

LET'S READ!

Children & Youth Books on Disability & Diversity

Reading is a great activity to acquire valuable information and life skills, to have joy, and to understand how everything around us works. Reading can also teach us how to be responsible citizens. Storybooks, novels, and picture books depicting positive stories about diversity and inclusion can teach young readers about empathy, acceptance, and justice towards their peers. Unfortunately, the children's literature industry lacks disabled representation in books. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center's 2019 study, only 3.4% of children's books have disabled main characters.¹ The shortcomings of the publishing companies become more evident when we consider that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in every 4 adults have a disability.²

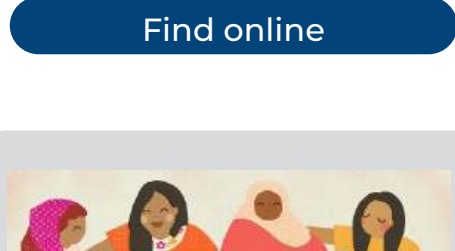
Authors and illustrators face many barriers when publishing books that represent disabilities or diversity. Some of the barriers often take place in the form of ableism ([Click here for NCHPAD's online training on Ableism](#)), which is a form of discrimination against disabled people. Other barriers stem from lack of connection with editors because of pre-determined disability stereotypes. Editors may be defining disability as something negative while trying to create narratives of disabled characters who are looking for a cure for their disability. Another issue is the lack of accessibility at writing conferences and workshops for new writers, limiting the opportunity to grow professionally as a writer or illustrator.

NCHPAD staff have curated a list of their favorites books that have disability and diversity representation. We hope you find opportunities to encourage children and youth to read and learn about things that make us different while learning an appreciation for diverse identities.

Disclaimer: With exception of *Where is mi amigo, Pedro?*, NCHPAD does not have any affiliation with the books, authors, or publishing agencies listed on this resource.



OUR TOP PICKS



Where is mi amigo, Pedro?

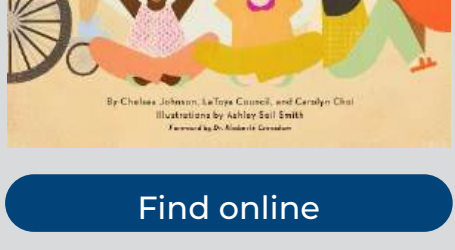
By Alex X. Martinez, illustrated by Grayson Cusimano

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English, Spanish

Where is mi amigo Pedro? narrates a story about a boy and his quest to find his friend, Pedro to fly kites at the park. The journey to find Pedro will teach kids about inclusion in physical activity settings. Find activity pages at the end of the book to access cross-disciplinary and inclusion activities that complement the story. Available in both English and Spanish!

[Find online](#)



Intersection Allies: We Make Room for All

By Chelsea Johnson, LaToya Council, and Carolyn Choi.

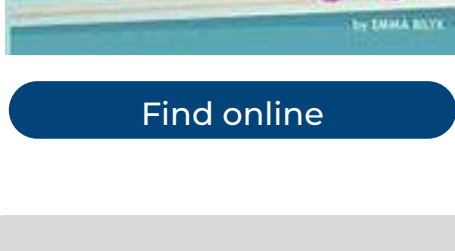
Foreword by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Illustrated by Ashley Seil Smith

Reading age: 6-12 years

Language: English, Spanish

In poetic stanzas, *Intersection Allies* introduces the stories of nine kids from diverse backgrounds. Authors use each character's story to explain how children's safety concerns are shaped by their intersecting identities, such as class, sexuality, disability, race, religion, and citizenship—what is known in academic and activist circles as "intersectionality."

[Find online](#)



Rebekah's Superpower

By Emma Bilyk

Language: English

A children's book to help deaf and hard-of-hearing kiddos be empowered and have language for self-advocacy. Rebekah is a little girl born with microtia and wears a BAHA to help her hear. Hearing aids give you superpowers!

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Islandborn

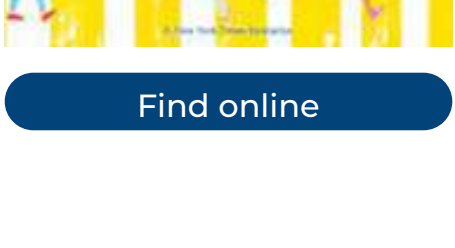
By Junot Díaz, illustrated by Leo Espinosa

Reading age: 5-8 years

Language: English, Spanish

So when Lola's teacher asks the students to draw a picture of where their families immigrated from, all the kids are excited. Except for Lola. She can't remember The Island—she left when she was just a baby. But with the help of her family and friends, and their memories—joyous, fantastical, heartbreaking, and frightening—Lola's imagination takes her on an extraordinary journey back to The Island. As she draws closer to the heart of her family's story, Lola comes to understand the truth of her abuela's words: "Just because you don't remember a place doesn't mean it's not in you."

[Find online](#)



All Are Welcome

By Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English

Celebrate diversity and inclusion with this New York Times bestselling picture book about a school where all are welcome. Look under the jacket for a poster, and don't miss the fold-out page at the end of the book. Follow a group of children through a day in their school, where everyone is welcomed with open arms. A school where kids in patkas, hijabs, and yarmulkes play side-by-side with friends in baseball caps. A school where students grow and learn from each other's traditions and the whole community gathers to celebrate the Lunar New Year. *All Are Welcome* lets young children know that no matter what, they have a place, they have a space, they are welcome in their school.

[Find online](#)



Our Class is a Family

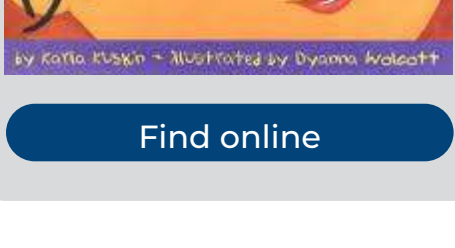
By Shannon Olsen, illustrated by Sandie Sonke

Reading age: 3-7 years

Language: English, Spanish

"Family isn't always your relatives. It's the ones who accept you for who you are. The ones who would do anything to see you smile, and who love you no matter what." Teachers do so much more than just teach academics. They build a sense of community within their classrooms, creating a home away from home where they make their students feel safe, included, and loved. With its heartfelt message and colorfully whimsical illustrations, "Our Class is a Family" is a book that will help build and strengthen that class community. Kids learn that their classroom is a place where it's safe to be themselves, it's okay to make mistakes, and it's important to be a friend to others. When hearing this story being read aloud by their teacher, students are sure to feel like they are part of a special family.

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Meeting Mimi

By Francie Dolan, illustrated by Wendy Leach

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English

There is lots to learn about the new girl at school. She does not like beans. She does like to tell jokes. And, she has a physical disability. In this book, beginning readers in prekindergarten to grade 1 can join Mimi's classmates as they ask questions about different abilities and make a new friend. This illustrated picture book series features social/emotional issues as plot drivers. Youngsters are introduced to a variety of experiences, while caregivers are given a jumping off point for discussing and guiding their child's social/emotional development.

[Find online](#)



I am Me

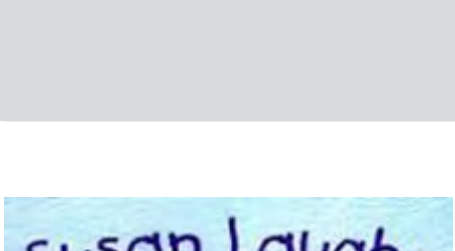
By Karla Kuskin, illustrated by Dyanna Wolcott

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English

After being told how she resembles other members of her family, a young girl states positively and absolutely that she is "no one else but me".

[Find online](#)



You are Enough

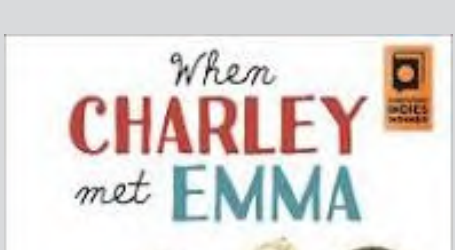
By: Margaret O'Hair, illustrated by Sofia Cardoso

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English

It can be hard to be different whether because of how you look, where you live, or what you can or can't do. But wouldn't it be boring if we were all the same? Being different is great! Being different is what makes you YOU. This inclusive and empowering picture book from Sofia Sanchez an 11-year-old model and actress with Down syndrome reminds readers how important it is to embrace your differences, be confident, and be proud of who you are. Imagine all the wonderful things you can do if you don't let anyone stop you! You are enough just how you are.

[Find online](#)



Just Ask: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You

By Justice Sotomayor, illustrated by Rafael López

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English, Spanish

Feeling different, especially as a kid, can be tough. But in the same way that different types of plants and flowers make a garden more beautiful and enjoyable, different types of people make our world more vibrant and wonderful. In *Just Ask*, United States Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor celebrates the different abilities kids (and people of all ages) have. Using her own experience as a child who was diagnosed with diabetes, Justice Sotomayor writes about children with all sorts of challenges--and looks at the special powers those kids have, as well. As the kids work together to build a community garden, asking questions of each other along the way, this book encourages readers to do the same: When we come across someone who is different from us but we're not sure why, all we have to do is Just Ask.

[Find online](#)



Susan Laughs

By Jeanne Willis, illustrated by Tony Ross

Reading age: 4-7 years

Language: English

Susan laughs, she sings, she rides, she swings. She gets angry, she gets sad, she is good, she is bad... Told in rhyme, this story follows Susan through a series of familiar activities. She swims with her father, works hard in school, plays with her friends -- and even rides a horse. Lively, thoughtfully drawn illustrations reveal a portrait of a busy, happy little girl with whom younger readers will identify. Not until the end of the story is it revealed that Susan uses a wheelchair.

[Find online](#)



When Charley Met Emma

By Amy Webb, illustrated by Merrilee Liddiard

Reading age: 3-5 years

Language: English

When Charley goes to the playground and sees Emma, a girl with limb differences who gets around in a wheelchair, he doesn't know how to react at first. But after he and Emma start talking, he learns that different isn't bad, sad, or strange--different is just different, and different is great! This delightful book will help kids think about disability, kindness, and how to behave when they meet someone who is different from them.

[Find online](#)



All the Way to the Top: How One Girl's Fight for Americans with Disabilities Changed Everything

By Annette Bay Pimentel, illustrated by Nabi H. Ali

Reading age: 4-8 years

Language: English

Experience the true story of lifelong activist Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins and her participation in the Capitol Crawl in this inspiring autobiographical picture book. This beautifully illustrated story includes a foreword from Jennifer and backmatter detailing her life and the history of the disability rights movement.

[Find online](#)



Not So Different: What You Really Want to Ask About Having a Disability

By Shane Burcaw, illustrated by Matt Carr

Reading age: 6-9 years

Language: English

Shane Burcaw was born with a rare disease called spinal muscular atrophy, which hinders his muscles' growth. As a result, his body hasn't grown bigger and stronger as he's gotten older—it's gotten smaller and weaker instead. This hasn't stopped him from doing the things he enjoys (like eating pizza and playing sports and video games) with the people he loves, but it does mean that he routinely relies on his friends and family for help with everything from brushing his teeth to rolling over in bed.

[Find online](#)



Song for a Whale

By Lynne Kelly

Reading age: 8-12 years

Language: English

From fixing the class computer to repairing old radios, twelve-year-old Iris is a tech genius. But she's the only deaf person in her school, so people often treat her like she's not very smart. If you've ever felt like no one was listening to you, then you know how hard that can be. When she learns about Blue 55, a real whale who is unable to speak to other whales, Iris understands how he must feel. Then she has an idea: she should invent a way to "sing" to him! But he's three thousand miles away. How will she play her song for him? Full of heart and poignancy, this affecting story by sign language interpreter Lynne Kelly shows how a little determination can make big waves.

[Find online](#)

What Stars Are Made Of

By Sarah Allen

Reading age: 10-14 years

Language: English

Twelve-year-old Libby Monroe is great at science, being optimistic, and talking to her famous, accomplished friends (okay, maybe that last one is only in her head). She's not great at playing piano, sitting still, or figuring out how to say the right thing at the right time in real life. Libby was born with Turner Syndrome, and that makes some things hard. But she has lots of people who love her, and that makes her pretty lucky. When her big sister Nonny tells her she's pregnant, Libby is thrilled—but worried. Nonny and her husband are in a financial black hole, and Libby knows that babies aren't always born healthy. So she strikes a deal with the universe: She'll enter a contest with a project about Cecelia Payne, the first person to discover what stars are made of. If she wins the grand prize and gives all that money to Nonny's family, then the baby will be perfect. Does she have what it takes to care for the sister that has always cared for her? And what will it take for the universe to notice?

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