

DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME

ABOUT:

I know a young man who wears braces on his legs and can only walk with the use of crutches. In my family, there are two children with Down syndrome. I also have a friend who needs a wheelchair for mobility. It is a natural thing to notice differences, including different cultures, and wonder. The hard part is to know what to do, and how to respond to these differences. When I saw a dachshund fitted with wheels for its back legs, I had an idea of how to write a story that helps children navigate and understand these differences.

PURPOSE:

From my experience with family and friends who have special needs, or are from different cultures, what they want the most is to be recognized as people who have value, rather than people to be pitied. It is okay for a child to be curious and ask questions. It is preferable to educate them about disabilities in a factual manner, such as *his legs do not work like yours*. It is also desirable to help children respect differences in appearance and culture. We live in a diverse world that should be celebrated.

SUGGESTIONS:

A child needs to feel safe asking questions. Open up a dialogue by explaining specialized equipment—tools— some people need to help them. Help them to understand behavior that is odd to them, such as children who do not like their food to touch or don't want anyone to touch them. Encourage patience, helping them to understand that children with special needs just take a little longer to do things or become friends. Point out similarities, such as interests, favorite movies, and foods. Because children are kind and want to be helpers, speak to them about asking before helping. And, as Winston discovers in his story, Jet wanted to play as much as Winston did, he just needed the chance.

IDEAS:

Take note of all the different cultures in your child's class, neighborhood, place of worship, clubs, and athletic teams.

- Prepare food connected to that culture.
- Research famous people from that culture.
- What holidays do people from that culture celebrate?
- Have special guests come to speak to your class about diversity.