

Rabbit Hole Reads

Disability Awareness

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What is Disability Awareness?

Disability is a natural part of human diversity. People move, learn, communicate, and experience the world in many different ways. Some people are born with disabilities, and others may become disabled due to illness, injury, or aging.

Being “disability aware” means understanding, respecting, and celebrating these differences. It means learning from disabled voices, noticing when things are unfair or inaccessible, and working to create a world where everyone belongs.

Why This Topic Matters

Disability is often overlooked in conversations about identity, inclusion, and justice—but it shouldn’t be. More than one in four people in the U.S.—over 70 million adults—live with a disability, yet their experiences are too often misrepresented, silenced, or ignored.

Even more importantly, 80% of disabilities develop after age 18, meaning most people become disabled during adulthood, not childhood. Disability is not a static identity we’re born with—it can happen to anyone, at any time. This is why it’s even more imperative to raise kids to be open-minded, empathetic, and knowledgeable about disability.

This theme helps learners:

- See disability as diversity, not deficiency
- Understand and question ableism (the unfair treatment of disabled people)
- Practice empathy, advocacy, and inclusion
- Hear directly from disabled voices—through books, art, media, and storytelling

What We Value in These Reads

This guide attempts to center:

- **#OwnVoices stories:** books by disabled authors or illustrators
- **Intersectionality:** we uplift stories from BIPOC, queer, and neurodivergent creators
- **Accuracy & Respect:** avoiding “inspiration porn,” pity, or stereotypes
- **Agency:** showing disabled people as full, complex, joyful humans

Big Ideas to Explore

Some rabbit holes we'll dig into:

- What is disability? How do we define it?
- What makes something accessible or inaccessible?
- How do disabled people lead, create, and make change?
- What's the difference between help and support?
- How can we become allies and co-creators of inclusion?

Guiding Questions for Learners

You can return to these throughout the theme:

- What do I already know (or think I know) about disability?
- What am I curious about or want to learn?
- How can I use what I've learned to be more inclusive?

Resources & Further Learning

Explore, Listen, Learn, Support

Disability is not just a topic in books—it's a vibrant, global community filled with art, activism, culture, and joy. These resources are a starting point for learning from disabled people directly, understanding diverse experiences, and becoming a better advocate.

Organizations & Projects

All of the following are disabled-led or center disabled voices.

Disability Rights & Justice

[Disability Visibility Project](#) – Created by Alice Wong. Features essays, interviews, and activism focused on disabled culture and justice.

[Sins Invalid](#) – A disability justice-based performance project that centers disabled artists of color and queer/gender nonconforming people.

[Rooted in Rights](#) – A digital advocacy organization sharing stories and media created by disabled people.

More Book Lists & Recs

[Disability in Kidlit](#) – In-depth reviews and critiques of children's books featuring disabled characters, written by disabled adults.

[We Need Diverse Books](#) – While broader than disability, their blog and resources include reviews and author interviews featuring disabled voices.

Podcasts and Videos

- [The Accessible Stall](#) – A podcast about disability culture and politics, hosted by disabled advocates. Candid and funny.
- [Disability Visibility Podcast](#) – Deep interviews with disabled creators, organizers, and thinkers.
- [Power Not Pity](#) – A podcast by and for disabled people of color. Radical, reflective, and powerful.

- [Emily Ladau](#) on TEDx – "I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much" – On everyday ableism and authentic inclusion.
- [ASL Nook](#) – Beautiful ASL storytime videos for kids and families, by a Deaf family.

Learn from Disabled Creators (Social Media)

Want to fill your feed with real-life disabled voices?

- [@lilmisshotmess](#) – Queer disabled educator and Drag Queen Story Hour co-founder
- [@keah_maria](#) – Keah Brown, disabled author and founder of #DisabledAndCute
- [@thechronicnotebook](#) – Chronic illness advocacy and affirming mental health content
- [@wheelchair_rapunzel](#) – Lifestyle, beauty, and accessibility from a proud disabled woman

Tip: Follow multiple voices. Disability is not a monolith.

Want to Go Deeper? Read These Too

- [Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice](#) by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
- [Being Heumann](#) by Judith Heumann
- [The Pretty One](#) by Keah Brown
- [Demystifying Disability](#) by Emily Ladau
- [Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law](#) by Haben Girma

Talking Honestly, Compassionately, and Inclusively About Disability with Your Kids

You don't need to have all the answers to raise kids who are inclusive, curious, and kind. This guide will help you talk about disability in ways that are respectful, accurate, and empowering—whether you're reading a picture book together or having a big feelings conversation with your teen.

1. Use Clear, Respectful Language

The words we use matter. Aim for:

- “Disabled person” or “person with a disability” depending on the situation (ask which someone prefers if you're talking about a specific person)
- Avoid euphemisms like “special needs,” “differently abled,” or “handi-capable”—they often make disability sound shameful or vague

If you're not sure what to say, “disabled” is a widely accepted, inclusive term.

Try: “Disability is a normal part of life, and there are many different ways to be human.”

2. Talk About Stereotypes and Unfair Treatment

Many books and real-life stories show disabled people being:

- Bullied or excluded
- Pitied or treated like “inspiration”
- Pressured to be independent in unrealistic ways
- Hurt by unfair systems (schools, hospitals, laws)
- Don't skip over these parts—talk about them!

Ask:

- “Was that character treated fairly?”
- “What could others have done to help or include them better?”
- “What would justice look like here?”

3. Offer Content Warnings Thoughtfully

Some stories include difficult topics like:

- Medical trauma or scary hospital scenes
- Bullying or abuse
- Mental health struggles
- Discrimination and ableism

For younger or emotionally sensitive readers, give a gentle heads-up. Let them decide if they want to pause or keep reading.

Example:

- “This story shows a character being treated unfairly by adults. That might feel upsetting—and that’s okay. You don’t have to keep reading if it feels too heavy.”

4. Disability Isn’t Always Simple

Not every story ends with a neat lesson or perfect resolution. A disabled character might feel proud, frustrated, joyful, angry—or all of those at once.

You can say:

- “It’s okay to feel a lot of things about this.”
- “You can love who you are and still want things to be easier or more fair.”

5. Focus on Empowerment, Not Pity

Disability stories are not meant to make us feel bad for someone.

- Instead, they invite us to notice:
- What makes someone strong or creative
- What systems need to change
- How we can build better communities

Ask:

“What could we do to help make the world more accessible?”

“Who’s helping in this story—and how?”

6. Show That You're Still Learning, Too

You don't need to have perfect language or always know what to say. What matters most is that your kids see you trying—and growing.

Model it:

- “That’s a great question—I don’t know yet.”
- “I’m still learning, too.”
- “Thanks for helping me think about this.”

Co-op Leader's Inclusion Guide

Creating a Disability-Affirming Homeschool Community

Whether you're running a virtual circle time, a backyard science club, or a full co-op program, inclusion doesn't just "happen"—it's intentional. This guide supports you in making your homeschool group welcoming, safe, and empowering for all kids, including disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent learners.

1. Start with a Mindset Shift

Inclusion isn't about "accommodating special needs"—it's about creating flexible, human-centered environments where everyone can thrive.

Ask yourself:

- Are we planning for access, or reacting to inaccessibility?
- Do our rules or expectations center nondisabled norms?
- Are disabled kids seen as full participants, or as exceptions?
- Inclusion isn't a checklist—it's a practice of listening, unlearning, and adjusting.

2. Ask About Access Needs—Before Day One

Build this into your registration or welcome form:

- "Are there any access needs (sensory, mobility, communication, etc.) you'd like us to know about?"
- "How can we make your family feel safe and supported?"
- "Does your child use any tools, supports, or routines we should be aware of?"

Be specific that you're open to: Wheelchairs, AAC devices, stimming, noise-canceling headphones, alternative ways of participating

And follow up: "Thanks for sharing. We're excited to learn how to support your child."

3. Design for Flexibility

Make your programming naturally inclusive:

- Offer options: stand/sit/lay, write/draw/speak
- Avoid "one right way" to complete activities
- Allow movement and sensory input (fidgets, wiggles, stepping away)
- Provide a quiet zone or sensory corner

Universal Design helps everyone—not just disabled learners.

4. Use Inclusive Materials

Feature books by disabled authors with affirming disability representation

Avoid inspiration porn (“Look how brave!” “Overcoming adversity!”)

Choose stories that show disabled kids being kids

Tip: Avoid worksheets or lessons that label disability as a problem to fix. Choose language that honors difference, not deficit.

5. Model Inclusion in Your Leadership

- Normalize access tools: “Some of us use visual timers, some of us need breaks—that’s okay.”
- Redirect ableist comments gently but clearly: “Actually, there’s lots of ways to communicate—even without talking.”
- Show curiosity and respect when something is unfamiliar: “That’s new to me—thanks for sharing it with me.”

6. Listen When Feedback Comes

If a child, parent, or disabled community member expresses discomfort, listen with humility. Don’t defend first—reflect and revise. Try:

- “Thank you for trusting me with this.”
- “I’m sorry this happened. Here’s what I’ll change.”
- “Would you like to help us co-create something more accessible?”

7. Anticipate Common Access Needs

While everyone’s access needs are different, you can plan ahead for:

- **Sensory differences** (limit strong scents, allow movement/fidgets, soft lighting)
- **Mobility needs** (accessible entrances, tables with clearance, wide walkways)
- **Neurodivergence** (visual instructions, transitions with warning, support without shame)
- **Communication differences** (don’t require verbal responses, honor AAC, model respect)

8. Offer a Family Inclusion Statement

Post it in your welcome packet, website, or space:

“Our homeschool community values all kinds of minds and bodies. We welcome disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill learners, and commit to creating a flexible, affirming environment that centers dignity, access, and care.”

9. Need More Support? Try These Tools

- Understood.org – Supports for neurodivergent learners
- Wrightslaw – Legal guidance for parents navigating education
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) – Advocacy by and for autistic people
- Respecting Neurodiversity – Free learning resources for inclusive communities

RHR Board Book Guide

Talking About Disability with Babies & Toddlers

Disability awareness starts in the earliest years—with the books we read, the words we use, and the joy we share. These board books celebrate diverse bodies, tools, languages, and ways of being. They don't turn disability into a lesson—they show it as part of everyday life.

This guide invites families and educators to talk with young children about inclusion and difference through joyful, affirming stories that center disabled kids just being kids.

Helping Young Kids Build Disability Awareness

Name & Normalize Differences Early

Use clear, simple language:

“That child uses a wheelchair to move, just like you use your legs.”

“That’s a hearing aid—it helps her listen.”

Celebrate Tools as Extensions of the Body

Model respect for tools like glasses, feeding tubes, walkers, braces, or slings.

Include dolls, puzzles, or playsets that reflect diverse bodies and mobility aids.

Expose Kids to Sign Language at All Ages

Learn simple ASL signs for words like “more,” “stop,” “mom,” “friend,” or “love.”

Use signs alongside speech during daily routines.

Diversify Your Visual World

Choose art, toys, books, and media that show disabled kids just being kids.

Representation shouldn't only appear in “lesson time.”

Speak Kindly About All Bodies

Model body acceptance—even your own. Replace critical language with wonder:

“My legs are strong today.”

“Your fingers are so good at grabbing!”

Activity Ideas

- **Mirror play:** “What do you like about your face today?”
- **Tool sorting:** Mix play utensils or dolls with mobility aids into pretend play.
- **Sign a song:** Learn ASL signs for family, animals, or emotions.
- **“Bodies Are Cool” art:** Draw your family or community in all your wonderful differences.

Board Book Picks & Talking Points

We Are Little Feminists: On-the-Go, How We Eat, and How We Play by Shuli de la Fuente-Lau

These board books shine with real photos of disabled children playing, eating, and moving in ways that work for them—zipping through town in wheelchairs, exploring textures, or using adaptive tools at mealtime. The language is simple but intentional, modeling respect and celebration of every body.

Talk about: “What tools do we use every day? What helps us eat, move, and play?”

Bodies Are Cool by Tyler Feder

This vibrant book sings the praises of bodies of all shapes, sizes, and kinds—freckled, scarred, wrinkled, limb-different, round, or bumpy. With a rhythmic chorus of “Bodies are cool,” it affirms that every body is worthy and wonderful just as it is.

Talk about: “What do you love about your body today? What’s something cool someone else’s body can do?”

What I Like About Me! by Allia Zobel Nolan, illustrated by Miki Sakamoto

With rhymes and a fun mirror at the end, this cheerful book invites kids to notice and name what makes them unique—braces, glasses, wheelchairs, wild hair, and more. It gently counters the idea of “normal” by showing difference as something to celebrate.

Talk about: “What makes you different? What makes you you?”

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star: American Sign Language by Annie Kubler

This charming board book pairs the classic lullaby with American Sign Language signs, modeled by sweetly illustrated characters. A beautiful way to introduce ASL, while honoring signing as a valid and expressive language.

Talk about: “How do we use our hands to talk or show something? What other ways can we communicate?”

RHR Picture Book Guide

Talking About Disability with Picture Books

Disability isn't one story—it's millions. Through picture books, we can explore the richness of disabled lives, challenge assumptions, and imagine more inclusive communities. This guide celebrates books where disability is present with pride, not pity—centered in joy, agency, creativity, and care.

These stories help young learners explore big ideas: interdependence, communication, access, movement, friendship, and justice.

Deepening Learning Through Action & Community

Use Respectful Language with Kids

Say “disabled person” or “person with a disability” based on context—and explain why language matters. Practice saying “non-speaking,” “mobility aid,” or “access” naturally in conversation.

Make a Space You Frequent More Accessible

Add visual labels, quiet zones, sensory play stations, or flexible seating. Let kids help brainstorm ways to make a space “welcoming for everyone.”

Include Disability in Everyday Conversations

Not just during lessons—point out ramps, signs in braille, ASL interpreters on TV, adaptive swings, etc. Ask, “How is this helping someone?”

Practice Asking & Listening

Role-play respectful curiosity: “Hi, I noticed you use something I don’t know about. Can I ask what it does?” **Emphasize consent:** not everyone has to answer, and that’s okay.

Participate in Local Inclusion Efforts

Attend a sensory-friendly event, advocate for inclusive playground equipment, or help make library storytime more accessible.

Other Activity Ideas

- **Who Does it Help?**: Look at pictures of everyday tools or devices that help people—glasses, headphones, ramps, spoons, walkers. Match them to what they help with. (printable activity in the back)
- **City Redesign**: Inspired by We Move Together or My City Speaks
 - Draw a playground, classroom, or park that's welcoming to everyone
 - Build an inclusive space with blocks, Legos, or recyclables
 - Label features like “quiet zone,” “ramp,” “signs in Braille,” “seating for all sizes,” etc.
 - **Prompt**: “What would YOU want if you used a wheelchair or couldn't speak out loud?”
- **Sign Language Practice**: Learn to introduce yourself in ASL.
- **Story Extensions**: Write or draw a new scene with a favorite character doing something joyful in their community.
- **Accessibility Scavenger Hunt**: Look around your school, library, or neighborhood for things that help different people access a space. Make a list or draw what you find! *Printable in back*. Look for:
 - Ramps or elevators
 - Braille signs or tactile buttons
 - Automatic doors
 - Captioned screens
 - Wide walkways
 - Quiet spaces
 - Grab bars
 - Sensory tools (fidgets, weighted lap pads)
- **Discussion Prompt**: “What else could we add to make this place even more welcoming?”

Picture Book Picks & Talking Points

We Move Together by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, & Eduardo Trejos

A vibrant and radical book about disability justice, collective care, and building accessible communities. With energetic illustrations and real-world vocabulary, this story invites kids to think beyond individual inclusion and toward systemic change.

Talk about: “What does it mean to move together? What helps make a space fair for everyone?”

King for a Day by Rukhsana Khan, illustrated by Christiane Krömer

During Pakistan’s Basant kite festival, Malik—a skilled kite flier who uses a wheelchair—defeats a neighborhood bully and helps a younger child feel seen. Malik’s disability is present but not a plot point, modeling natural, respectful representation.

Talk about: “What makes Malik a strong character? What are different kinds of strength?”

I Will Dance by Nancy Bo Flood, illustrated by Julianna Swaney

Eva dreams of dancing on stage, and with the help of a supportive community and inclusive dance program, she does. Based on a true story, this lyrical book emphasizes self-expression, art, and determination.

Talk about: “What does dancing mean to Eva? What helps her feel free?”

A Day With No Words by Tiffany Hammond, illustrated by Kate Cosgrove

Narrated by a Black autistic boy, this book invites readers into a day where communication happens without spoken words. It powerfully normalizes AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) and celebrates neurodivergent family life.

Talk about: “What are all the ways people can talk to each other?”

My Friend Isabelle by Eliza Woloson, illustrated Bryan Gough

This gentle, straightforward story shows a friendship between two preschoolers—one with Down syndrome, one without. It introduces difference in a warm, non-lesson-y way that emphasizes connection.

Talk about: “What do these friends enjoy doing together? How are they alike and different?”

Can Bears Ski? by Raymond Antrobus, illustrated by Polly Dunbar

A poetic, metaphor-rich story about a young bear who is Deaf and learning how to communicate and thrive. Written by a Deaf poet, it blends whimsy with profound representation of Deaf experience.

Talk about: “What helps the bear understand the world? What helps you?”

Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You by Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Rafael López

A vibrant book where kids introduce themselves and their disabilities proudly—diabetes, ADHD, autism, asthma, and more. Encourages questions, curiosity, and self-acceptance.

Talk about: “Why is it okay to ask questions? What’s a respectful way to learn about someone?”

My City Speaks by Darren Lebeuf, illustrated by Ashley Barron

Told from the perspective of a blind child, this poetic book takes readers on a sensory-rich city adventure. With textured cut-paper illustrations and layered language, it shows that we don’t all experience the world the same way—but every way is valid.

Talk about: “How does the city feel or sound? What senses do you use to explore?”

Not So Different by Shane Burcaw

With humor and honesty, Shane answers kids’ common (and awkward) questions about life with spinal muscular atrophy. A great entry point to disability awareness for curious kids and an easy way to model respectful dialogue.

Talk about: “What’s a question you’ve had before? Why is it important to ask and listen kindly?”

RHR Graphic Novel Guide

Talking About Disability Through Comics & Graphic Novels

Comics and graphic novels give readers a front-row seat to life through someone else's eyes—and sometimes ears, brain, or body. Through accessible storytelling, sharp visuals, and powerful voice, these stories reflect what it means to be disabled, neurodivergent, or "different" in a world that often expects sameness.

This collection centers authentic representation and creates entry points for empathy, self-reflection, and conversation.

Deepening Learning Through Action & Community

Fan Con for Everyone

Inspired by Stars in Their Eyes

Design your own inclusive fan convention. Think about:

- What panels or guests would you feature?
- What accessibility features would you build in? (quiet rooms, captions, ramps, sensory kits?)
- Who do you want to feel welcome?

Draw it, write about it, or present it.

Neurodivergent Needs Bingo

Inspired by My Brain Is Different and Sensory

Create a bingo board with things like:

- "Needs movement breaks"
- "Has strong reactions to sounds"
- "Learns better with pictures"
- "Zones out but still listens"

Kids mark what applies to them, then compare:

"We're all different—and that's normal!"

"How can we support one another?"

Disability Doesn't Mean Sidekick

Inspired by Metaphase and El Deafo

Create a superhero version of yourself—what makes you powerful?

Include:

Tools you use (real or imagined)

Things people underestimate about you

What your disability/neurodivergence helps you notice, feel, or understand differently

"Ask Me First" Poster Project

Inspired by Just Ask! and Sensory

Create classroom or home posters with:

- “What helps me learn best”
- “What I wish people understood”
- “How I like to communicate”
- “What not to assume about me”

These can be displayed or kept private to build community trust.

GN Picks & Talking Points

El Deafo by Cece Bell (Ages 8+)

Cece shares her experience growing up Deaf with humor, honesty, and heart. Her phonic ear gives her superpowers—but it also sets her apart. This graphic memoir helps kids understand Deaf culture, hearing aids, and the journey to self-acceptance.

Talk about: “What makes Cece feel powerful? What makes her feel left out?”

Sensory: Life on the Spectrum edited by Bex Ollerton (Ages 12+)

A collection of short comics by autistic creators, offering nuanced, personal glimpses into sensory processing, relationships, and identity. Perfect for building understanding from lived experience.

Talk about: “Which comic felt familiar or surprising? What did you learn about autism you didn’t know before?”

Stars in Their Eyes by Jessica Walton, illustrated by Aśka (12+)

Maisie is a prosthesis-using teen attending her first fan convention, where she finds solidarity in disability, queerness, and fandom. Joyful, casually inclusive, and affirming.

Talk about: “Why does Maisie want to see someone like her on stage? How does that help her feel seen?”

Metaphase by Chip Reece (Ages 8+)

Ollie, a boy with Down syndrome, wants to be a superhero like his dad. This high-action, heartfelt comic challenges stereotypes and shows that everyone can be powerful.

Talk about: “What makes someone a hero? How does Ollie’s story challenge what others expect of him?”

My Brain Is Different: Stories of ADHD and Other Developmental Disorders by Monzusu (Ages 12+)

Manga-style stories drawn from real interviews with neurodivergent teens. Honest, validating, and full of insight into how different brains experience the world.

Talk about: “How do the characters learn to understand themselves? What helps them succeed?”

Mooncakes by Suzanne Walker, illustrated by Wendy Xu (12+)

Nova is a hard-of-hearing teen witch; Tam is a nonbinary werewolf. Together, they explore love, magic, identity, and chosen family. A quiet revolution in casual rep.

Talk about: “What does inclusion look like in fantasy worlds? How do Nova and Tam support each other?”

Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer by Gillian Goerz (Ages 8+)

A witty, character-driven mystery featuring Shirley, a brilliant, likely neurodivergent kid whose differences make her a keen observer—and a complicated friend.

Talk about: “What makes Shirley a good detective? How do she and Jamila learn to understand each other?”

RHR Middle Grade Guide

Talking About Disability with Middle Grade Novels

Middle grade readers are ready to dig into identity, justice, history, and power—and these books deliver. They feature disabled characters not as metaphors or sidekicks, but as full, complex protagonists who take up space, ask questions, and speak truth.

This guide encourages readers to reflect, discuss, and imagine a more inclusive world—starting in their own communities.

Actionable Steps for Middle Grades

Neurodivergent Detective Challenge

Inspired by The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family

- Create your own mystery with clues that use different ways of noticing:
- Sensory clues (sounds, textures, smells)
- Patterns others might miss
- Emotional or social insights

Think about how different brains might solve the same mystery in different ways!

Silent Conversation Practice

Inspired by Show Me a Sign

Practice:

- Spelling your name in fingerspelling
- Having a “no talking” conversation using paper, drawings, or gesture
- Exploring the history of Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language (MVSL) and its impact on Deaf culture

Reflection Prompt: “How did it feel to communicate without speaking? What worked? What didn’t?”

Roll With It Recipe Remix

Inspired by Roll With It

Choose a favorite recipe—or create your own—and redesign it to be:

- More accessible (e.g., visual instructions, simple steps, adaptive tools)
- More inclusive (allergen-aware, sensory-friendly, etc.)
- Draw or write it out, and share with others. If possible, make and share the treat!

“This Is Me” Accessibility Profile

Inspired by A Blind Guide to Stinkville

Create a one-pager about how you navigate the world. Include:

- How you learn best
- What helps you feel comfortable
- What makes things harder—and how others can help

This is great for self-reflection and building classroom trust and accessibility awareness.

Write a Letter for Change

Advocacy in Action: Making a Space More Accessible

Inspired by characters like Addie (A Kind of Spark) and Ellie (Roll With It), this activity invites kids to notice where access is lacking—and then speak up to help fix it.

Step 1: Investigate

Walk around your school, library, park, or other community space. Ask:

- Can everyone get in? (stairs vs. ramps, automatic doors?)
- Are signs easy to read or available in Braille or symbols?
- Are there quiet areas for people who need breaks from noise?
- Are chairs, tables, or bathrooms accessible to all bodies?
- Make a list of what works—and what doesn’t.

Step 2: Listen and Share

Before you write your letter, talk to someone who knows what it feels like when a space isn’t accessible.

That could be:

- A disabled family member, friend, or neighbor
- A classmate who uses different tools to learn or move
- A guest speaker or video clip from a disabled activist or creator

Ask questions like:

- “What makes a space feel welcoming to you?”
- “Have you ever been left out because of how a place was built or organized?”
- “What do you wish more people noticed or changed?”

Remember: you’re here to listen, not to fix or speak over. Say thank you, and don’t share their story without permission.

If no one is available to talk with directly, you can:

- Watch or read a short story, blog, or video by a disabled person (I can help you find one!)
- Imagine how one of the book characters you read about might answer these questions

Step 3: Plan Your Letter

Choose who to write to:

- A school principal or librarian
- A parks department
- A city council member or local business owner

Use this outline:

- Introduce yourself and explain why you're writing
- Describe the problem: what makes the space hard to use?
- Explain why it matters (share a personal connection or big idea)
- Offer a solution (be specific and kind!)
- Thank them for listening and considering your idea

Optional Prompts:

- “If someone used a wheelchair or walker, could they get in easily?”
- “What would make this space better for people with sensory sensitivities?”
- “How would it feel to be left out because of how a place is built?”

Example Opening:

Dear (head librarian),

My name is Jordan, and I'm in 5th grade. I'm writing to ask if we can make the library more welcoming to kids who use wheelchairs. Right now, the reading corner has bean bags and small stools, but there's no space for someone using a chair or walker to sit with the group...

Middle Grade Picks & Talking Points

A Kind of Spark by Elle McNicoll

Addie is an autistic girl who learns about the Scottish witch trials and fights to create a memorial in her village. Her advocacy is fueled by her own experience with misunderstanding and exclusion.

Talk about: “What does Addie’s spark represent? How does her neurodivergence help her notice things others miss?”

The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family by Sarah Kapit

Lara and Caroline, both autistic, start a detective agency that tests their communication styles, boundaries, and teamwork. This warm family story explores sibling relationships and the richness of neurodivergent experience.

Talk about: “What makes Lara and Caroline different from each other—and how do they learn to understand each other better?”

Show Me a Sign by Ann Clare LeZotte

Mary, a Deaf girl in an 1805 signing community, must confront ableism when an outsider arrives to study her—and ends up treating her as less than human. A powerful look at language, autonomy, and colonialism.

Talk about: “What does sign language mean to Mary? Why is being studied without consent dangerous?”

Roll With It by Jamie Sumner

Ellie, a wheelchair user and aspiring baker, faces a new town, a cramped trailer, and a fierce longing for independence. She navigates her world with humor and strength, even when it’s not built for her.

Talk about: “What helps Ellie stay strong? What needs to change to make the world better for kids like her?”

A Blind Guide to Stinkville by Beth Vrabel

Alice, who is legally blind and has albinism, moves to a new town and enters an essay contest to show that she’s capable and independent. This story blends self-discovery, friendship, and honest disability representation.

Talk about: “What does Alice learn about herself? Why is it important that people believe her story?”

RHR Young Adult Guide

Talking About Disability with YA Fiction & Memoir

YA readers are ready for complex, intersectional stories that challenge stereotypes and confront ableism head-on. These books lift up disabled voices and experiences—from memoir to urban fantasy—while exploring themes of family, identity, trauma, and empowerment.

Actionable Steps for Middle Grades

Write Your Own Disability Story or Memoir Excerpt

Inspired by Unsinkable

Encourage teens to write about their own or a family member's experience with disability, identity, or resilience. This can be a poem, journal entry, or memoir excerpt.

Advocacy Letter or Social Media Campaign

Inspired by Disability Visibility

Teens draft letters or social media posts advocating for:

- More inclusive policies at school/work
- Accessibility improvements in their community
- Increased representation of disabled people in media
- Encourage respectful, clear, and personal messaging.

Create a Character with a Disability for a Story or Comic

Inspired by Hellwatch

Write or draw an original character with a disability or neurodivergence. Think about:

How their disability shapes but doesn't define them

Their strengths, challenges, and personality

How they navigate their world and relationships

Disability Culture Exploration Project

Inspired by Disability Visibility

Research a disability culture, activist group, or historical figure in disability rights.

Present your findings creatively: a video, art piece, poem, or presentation.

Host or Join a Discussion Group on Disability & Identity

Encourage teens to find or start a book club, online forum, or school group focused on disability representation in media, ableism, and activism.

YA Picks & Talking Points

Unsinkable by Jessica Long with Hannah Long

A memoir of a Paralympian's journey from orphan to elite athlete, facing surgeries, trauma, and identity questions. An inspiring portrait of resilience and ambition.

Talk about: "How does Jessica define herself beyond her disability? What role does identity play in her journey?"

Give Me a Sign by Anna Sortino

Lilah navigates Deaf culture, microaggressions, and social anxiety while reconnecting with her community at camp. A nuanced look at Deaf identity and belonging.

Talk about: "What are some challenges Lilah faces as a Deaf teen? How does her community support her?"

Disability Visibility (Adapted for YA) edited by Alice Wong

First-person essays explore ableism, pride, identity, and systemic barriers. An essential anthology for understanding disability culture and activism.

Talk about: "What did you learn about disability culture? How can visibility lead to change?"

Hellwatch by Larime Taylor

Ester, a teen with arthrogryposis, battles demons in a dark urban fantasy world. The novel blends horror with authentic disability representation and humor.

Talk about: "How does Ester's disability shape her identity and powers? What makes her story unique in fantasy?"

Adult Picks & Talking Points

Engaging with Disability in Adult Literature and Memoir

These books open windows into disabled lives with nuance, honesty, humor, and vulnerability. They confront internalized ableism, social stigma, accessibility, and identity while celebrating resilience, community, and beauty in lived experience.

Activities and Actionable Steps for Middle Grades

Reflective Journaling or Essay Writing

Inspired by Sitting Pretty and Easy Beauty

Write about your own assumptions or experiences related to disability. Possible prompts:

- When have I noticed ableism in myself or others?
- How do I define beauty and worth in bodies, including disabled bodies?
- What does resilience look like in my life or community?

Amplify Disabled Voices

Inspired by Disability Visibility

Commit to following, supporting, and sharing work by disabled creators, activists, and artists on social media or in your community.

Accessibility Audit and Advocacy

Inspired by themes across the guide

Assess your workplace, home, or local spaces for accessibility. Identify barriers and contact responsible parties with suggestions (similar to the letter-writing activity for middle grade).

Join or Start a Disability Justice Group or Book Club

Engage in community discussions focused on disability rights, culture, and representation.

Educate Yourself and Others on Intersectionality and Disability Justice

Read about how race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect with disability. Share what you learn in conversations or workshops.

RHR Adult Guide

Sitting Pretty by Rebekah Taussig

Sharp, witty essays that challenge stereotypes about disability, chronic pain, and body politics. Taussig blends humor and critical insight to dismantle ableism and reclaim agency.

Reflect on: “How does Taussig use humor to confront serious issues? What assumptions about disabled bodies did you notice in yourself?”

Disability Visibility edited by Alice Wong

A seminal anthology giving voice to the multiplicity of disability experiences. Essays cover activism, art, joy, trauma, and systemic barriers, centering intersectionality and pride.

Reflect on: “Which essay moved you the most? How does disability culture shape identity and activism?”

Easy Beauty by Chloé Cooper Jones

A lyrical memoir exploring beauty, agency, and disabled embodiment across landscapes and cultures. It asks how society’s beauty standards exclude and harm disabled people.

Reflect on: “How do societal ideas of beauty affect disabled people? What does ‘living beautifully’ mean to you?”

Deaf Sentence by David Lodge

A tender, literary novel about aging, hearing loss, and family connection. The author’s Deaf perspective illuminates the emotional texture of communication and isolation.

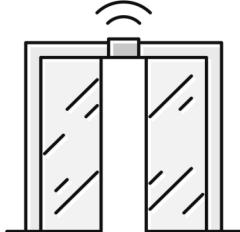
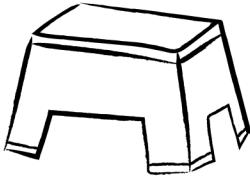
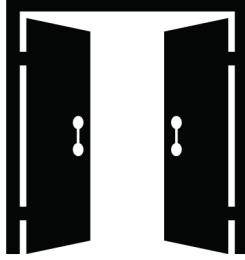
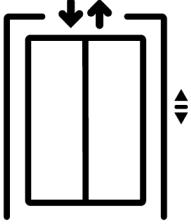
Reflect on: “How does the experience of hearing loss shape relationships? What moments of connection stood out to you?”

Borderline by Mishell Baker

Urban fantasy featuring a leg amputee with borderline personality disorder. Disability and mental health are integrated authentically in a story about survival and healing.

Reflect on: “How does this story challenge common tropes about disability and mental health? What strengths does Millie show?”

Accessibility Scavenger Hunt

 <p>Accessible Ramps</p>	 <p>Brail Sign</p>	 <p>Automatic Doors</p>
 <p>Handicap Stalls</p>	 <p>Stepstools</p>	 <p>Handicap Parking</p>
 <p>Wide Doors and Hallways</p>	 <p>QUIET-ZONE</p>	 <p>Elevators</p>
 <p>Closed Captioning and Audio Description for Videos</p>	 <p>Accessible Playground Equipment</p>	 <p>Sensory Warning</p>

Activity: How Does this Help?

Accessibility is what makes places, tools, and activities usable for everyone.

Sometimes that means ramps or braille signs. Sometimes it means noise-cancelling headphones, elevators, or even visual schedules. Accessibility isn't just about disability—it's about making the world fair, welcoming, and safe for all kinds of people.

In this activity, we'll look at pictures of different tools and features that help people take part in everyday life. Some you might see all the time, and some you might never have noticed before!

This activity builds:

- Self-awareness (understanding your own needs)
- Communication (how to explain those needs)
- Empathy (understanding that others may need different things)

Materials:

- Printable cards
- Scissors
- Optional: Paper to glue down the cards too and glue stick

Instructions

1. Print out the pictures and cut them out.
2. Look through the pictures. Take your time—some things might be easy to recognize, others might take a guess.
3. Talk about what each item is and who it might help. Try to name:
 - a. What the tool is or does
 - b. What kind of access need it supports (mobility, sensory, communication, etc.)
4. Sort the pictures. You can sort them into groups like:
 - a. “Helps with movement”
 - b. “Helps with seeing or hearing”
 - c. “Helps with understanding or calming down”
 - d. “Not sure—let’s discuss!”
5. Reflect. Ask:
 - a. Have you seen any of these in real life?
 - b. Do you think your home, school, or library has enough of them?
 - c. Can you think of something else that would help someone participate?



My Unique Self

Everyone experiences the world through their senses — things we see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. For some people, especially autistic or neurodivergent kids, certain sensory experiences can feel really good or really overwhelming. This activity helps kids reflect on how their senses work, what helps them feel comfortable, and what makes them feel like themselves.

This activity builds:

- Self-awareness (understanding your own needs)
- Communication (how to explain those needs)
- Empathy (understanding that others may need different things)

Materials:

- Paper (folded into three sections)
- Writing or coloring supplies
- Optional: Template + scissors and glue

Use the page to draw, write, or talk about:

- **Things I Like** – sensory things that feel good
- **Things That Are Hard** – sensory experiences that are uncomfortable
- **Things That Help Me** – strategies or supports that make things easier (like noise-cancelling headphones, taking breaks, hugging a stuffed animal, having space)

Encourage honesty, creativity, and self-kindness. There are no wrong answers!



Things I Like

Things That are Hard

Things That Help Me

