

A Checklist to Evaluate Children's Books that Address Disability as Part of Diversity

*Circle T for each statement that is true and F for each statement that is False. A positively evaluated book should have 7 out of 9 statements circled T.

1) Check the Illustrations:

Are there Stereotypes: There are no stereotypes promoted in this book. T F

Children's books should not help support or perpetuate any stereotypes. Consequently, books that represent children with disabilities should do so in ways that do not promote stereotypes. For example, look for books that show children with disabilities in the same classes as their non-disabled peers, participating in the same activities as their peers.

Look for Tokenism: All of the children are depicted as genuine individuals with distinctive features. T F

Look for Tokenism. It is desirable that children with disabilities be represented in books as genuine individuals with distinctive features. It is appropriate to have a child with a physical disability in a wheelchair or using another type of adaptive device as long as the reader also views the child as being a distinctive individual with his/her own personality and characteristics.

Who's Doing What: The children with disabilities have leadership and action roles. T F

Who's Doing What? The illustrations should depict children with disabilities in leadership and action roles. The children with disabilities should not only be active observers while the children without disabilities are always the "doers."

2) Check the Story Line:

Standards for Success: The children with disabilities are accepted for their own individual behaviors. T F

To gain acceptance and approval, the child with a disability should not have to exhibit extraordinary qualities, such as exceptional memory or math skills. The child should not have to walk or run with his friends to be accepted by them.

Resolution of Problems: The people with disabilities help resolve the problem. T F

Resolution of Problems. Look at how the problems in the story are presented, conceived and resolved. The person with the disability should not be considered part of the "the problem." When appropriate, the reasons for the disabilities should be explained to the child.

Role of the person with a Disability: The same story could be told if the main character did not have a disability. T F

The achievements of the person with a disability should be based on his/her own initiative and intelligence. This story should be able to be told in the same way even if the main character did not have a disability.

3) Look at the Lifestyles:

The illustrations offer genuine insights into another person. T F

If the person with the disability is depicted as “different,” no negative value judgments should be implied. The illustrations and text should offer genuine insights into another person.

4) Weigh the Relationships Between People:

The children with disabilities function in essentially leadership roles. T F

The people without disabilities should not possess all of the power, take all of the leadership roles, and make all of the important decisions. The children with disabilities should not only function in supportive or, subservient roles. Neither should the reverse be true. There should be a clear balance of roles.

5) Consider the Effects on a Child’s Self-Image:

There is one or more persons with whom a child with a disability can readily identify as a positive and constructive role model. T F

Norms should not be established which limit any child’s aspirations and self-concept. By continuously bombarding a child with a disability with images of “typical” children as the ultimate in beauty, cleanliness, and virtue, we are harming the child’s self-image. In each story, there should be at least one or more persons with whom a child with a disability can readily identify as a positive and constructive role model.

6) Consider the Author or Illustrator’s Background:

The author’s background strengthen the value of his/her work. T F

Analyze the biographical material on the jacket flap or the back of the book. Look for qualities that the author or illustrator may have that would help them understand and contribute knowledgeably to a specific theme or topic.

7) What is the Author’s Perspective?

The authors perspective strengthens the value of his/her written work. T F

No author can be entirely objective. All authors write from a cultural as well as from a personal context. Children’s books in the past have traditionally come from authors who were white, non disabled, and who were members of the middle class, with the result being a single ethnocentric perspective dominated children’s literature in the United States (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989). With any book in question, read carefully to determine whether the direction of the author’s perspective substantially weakens or strengthens the value of his/her written work.

8) Watch for Loaded Words

This book has no loaded words (I.E. “Slow”) T F

A word is loaded when it has offensive overtones. Examples of loaded adjectives specific to children with disabilities are “slow,” “retarded,” “lazy,” “docile,” “backwards,” “crazy,” “feeble-minded,” “cripple,” “idiot,” “deaf,” “dumb,” and sometimes “special.”

9) Look at the Copyright and Target Age

The copyright and target age is appropriate for the intended audience? T F