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Teacher's guide to using literature to promote inclusion of people with disabilities

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People with Disabilities

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Introduction

Literature portraying characters with disabilities provides teachers with rich opportunities to teach their students about human diversity and tolerance (Adomat, 2014). Literature has been suggested as a means for teaching about mild, learning disabilities (Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006), as well more severe, developmental disabilities (Dyches & Prater, 2000). Because of its wide-ranging applications to teach about disability, educators should carefully evaluate and select literature that they can used to design lessons that teach about disability in ways that increase awareness, understanding, and competency. The *Teacher's Guide to Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Disabilities* has been designed to assist teachers who wish to use literature to promote inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Historically, people with disabilities have been inaccurately and negatively portrayed in literary works such as short stories, books, TV programs, and movies. For example, in an analysis of Caldecott Medal and Honor books, Dyches, Prater, and Jenson (2006) found that individuals with disabilities were underrepresented in children's picture books, and even when included in these books, individuals with disabilities tended to be portrayed in ways that were negative and inaccurate. Dyches et al. (2006) suggested that teachers expose and correct stereotypes in books portraying characters with disabilities to promote normalization and inclusion of this diverse population in society. This guide can help teachers identify works that portray characters with disabilities in inaccurate and negative ways and design lessons to expose and correct those stereotypes.

Fortunately, recent works of literature have begun to provide more accurate information about, and more positive images of, people with disabilities (McGrail & Rieger, 2013; Prater, 2003). No matter how accurate the information presented or how positive the characterization, all works that include characters with disabilities have potential to teach not only disability facts, but also critical thinking, deep reflection, respect, and tolerance for all forms of human diversity (Rieger & McGrail, 2015). Price, Ostrosky, and Mouzourou (2016) have suggested that professionals carefully review books using evaluative criteria to examine how literature portrays characters with disabilities. Price et al. (2016) used criteria developed by Nasatir & Horn, 2003 to critically examine 102 children's library books. Criteria examined included age appropriateness for intended audience, use of stereotypes, type of role played by character with disabilities, and others. This guide employs criteria from a number of sources to evaluate literary works. No matter how characters are portrayed, this guide will help teachers design lessons that increase awareness, understanding, and inclusion of children and adults with disability.

Organization of the Teacher's Guide

Previous Research

The *Teacher's Guide to Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Disabilities* is based on an earlier work examining the impact of adolescent literature on perceptions of developmental disability (Menchetti, Plattos, & Carroll, 2011). This version of the teacher's guide has been expanded to address all types and levels of disability. The rubric has been revised to yield two types of quantitative evaluation scores assessing how a literary work portrays characters with disability. Finally, a curriculum guide has been added to provide teachers with lesson ideas based upon the scores obtained by rating the work of literature using the evaluation rubric.

Overview

The *Teacher's Guide to Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Disabilities* consists of two parts. Part 1 consists of a rubric for evaluating how short stories, books, poems, TV programs, movies, digital media, and other forms of literature portray characters with disabilities. The rubric yields two types of scores.

First, literary feature scores allow rater(s) to critically analyze each of the eight literary features separately. Second the final rubric score assesses the overall portrayal of disability in the work being rated. After completing the rubric to critically analyze how characters with disabilities are depicted in a work of literature, a teacher can consult the accompanying curriculum guide to find instructional planning resources to teach their students lessons about human diversity and tolerance.

Part 2 of the *Teacher's Guide to Using Literature to Promote Inclusion of People with Disabilities* is a curriculum guide with learning objectives, lesson activities, strategies for outcome evaluation. The curriculum guide is a resource for teachers who wish to design lessons using literature to teach about disabilities.

Part 1 - Evaluation Rubric

Development of Criteria. The evaluation rubric was designed to determine the appropriateness and accuracy of works that include characters with disabilities. Rubric criteria were chosen by integrating two areas of research. First, selection criteria suggested by the American Library Association (2017a; 2017b) for children's, adolescent, and adult literature informed selection of rubric items. Next, research investigating ways to promote social inclusion of individuals with disabilities through literature was used to further refine criteria so that each criterion addresses the accuracy and appropriateness of disability characterizations and portrayals (Andrews, 1998; Dyches & Prater, 2000; Dyches, Prater, & Jenson, 2006; Landrum, 1999; Nasatir & Horn, 2003; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006; Price, Ostrosky, & Mouzourou, 2016). Based on the research, evaluative criteria were grouped into eight (8) areas or "literary features".

Literary features assessed by the evaluation rubric are:

1. Physical Appearance;
2. Characterization;
3. Style;
4. Plot;
5. Setting;
6. Theme;
7. Point of View; and,
8. Reader Response.

Scoring. Rubric scores can be used to help educators determine how a work of literature portrays characters with disabilities. The rubric can be completed by an individual teacher or media specialist. The rubric can also be scored collaboratively by raters with knowledge of disabilities and a background in general education, special education, or English education. If used collaboratively, the two raters should use the rubric together discussing their reasons for giving the score to each criterion item on the rubric.

The rubric yields two types of scores. These scores allow rater(s) to critically analyze each of the eight literary features separately or assess the overall portrayal of disability in the work being rated.

Literary Feature Scores. Literary feature scores are obtained by summing the columns marked, "yes"; "no"; "unsure"; and, "n/a" for each of the eight literary areas evaluated. These literary feature scores allow the rater(s) to critically examine how the work of literature meets research-based standards for that specific feature. The higher the number of "yes" responses for each feature, the more accurately and positively the work addresses that feature. For example, a high number of "yes" responses for Physical Appearance indicates that the format and illustrations in the work being rated depict characters with disabilities more accurately and positively. Similarly, a "yes" for Reader Response means that the work allows readers to create their own meaning about disability and stimulates positive thinking and appropriate discussions. Literary feature scores allow the rater to make more detailed analysis of the work being rated by focusing on each of the eight areas on the rubric separately.

Final Rubric Score. A second type of score--the final rubric score—reflects the overall evaluation of the literary work. It represents the overall impression regarding disability that readers are likely to take away from the work. The question being assessed by the final rubric score is: Does the work being rated present an accurate and positive overall view of disability or does the work present inaccurate and negative impressions of disability?

 The final rubric score is obtained by summing the columns marked, "yes"; "no"; and, "unsure" for all of the eight literary features. The final rubric score is simply the number of criterion items marked "yes" by the rater(s) over the entire rubric. The higher the final rubric score, the more accurately and positively the work portrays characters with disability. It is important for raters to understand, however, the even works with a low final rubric score can be used to teach about disability. Part 2 of this guide will help teachers plan appropriate instruction no matter what the work's final rubric score.

Part 2 - Curriculum Guide

The curriculum guide was designed to assist teachers in planning instruction that utilizes literature to teach in ways that accurately reflect and honor the lives of all people with disabilities. The curriculum guide consists of sample learning objectives, lesson ideas, and evaluation strategies. These resources are organized based on the final rubric scores obtained by analyzing the work with the rubric. Based on the final rubric score, teachers can provide instruction that specifically addresses the manner in which the literature portrays individuals with disabilities. It is important to note, however, that no matter what final rubric score the literary work obtained, the goal of all lessons is to teach understanding of people with disabilities in ways that promote their inclusion and value in school and all aspects of community life.

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Part 1 - Evaluation Rubric

Title of Work Evaluated:
Author:
Target Age of Audience:
Disability Depicted:

Literary Feature 1: *Physical Appearance* (American Library Association, 2017; Nasatir & Horn, 2003; Price, Ostrosky, & Mouzourou, 2016)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
1.1 Format is appealing given intended target age of reader.					
1.2 Illustrations and images are realistic and/or appropriate for intended audience.					
1.3 Illustrations and images show the distinctive personality of the character with a disability (they do not appear stereotypically alike, as if all people with disabilities look the same).					
1.4 Illustrations and images show the character with a disability actively involved in the environment; a "doer".					
Feature Scores-Physical Appearance (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 1.)					

Literary Feature 2: *Characterization* (Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1999; Nasatir & Horn, 2003; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006; Price, Ostrosky, & Mouzourou, 2016)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
2.1 Focuses on common traits of all people while showing human qualities of people with disabilities.					
2.2 The character with the disability possesses dynamic qualities and is not only defined by his/her disability.					
2.3 Character accepts his/her own disability and focuses on his/her abilities.					
2.4 Characters with and without disabilities use correct terminology when referring to the disability itself.					
2.5 Meaningful interactions exist among characters with and without disabilities.					
2.6 The character is not presented as a stereotyped case (e.g., violent, laughable, asexual, a burden, pitiable, etc.).					
2.7 A positive portrayal of strengths exists for the character with a disability.					
2.8 Character with a disability is portrayed as confident and able to make own decisions.					
2.9 Character with a disability is accepted by peers.					
2.10 A balance of roles exists between the character with a disabilities and characters without a disability.					
Feature Scores-Characterization (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 2.)					

Literary Feature 3: *Style* (American Library Association, 2009; Andrews, 1998; Prater, et al., 2006)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
3.1 People first language is used appropriately (e.g., "a boy with intellectual disabilities" instead of "the mentally retarded boy")					
3.2 Terms used to describe characters and settings are appropriate.					
3.3 Language is age appropriate for audience/clear style/appropriate vocabulary.					
3.4 The narrative and dialogue portraying the characters with a disability is appropriate for age of readers.					
3.5 Descriptions provide colorful imagery without being lengthy.					
3.6 Dialogue among all characters is genuine.					
3.7 Catches interest within first 10 pages.					
Feature Scores-Style (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 3.)					

Literary Feature 4: *Plot* (American Library Association, 2017; Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1999; Nasatir & Horn, 2003; Prater, et al., 2006; Price, Ostrosky, & Mouzourou, 2016)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
4.1 The character with the disability plays a major role in the plot.					
4.2 The character's disability is naturally revealed throughout the plot.					
4.3 The plot highlights the abilities (not just disabilities) of the character with a disability.					
4.4 Plot is realistic/believable (e.g., character with a disability is not portrayed as a superhero, the character is not cured, parents are not saints, etc).					
4.5 The plot shows the character with a disability having similar life experiences as peers without disabilities (e.g., similar conflicts, similar goals, similar likes, etc).					
4.6 Accurate information regarding the disability is provided throughout the plot.					
4.7 All characters are well developed.					
4.8 Interesting plot throughout story.					
4.9 Dialogue and action is used to develop the plot.					
4.10 Uses humor appropriately.					
Feature Scores-Plot (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 4.)					

Literary Feature 5: *Setting* (Prater, et al., 2006)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
5.1 The setting allows the character with the disability to be included in society (school, work, recreation).					
5.2 Portrays up-to-date practices regarding disabilities.					
5.3 Accurate historical/current perspective of people with disabilities living within society.					
Feature Scores-Setting (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 5.)					

Literary Feature 6: *Theme* (American Library Association, 2009; Andrews, 1998; Prater, et al., 2006)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
6.1 The theme teaches a valuable lesson about interacting with people with disabilities.					
6.2 The theme rectifies a stereotype/myth about people with disabilities.					
6.3 The theme is familiar and appealing to intended audience (making friends, parental conflicts, sibling conflicts, dating, school issues, etc.).					
Feature Scores-Theme (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 6.)					

Literary Feature 7: *Point of View* (Prater, et al., 2006)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
7.1 Written from the perspective of the character with a disability.					
Features Scores-Point of View (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 7.)					

Literary Feature 8: *Reader Response* (Rosenblatt, 1995)					
Criteria	Yes	No	Unsure	N/A	Rater's Notes (briefly summarize important passages or scenes that illustrate the criterion being rated)
8.1 This work allows readers to create their own meaning about disabilities; stimulates thinking and appropriate discussions.					
Feature Scores-Reader Response (Sum the number of responses in each column for literary feature 8.)					

Literary Feature	Total Yes	Total No	Total Unsure
1. Physical Appearance			
2. Characterization			
3. Style			
4. Plot			
5. Setting			
6. Theme			
7. Point of View			
8. Reader Response			
Sum of Feature Scores			

Final Rubric Score
Sum of Total Yes Column
Across all 8 Features   = _____

Interpretation of Final Rubric Score

If the **Final Rubric Score** (i.e., total number of yes column responses) ranges from:

39-30, the work includes **predominately accurate information and positive images** of people with disabilities;

29-20, the work includes **accurate and inaccurate information and both positive and negative images** of people with disabilities; and,

19 and below, includes **predominately inaccurate information and negative images** of people with disabilities.

Note: If you are unsure of 1/3 or more of the rubric criteria (i.e., **13 or more "unsure" responses across all 8 literary features**) we suggest you consult a second rater to assist in a re-evaluation of the work. The second rater should have knowledge of disabilities and a background in special education, English education, or be a media specialist and the two raters should use the rubric together to score the work, discussing their reasons for giving the score to each criterion item on the rubric. This way the co-raters can benefit for one another's knowledge and expertise about literature and disability.

Resources for Locating Literature

For literature promoting understanding and inclusion see:
https://www.disability.illinois.edu/disability-allyship-resources

For more information about inclusion literature, please go to:
http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring98/andrews.html

Use this curriculum guide to generate ideas for using a work to teach in ways that promote inclusion of people with disabilities. Go to the section of the curriculum guide that corresponds to the number of "yes" responses you recorded on the rubric (i.e., the final rubric score). There you will find sample learning objectives, lesson ideas, and evaluation strategies designed specifically to address the way the work you rated depicted characters with disabilities.

Works with Final Rubric Score 39-30

Number of "Yes" Responses on Entire Rubric = 39-30: Predominately Accurate and Positive Depictions		
If you are interested in using literature, such as *Radio* (the movie) that depicts a character with intellectual disability accurately and positively here are some ideas you might try:		
Learning Objectives	**Lesson Topic/Activity Ideas**	**Product & Evaluation Strategy**
1. The learner will demonstrate knowledge of accurate facts about individuals with disabilities (i.e., intellectual disabilities).	a. Students do a research report on the specific disability described in the work. Students identify the accurate facts about that disability and contrast these with inaccurate "myths" about disability. b. Students make a list of qualities they would want in a friend. Then the students read the work and make a list of the good qualities of the character with the disability. The students compare that to the original list to see how well they match up and discuss it in class. c. Students make a list of good qualities they would want to find in a friend (see above). Then the students get to know students within their school who have a disability. After they get to know each other they list all of their common interests and shared activities.	a. Students produce written reports. The products are evaluated using a grading rubric. b. Students discuss the list they created. The discussions are evaluated using a grading rubric. c. Students produce reflection papers including the list they created. The papers are evaluated using a grading rubric.
2. The learner will discuss the social importance of positive, accurate media portrayals of individuals with disabilities (i.e., intellectual disabilities).	a. Students identify and research famous people with disabilities and discuss how they have impacted society in positive ways. b. Students volunteer at a local group home for adults with developmental disabilities. They make a scrapbook that highlights all the skills, activities, hobbies, etc. that their new friends *can* do. Discuss how they are the same as people without disabilities. c. Students complete a survey about their ideas of people with disabilities before reading the work. After reading the work they take the survey again and then compare it to their original survey to see if their ideas changed.	a. Students do oral presentations. The presentations are evaluated using a grading rubric. b. Students produce scrapbooks. The products are evaluated using a grading rubric. c. Students discuss how survey scores changed. The discussions are evaluated using a grading rubric.

Works with Final Rubric Score 29-20

Number of "Yes" Responses on Entire Rubric = 29-20: Both Accurate and Inaccurate; Positive and Negative Depictions If you are interested in students utilizing a classic text such as *Of Mice and Men* that includes both accurate and inaccurate information and positive and negative characterizations, here are some general objectives and ideas you might implement.		

Learning Objectives:	Lesson Topic/Activity Ideas	Product & Evaluation Strategy
1. The learner will discuss the impact of negative portrayals of individuals with development disabilities on individuals and on society.	a. Students participate in activities or programs that provides opportunities to increase awareness, understanding and competence of disability (i.e., a disability ally). See: https://www.disability.illinois.edu/disability-allyship b. Students discuss how limitations in functioning can be accommodated by changes in the environment. c. Students rate the physical accessibility of their school. Ratings are shared with school administrators.	a. Students produce reflection papers. The products are evaluated using a grading rubric. b. Participation in discussion is monitored and scored by teacher. c. Students produce school "grades" based on access for students with disability.
2. The learner will discuss how acceptance and support can help people with developmental disabilities improve their functioning.	a. Students identify the everyday tasks that may be difficult for individuals with developmental disabilities due to environmental barriers. Students brainstorm how to improve the environment to make living with the disability more manageable. b. Discuss common challenges everyone has faced in their lives (learning disabilities, hearing problems, eating problems, asthma, sleeping problems, glasses, height, etc.) and how those problems are managed. Then the students identify the challenges of a character (from the work) and discuss how he/she was or was not supported.	a. With a partner, students create a presentation for the class. The presentations are evaluated using a grading rubric. b. Students write a journal about their personal challenges. The journals are evaluated using a grading rubric.

Works with Final Rubric Score Below 19

Number of "Yes" Responses on Entire Rubric below 19: Predominately Inaccurate and Negative Depictions		
Opportunities for teaching still abound even when texts contain inaccurate and negative depictions of individuals with disabilities. Inaccurate, dismissive, stereotypical, or other inappropriate depictions can be useful in helping students understand real issues associated with living with a disability. Through classroom discussion, writing, and dramatic activities that highlight inaccurate portrayals student can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for human diversity. Here are some ideas that might be useful when using these kinds of texts.		
Learning Objectives:	**Lesson Topic/Activity Ideas**	**Product & Evaluation Strategy**
1. The learner will discuss how inaccurate media portrayals influence treatment of people with developmental disabilities.	a. Students identify stereotypes they have heard about people with developmental disabilities prior to reading the work. After reading the work the students identify examples within the work of those previously identified stereotypes. b. Students discuss how negative stereotypes influence societal responses to developmental disability. c. Students research and learn correct terminology about disabilities. Then select a section of the book to correct using "people first" language and proper terms. For information about people first language, please see: https://www.disability.illinois.edu/academic-support/instructor-information/accessible-language-guide-disability-etiquette	a. Students recite passages or act out scenes from the work. Their dramatic interpretations are evaluated using a grading rubric. b. Participation in discussion is monitored and scored by teacher. c. Students produce a revised section of the text. The products are evaluated using a grading rubric.

Other Resources

For more information about developmental disabilities, please go to: http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/

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