

I Am Different---Just Like You!

Rebecca DalMolin

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I Am Different—Just Like You! is a solid reading time tool for fostering attitudes of acceptance.

Rebecca DalMolin's heartfelt picture book *I Am Different—Just Like You!* focuses on what it's like to have Down syndrome, and is intended to help children and families understand the differences and similarities of others.

Adella is just like any child her age. She likes to talk, play, make others smile, and ride horses. Like a lot of children, there are things Adella struggles with, too, including running fast, being in large crowds, and hearing loud noises. From these descriptors alone, one wouldn't know that Adella has Down syndrome. She has her own unique set of challenges to face, but who doesn't? In fact, it's these challenges that make her relatable; she's different, just like everyone else.

To introduce Down syndrome, the book begins with an easy-to-understand snowman metaphor, likening the formation of snowmen to that of humans. Next comes a helpful science lesson that both children and adults will be able to understand. One extra chromosome is all it takes to turn activities that other people consider easy into a confusing ordeal for someone with Down syndrome, the book shows, but that confusion does not mean that a child will be held back from living a fulfilling life. For Adella, things like communication and day-to-day activities, although difficult at times, are quite doable, and having fun is still super easy.

The latter part of the book includes a list of possible careers for Adella that have already been achieved by members of the Down syndrome community, like climbing Mt. Everest, speaking to Congress, becoming a Special Olympic athlete, fashion model, clothing designer, entrepreneur, and teacher, imparting a sense that many achievements are within the reach of any aspiring individual, whether they have Down syndrome or not.

I Am Different—Just Like You succeeds in its main objective: to act as a catalyst for children to understand inclusion, and to provide the adults in their lives with a conversation starter on how to treat others who seem different. The interactive question and response portion at the end of the book supports active participation and engagement, further strengthening the book's goals of achieving understanding and highlighting commonalities. The positive tone emphasizes the message that, whether they have disabilities or not, those with Down syndrome are like anyone else, and are entitled to be treated as such.

The story is written in an elementary style with the intention of being read aloud, though its section dealing with fetal development and the function of chromosomes is complex for young age groups and will doubtless require further explanation. The illustrations are done in mixture of styles: real-life figures are photoshopped into vibrant, hand-drawn backgrounds, with photorealistic sketches appearing throughout. The combinations are entertaining and thought provoking.

I Am Different—Just Like You! is a solid reading time tool for fostering attitudes of acceptance between children of all backgrounds and abilities.

IAN DAILEY (October 26, 2020)

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