

Books for Children

Stories for All Children: The Use of Literature in Inclusive Early Childhood Classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

According to the *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2003), more than two million young children with disabilities between the ages of birth and 8 years are being served in early childhood education programs in the United States (Bowe, 2004). Researchers posit that few curricula have been empirically validated, and no one curriculum choice has emerged as superior to all others for use in inclusive early childhood education settings (Bowe, 2004). In concluding a study of over one hundred programs, Gordon and Bryant recommend selecting resources that respond to a child holistically, rather than curricula that respond to a child's unique needs. Thus, effective programs provide opportunities for learning in language, cognition, social/emotional, and fine and gross motor development. Well-chosen literature can support development in each of these areas through embedded instruction (Bowe, 2004).

WHAT IS EMBEDDING?

Embedding is the insertion of specialized instruction into activities in which a child engages during the normal course of literature-based (and other) activities (Bowe, 2003). How then can embedding be used in literature-based activities? In the context of storytime and similar settings, young children with special needs are given opportunities to practice skills that are related to the individual goals and objectives found within their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Adults facilitate this when they expand, modify, or adapt literature-based activities while keeping these naturally occurring, non-

disruptive, and meaningful to all children (Bowe, 2004; Bricker et al., 1998).

Bowe (2004) suggests that the key to and first step in embedding is observation. Observation not only clarifies what is happening in an early childhood education setting, but it also provides a mechanism to identify new opportunities for literature sharing and learning. For adults, observation affords a way to identify children's strengths, preferences, and challenges and to use information to identify IEP goals and objectives and activities for each child. For children, it supports skill development of all kinds and helps to build predictability related to storytime and other literature-related activities.

After careful observation and formalization of goals and objectives, methods for achieving these can be selected. These methods may include such things as verbal guidance, performance cues, and adaptations (Bowe, 2004). For example, Kiria, a 4-year-old child with special needs, has several IEP goals that may be met during storytime.

Sample receptive language goal: Kiria will increase her receptive language skills in order to be successful at prereadiness tasks by meeting three of four objectives with an 80% or higher success rate.

Sample receptive language objective: At storytime, Kiria will demonstrate an understanding of colors (e.g., red, yellow, blue, green) by correctly pointing to or showing objects four out of five times in the story.

Similar objectives could also be established for recognition of shapes, numbers, letters, and other basic concepts, depending on the materials being shared and a child's specific IEP goals. To facilitate meeting goals, adults can use age and developmentally appropriate words liberally and ask all children questions or provide directives such as: "Who can find the red ball in the picture?" or "Kiria, now it is your turn. Show me the red ball with your pointing finger." If a child is unable

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or reluctant to respond, verbal and/or visual prompts can be used. Such prompts alert children that certain behaviors are expected at storytime. A teacher can also model the desired response and then give a child the chance to repeat it. The key to authentic programming and effective embedding is to provide opportunities for all children to take part in an exercise in naturally occurring ways.

Sample communication goal: Kiria will develop the following communication skill in order to successfully interact with peers and adults by meeting three of the four objectives with 80% or higher success rate.

Sample communication objective: At story time, Kiria will make eye contact with the teacher when responding to a question or a request four out of five times.

Similar objectives could focus on appropriate speech volume level, apposite signing, or other responses typically used in the storytime setting. For a child who is not yet able to respond, the objective might entail acknowledging in very specific ways peers or teachers when being spoken to during a story time. Thus, Kiria might be verbally cued to “look at me” or “look at Tonia.” Children who consistently turn away when speaking or when being spoken to may additionally be physically directed by signing, quiet verbal cues, and/or gently guiding their head until eye contact is made. Teachers may change position in the group when responding to a variety of children or seat a struggling child closer, so that cues can be more easily accessible to the child. In this way, the normal rhythm of storytime activity is not disturbed.

Sample social skill goal: Kiria will demonstrate the understanding of social skill in order to be accepted in a variety of environments by meeting three of the four objectives with an 80% or higher success rate.

Sample social skill objective: At storytime, Kiria will demonstrate knowledge of her own personal space and that of her peers by maintaining appropriate social space from peers for 3 to 5 minutes.

Related goals might contain such things as not engaging in uninvited touching during storytime, taking turns appropriately, and participating in specific group activities. Performance cues may be used to help children remember that certain behaviors are expected (e.g., keeping hands to themselves; waiting until it is their turn to speak; staying seated; or even learning to dance or move within a given space). Visual prompts and cues can aid

children in subtle ways. For example, “Find your place” can be played by all children when symbols, names, or photocopies of illustrations from a book designate seating before a story begins. “Dancing circles” can be identified by a teacher and/or by children before beginning a storytime activity that requires less well-defined use of space. By making such activities a game and using them intermittently or only until children have mastered personal space tasks, no child is singled out and all children have an opportunity to review or learn personal space rules in storytime settings.

Effective literature-based activities provide opportunities for all children to thrive and learn. As such, children with special needs are treated first and foremost as children. Strategies for embedding IEP goals and objectives in literature-based activities are best driven by this philosophy.

Below are some currently released books. Each of these can be used as a catalyst for exciting, inclusive storytime and individual reading experiences for all children.

Baker, Keith. *Quack and Count*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Children’s Books, 2003. 24 pp., \$6.95. Ages 6 months to 3 years.

Slip, slide, leap, and dive with a family of seven zany ducklings as they get ready to fly for the first time. A perfect resource for practicing numerals, sequencing, and counting. Learning about the number seven has never been more fun!

Banks, Kate. *Mama’s Coming Home*. Tomek Bogacki, illustrator. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2003. 32 pp., \$16.00. Ages 3 to 6 years.

“Mama’s coming home,” announces blue-haired, stay at home Papa. With this declaration, the family spins into motion. Amid the dog, cat, and baby, the boys pitch in to help prepare dinner and straighten the house, while across the city Mama closes up the shop and heads for the subway. Clever illustrations and rhythmic text capture the spirit of activity and anticipation as the family reunites. Children will delight in sharing the celebration of this important everyday homecoming.

Boynton, Sandra. *Fuzzy, Fuzzy, Fuzzy. A Touch, Scratch, and Tickle Book*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children’s Books, 2003. 12 pp., \$11.95. Ages birth to 3 years.

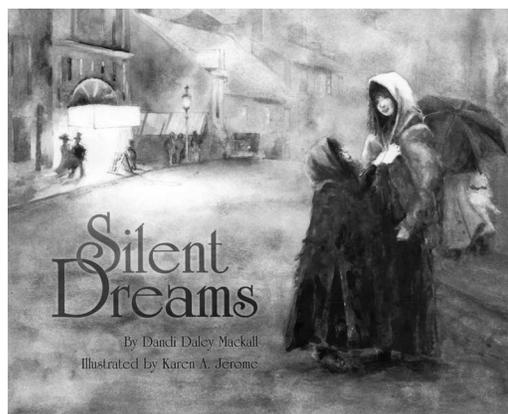
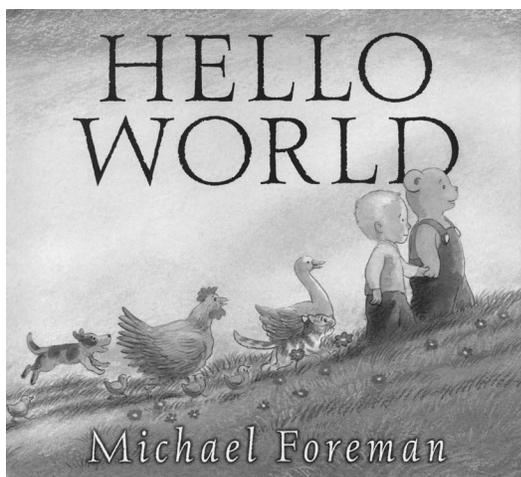
What toddler could resist a cow with blue hair and a fluffy pink nose, a pig with shiny green sunglasses, or even a dog with rough paw pads? Sandra Boynton's newest book invites children to giggle through an interactive text that teaches textures. This tiny treasure is sure to be requested over and over again. In fact, the last page of the book provides a way for children to ask for a repeat reading of the story.

Child, Lauren. *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato.* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2003. 32 pp., \$6.99. Ages 4 to 6 years.

Lola is a very fussy eater. She will not eat her carrots (until her clever brother Charlie reveals that they are orange twiglets from Jupiter). She will not eat her mashed potatoes (until Charlie explains that they are cloud fluffs from the pointiest peaks of Mount Fuji). But most of all, Lola will never, ever eat a tomato—or will she? Mixed media art, overlays of photos, and a pleasant serving of childlike drawing grace each page of this winsome tale.

Foreman, Michael. *Hello, World.* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2003. 48 pp., \$16.99. Ages 2 to 5 years.

As the day begins, Teddy and Baby set out to discover the world beyond the nursery. In a short, rhythmic text, new friends join with them as they journey—kittens, puppies, ducklings, frogs, and chicks. There are trees to climb, fields to cross, and sunny rocks to rest upon. At the top of the hill, at the end of the day, the most thrilling discovery is made. Young readers delight



in the luxurious double gatefold that brings the story to its gentle end.

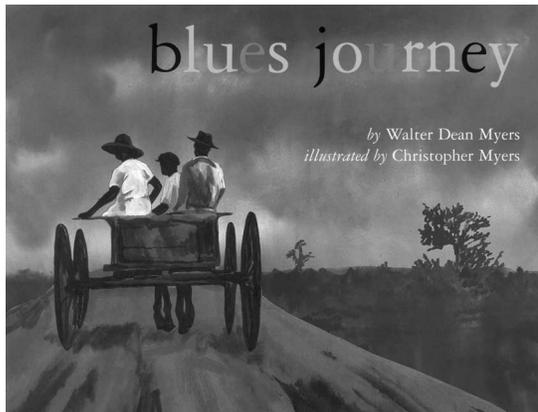
Mackall, Dandi Daley. *Silent Dreams.* Karen Jerome, illustrator. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2003. 32 pp., \$16.00. Ages 5 to 9 years.

When Camilla's parents die during a flu epidemic, she goes to live with a well-intentioned but emotionally fragile aunt. She and Auntie lose their home but find escape and happiness in their weekly visits to the silent movie house. The other down-and-outers help Camilla and her now-mute aunt experience the enchantment of the silent screen. Camilla then shares the silent movie stories with these friends who give her pennies needed to get into the movies. Jerome's soft, impressionistic watercolor illustrations expressively capture the silent movie era, the kindness of community in the face of misfortune, and the curative power of story.

Meiners, Cheri J. *When I Feel Afraid.* Janet Stevens, illustrator. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2003. 35 pp., \$10.95. Ages 4 to 8 years.

Meiners, Cheri J. *Understand and Care.* Janet Stevens, illustrator. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2003. 35 pp., \$10.95. Ages 4 to 8 years.

These two newest titles in the "Learning to Get Along Series" use clear, straightforward, age-appropriate words to introduce concepts such as listening, sharing, empathizing, and following rules. *When I Feel Afraid* teaches basic coping skills to help children handle their real and imagined fears through encouraging words and colorful illustrations. *Understand and Care* builds empa-



thy in children through child-friendly words and supporting illustrations to help young readers understand that other people have feelings similar to and different from theirs.

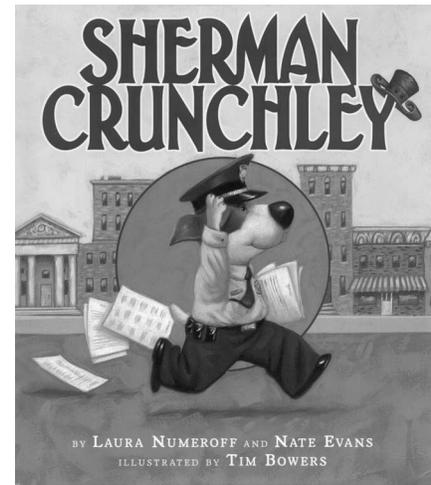
Myers, Walter Dean. *Blues Journey*. Christopher Myers, illustrator. New York: Holiday House, 2003. 48 pp., \$18.95. Ages 5 years and up.

Author Walter Dean Myers conveys his love of lyrics as a poetry form in his compelling introduction to the blues genre. The book begins with a history of the blues, tracing its roots to Africa and describing its evolution in America. Multi-hued blue ink, white paint, and brown paper bag illustrations highlight each verse.

*Pain will push and poke you,
despair will scrape the bone
Pain will push and poke you,
despair will scrape the bone
Misery loves company
blues can live alone.*

Numeroff, Laura Joffe and Evans, Nate. *Sherman Crunchley*. Tim Bowers, illustrator. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2003. 32 pp., \$16.00. Ages 4 to 8 years.

A Crunchley has been the chief of police in Biscuit City for a very long time. In a month, when his father retires, Sherman Crunchley is in line to take his place. He does not want to be police chief. He does not even want to be a police officer. He only does it because it is expected of him. Sherman does not know how to say no. Young readers will empathize and delight as Sherman puts on his thinking hat (he loves all kinds of hats), reads *How to Say No*, special orders a self-improvement video from late-night television, goes to a hypnotist, and finally devises the perfect solution. A great resource for



helping young children understand they can say no to adults.

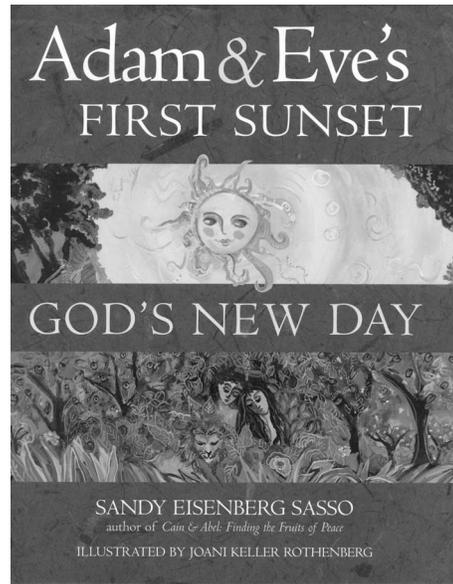
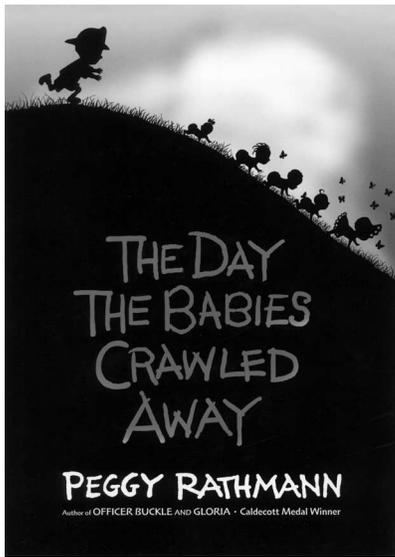
Patricelli, Leslie. *BIG Little*. C.B. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2003. 24 pp., \$6.99. Ages 1 to 3 years.

BIG Little is the third in a series of delightful concept board books by Leslie Patricelli (See also *Quiet LOUD* and *Yummy YUCKY*). Skillful pairings and bright graphics depict the antics of a diaper-clad baby as he explores the world of opposites.

Rathmann, Peggy. *The Day the Babies Crawled Away*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Young Readers Group, 2003. 32 pp., \$16.99. Ages 4 to 8 years.

Oh no, where did they go? It looks like the babies have crawled away during the neighborhood festivities. In an inventive departure from her usual prose and pictures, Rothman engages young readers and their adults in this rollicking rhyming rescue tale. Although adults do not observe the small escapees, a young boy notices, chases them into a thicket, and emerges as the baby-corralling champion.

*Remember how we cheered:
"HIP! HIP! HURRAY!
You've fetched
Our darling babies!
You are our hero—Have some pies!
And we insist
You've won FIRST PRIZE
For saving the day
When the babies crawled away!*



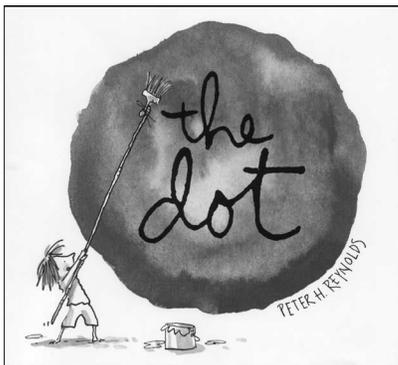
Reynolds, Peter H. *The Dot*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2003. 32 pp., \$14.00. Ages 5 to 8 years.

The Dot is a story for every child who has felt she or he could not draw and for every adult who hoped to encourage children to revel in their own creations. Vashti, a more than slightly discouraged student, proclaims she just cannot draw. Her effectual and wise teacher persuades her to “Just make a mark and see where it takes you.” A simple, single dot on the paper turns into a masterpiece by story’s end. Reynolds’s tale is a testimony to the power of encouragement and acceptance.

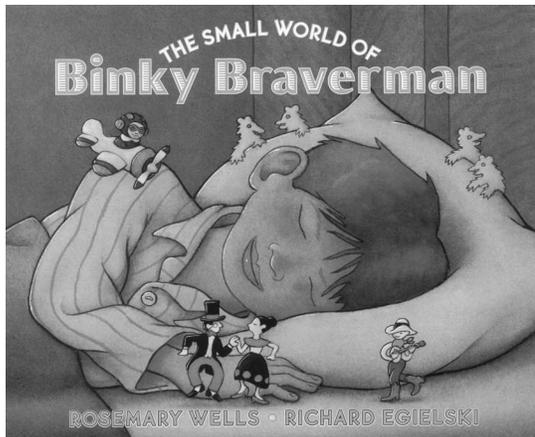
Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg. *Adam and Eve’s First Sunset*. Joani Keller Rothenberg, illustrator. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003. 32 pp., \$17.95. Ages 3 to 6 years.

A lesson in hope and faith—and learning that there are some things in life beyond our control—*Adam and Eve’s First Sunset* is a story for every child who has worried about what comes next. After spending their first day in the Garden of Eden, safe and free of worry, Adam and Eve realize that the sun is slipping away. They yell at the sun, then at each other, and worry that God has abandoned them. Before falling asleep, they pray that morning will come again. When it does, they realize that they are not forsaken and that night is just another of God’s creations.

Weeks, Sarah. *Two Eggs, Please*. Betsy Lewin, illustrator. New York: Simon & Schuster Children’s Books, 2003. 32pp., \$15.95. Ages 3 to 8 years.



Eggs, eggs, eggs—everyone wants eggs! But not all egg orders are the same. Some of the eccentric patrons prefer scrambled, some like fried, and some even want them *raw*. The only thing the hungry customers at this bustling diner seem to have in common is a desire for “TWO EGGS, PLEASE!” A witty look at similarities and differences.



Wells, Rosemary. *The Small World of Binky Braverman*. Richard Egelski, illustrator. New York: Viking/Penguin Group, 2003. 40 pp., \$16.00. Ages 4 to 7 years.

Stanley T. Braverman (a.k.a. Binky) learns that he has inherited all of his 105-year-old aunt Fran’s possessions. His journey to collect his inheritance turns his memories to a time long ago and to a city summer spent with his aunt and uncle. Despite itchy clothes and formidable fraction lessons, Binky’s summer turns from terrible to terrific on the night he spies tiny figures hopping off boxes and jars all over the kitchen: the trademarks have come to life! Together, Binky and his miniature friends—Sam the Banjo Man, the Paprika Twins, and Ike, who pilots a tiny propeller plane—transform a dreary summer into a forever treasured adventure.

REFERENCES

- Bowe, F. (2004). *Early childhood special education: Birth to eight*. (3rd ed.) Clifton Park, NY: Tomson Delmar Learning.
- U.S. Department of Education (2003). *Twenty-fifth annual report to congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington DC: Author.

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