralyzed her. She selects a group of four brilliant, but shy and unlikely, teammates to be her sixth-grade academic bowl team. She does not know why she has selected these four classmates, nor does she understand their repeated success at beating older, more experi-

enced competitors until she, like the reader, learns the story of each member and what draws them together. This book is a good example of including a character with a disability without emphasizing the character's limitations or disabilities. Mrs. Olinski's disability is not a focal point of the story, although it does affect the story line in minor ways. This book won the Newbery Medal Award.

📖 In another Newbery Medal book, *The Westing Game*, the tenants of a new condominium building learn that they are heirs to the estate of Sam Westing. His will states that his murderer is among the heirs. In teams of two, they must use clues to identify the murderer, with the winning team inheriting the Westing fortune. One of the potential heirs is Chris, an adolescent boy who uses a wheelchair. Although the author does not present detailed information about Chris and his condition, it is refreshing to read a very clever and well-written book that integrates a character in a wheelchair without focusing on his disability.

📖 The title character of *Yours Turly, Shirley* compensates for her learning disabilities by being the class clown. When her parents adopt Jackie, a young Vietnamese girl, Shirley helps her learn English and a new culture, including learning about Barbie and Santa Claus. Helping Jackie makes Shirley feel important. Jackie turns into an excellent student who is a wonderful reader, speller, and memorizer and whose schoolwork is far better than Shirley's schoolwork. Now school is not the only thing that Shirley dislikes. The characters in this book are enchanting and lovable. The book is a fast read with a cute and entertaining story that shows how some people use humor to cover up their weaknesses.

Final Thoughts

Parents, teachers, librarians, psychologists, social workers, and others can use books from this top 25 list to share with children the joy of reading exemplary

books that include multidimensional characters with disabilities. Given that literary merit alone will not ensure that you have chosen "the right book for the right reader for the right situation" (Kurkjian & Livingston, 2005, p. 790), the books on this list should help you select books appropriate for specific situations and individual students.

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