

Books with positive images of disability

Here are 11 children's books that are useful for discussing disability and inclusive issues with young readers.

Lightning Chase Me Home

Author: Amber Lee Dodd

Publisher: Scholastic

Interest age: 9-12

Reading age: 9-12



Amelia lives with her father, grandfather and dog in a weather-beaten house on the small Scottish island of Dark Muir. It's an island steeped in myths and legends, and with a permanent sense of a storm brewing, no matter the season.

On her eleventh birthday, and in island tradition, Amelia makes a wish on the mystical Serpent's Tooth Rock. Almost immediately, odd things begin to happen and it becomes apparent that her particular wish (to see her absent mother again) has awoken a strange and deeply powerful magic.

This is an unusual adventure story that successfully holds the reader under its spell. A growing sense of danger rumbles in the background and sudden flashes of magic streak through the book. Its appealing heroine (named by her mother after fearless explorers Amelia Earhart and Hester Stanhope) wrestles with the challenges of dyslexia, a new school, an unpleasant bully and a grandparent with dementia, while ultimately trying to solve the mystery of Serpent's Tooth Rock.

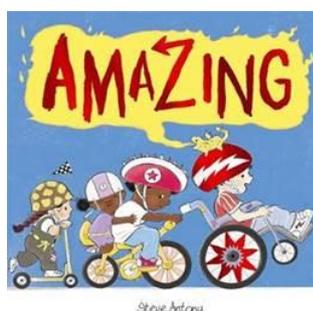
A highly satisfying read, combining a convincing contemporary context with timeless mystery and magic.

Amazing

Author: Steve Antony

Publisher: Hachette Children's Group

Interest age: 3-5



A delightful story about a little boy and his amazing pet dragon. It's a rare and perfect example of completely incidental inclusion when it comes to disability – and the themes of friendship and being yourself will appeal to every child.

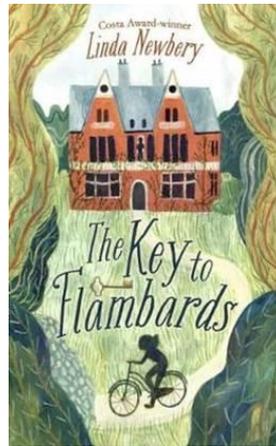
The Key to Flambards

Author: Linda Newbery

Publisher: David Fickling Books

Interest age: 11+

Reading age: 11+



It's been a year of dramatic changes for Grace. She must now start to move on, accepting her parents' divorce and adjusting to her life with a prosthetic limb, following a car accident which resulted in a lower leg amputation.

This summer, she's reluctantly left her home and best friend to spend the holidays at Flambards, a quiet countryside arts centre, where her mum is trying to breathe some life into a struggling business.

Flambards is a stately home with some serious history – and Grace's family are direct descendants of the Russell family who used to own it. As she gradually gets to know the locals, she uncovers some mysterious secrets buried in the house's past. It's a summer that will slowly change Grace's feelings about her past, her future and her very place in the world.

Grace is very likeable but convincingly flawed, grappling with conflicting emotions about friendship, identity, rural living and life in general. We see her assessing (and reassessing) her attitude towards disability – and Newbery ingeniously explores the theme from different angles, Grace's situation mirrored by other characters past and present, including an ancestor with facial disfigurement.

This is a very readable standalone for those unfamiliar with the K M Peyton stories that inspired it. It also offers fans of the original Flambards series the chance to revisit its style and charm, but with a fresh story, contemporary themes and engaging new characters.

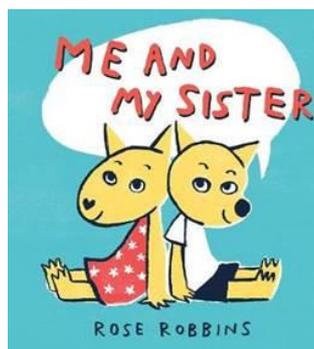
Me and My Sister

Author: Rose Robbins

Publisher: Scallywag Press

Interest age: 3-6

Reading age: 5+



A delightful insight into sibling life is delivered through appealing animal characters in this simple and effective picture book, reminding us that every child is different.

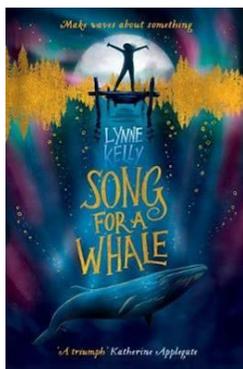
Song for a Whale

Author: Lynne Kelly

Publisher: Piccadilly Press

Interest age: 6-11

Reading age: 7+



A baleen whale's unique 55-hertz frequency means he cannot communicate with other whales, and 12-year-old Iris is determined to help him. A pacy story told with a tender touch, which also offers examples of common frustrations experienced by deaf children.

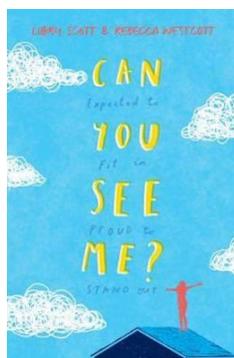
Can You See Me?

Author: Libby Scott and Rebecca Westcott

Publisher: Scholastic

Interest age: 9-11

Reading age: 9+



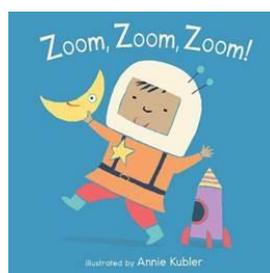
Starting secondary school is a daunting time for any 11 year old – and Natalia is no exception. This is a powerful, readable and relatable story about trying to fit in. Along the way, a host of assumptions and stereotypes about autism are smashed.

Zoom, Zoom, Zoom!

Author: Annie Kubler

Publisher: Child's Play International Ltd

Interest age: 0-3



The blend of rhyme, repetition and alliteration is a recipe almost guaranteed to attract a toddler, especially when accompanied by bright, appealing human faces. This delightful board book combines all these elements, along with a rocket theme for added excitement.

We see a group of children enthusiastically daubing generous blobs of messy paint onto homemade rockets. The unassuming verse slowly builds to a jubilant crescendo with the words, 'five, four, three, two, one...BLAST OFF!', as they zoom off on some imaginary space adventure.

The size and format is ideal for very young book-lovers to enjoy with their adults. The layout is bold and well balanced, the palette bright yet delicate, and the font attractive and accessible. Annie Kubler's trademark artwork features a diverse cast of endearing characters, and a sporty wheelchair-user, glasses, a hearing aid and an eye patch are all naturally and casually included. Particularly pleasing is a child who has converted his wheelchair into a rocket on the back cover!

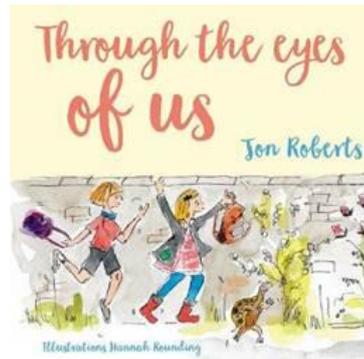
Through the Eyes of Us

Author: Jon Roberts

Publisher: Graffeg

Interest age: 3-6

Reading age: 5+



Kya and Martha are like 'two different colours sitting on a beautiful rainbow'. They are both on the autistic spectrum, but this certainly does not mean that they are the same. A beautiful book, rich in its universal sense of childhood fun and friendship.

Stretch Your Confidence

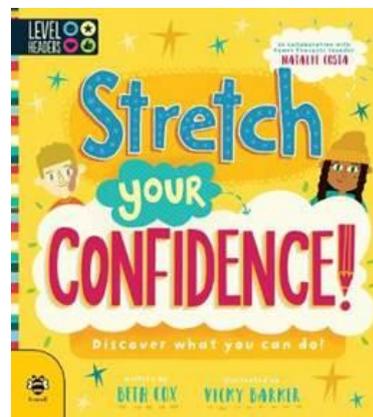
Author: Beth Cox and Natalie Costa

Illustrator: Vicky Barker

Publisher: B Small Publishing

Interest age: 6-11

Reading age: 6+



Empathy and understanding are vital skills for any child to develop. And at times in their lives, most children find their own confidence could do with a bit of a boost, too. This book from a new series called "Level Headers" is purposely designed to help children learn to better understand and manage emotions.

With a variety of ingenious activities, using tried and tested techniques, this activity book offers a highly interactive approach. With a lightness of touch, the book encourages children to record their feelings and responses, as they consider how they interact with others and are empowered to take ownership of their own emotions and behaviour. It gently challenges assumptions and broadens horizons, as the young reader considers their own unique abilities, their strengths, their differences and how to cope with challenges like managing change, friendship problems, anxiety and fear.

The creators' expertise in this field is palpable. And yet the delivery is always accessible and fun and the approach unselfconscious and uncontrived. Inclusivity is paramount, with the colourful illustrations featuring a diverse cast. Naturally and casually included are children with eye patches, facial marks and hearing aids.

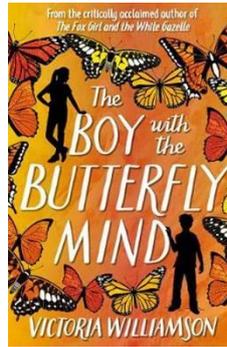
The Boy With the Butterfly Mind

Author: Victoria Williamson

Publisher: Floris Books

Interest age: 10+

Reading age: 9+



Since her dad left, Elin has strived to be perfect. She has convinced herself that if she is the tidiest, the most helpful and the most hardworking she can possibly be, her dad will leave his "fake family" and come back to live with her and her mum.

Jamie is chaotic, unpredictable and impulsive but is hoping that the move to America with his mum and her partner will give him the fresh start he thinks he needs.

When Elin and Jamie are thrown together by circumstances they cannot control, the results are complicated, messy and seem doomed to end in carnage. Until a mean-spirited trick leads to unexpected outcomes...

The complexities of families divided by break-up and reformed as blended versions of themselves will have been experienced by many readers. Elin and Jamie's story does not belittle their feelings of rejection and betrayal but shows how adaptation and compromise might smooth the path to a different, but worthwhile, family dynamic.

The depiction of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is both sensitive and honest, and Williamson's qualifications and experience in working with children with additional needs are self-evident.

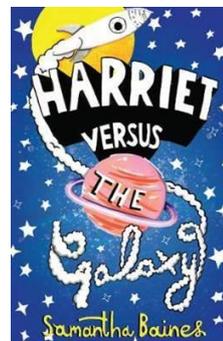
Harriet Versus the Galaxy

Author: Samantha Baines Illustrator: Jessica Flores

Publisher: Knights Of

Interest age: 6-11

Reading age: 7+



When 10-year-old Harriet is rummaging under her bed hunting for her hearing aid, the last thing she expects to find instead is an alien. It's a sock-munching alien from planet Janet. But what is it doing under her bed? And could it be that this isn't the only intergalactic visitor? Perhaps Harriet's mild-mannered, tea-sipping, sock-knitting gran knows more about the alien invasion than she is letting on.

It's not long before Harriet finds herself working alongside her gran to defend the human race from an array of extra-terrestrial characters, intent on stealing more than just socks.

This is a highly accessible story, laced with lively black-and-white illustrations and lots of laughs. A rare and welcome example a female protagonist who just happens to be hearing impaired without this being the focus (although her hearing aid proves useful not just for amplifying sound – it turns out it can tune into the wavelengths of many languages, too!).