

Getting To Know People with Physical Disabilities

From *ADL Curriculum Connections*

People with disabilities today make up one-fifth of the population in the United States and cut across multiple lines of identity including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and age. Despite the fact that people with disabilities represent the largest demographic group in the nation, the disability community remains largely invisible and continues to face architectural barriers, discriminatory policies, and negative attitudes on a daily basis.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) provides several free, online K-12 lessons that help teachers and students challenge myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities and promote awareness of various forms of disability. The lesson below is an edited version of one published in 2005 in *ADL Curriculum Connections*.¹

Age Range for the Lesson

Grades K-2

Rationale

The purpose of this lesson is to begin to familiarize students with the term disability, and to raise awareness about the experiences of people with physical disabilities. Through children's literature and personal connections with people who have a physical disability, students come to understand the capacity of people with disabilities to engage in activities that all people enjoy. Students will also come to know and recognize the International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities.

Objectives

Students will

- learn the terms disability and physical disability.
- understand and recognize the International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities.
- discover the various abilities of people who use wheelchairs.
- meet a person with a physical disability to learn more about the daily experiences of people living with a disability.
- develop a class book depicting what they learned about people with disabilities.

National Standards

Social Studies themes from National Council for the Social Studies, *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2010).

- ④ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY
- ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS
- ⑧ SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY
- ⑩ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

Materials

- Handout: International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities (Pullout P₄)
- Book: *A Very Special Critter* by Gina and Mercer Mayer,² basic art supplies, construction paper, crayons, markers

Time

20 minutes for Part I, and 1 hour for Part II

Techniques and Skills

Analyzing main ideas from a storybook, communicating ideas in words and drawings, developing a class book, examining and recognizing symbols, formulating questions, large group discussion.

Learning key vocabulary: ability, difference, disability, sign, symbol, wheelchair

Preparation

In order to appropriately define language and guide student discussion on disability issues, it is recommended that teachers carefully read ADL's resource sheets on disability prior to facilitating lessons with students. See the Resources section in the right-hand toolbar of the webpage cited in note 1, below. For example, one of the resource sheet titles is "A Brief History of the Disability Rights Movement."

Notes

1. The full URL where the ADL lesson (and ADL resource sheets) can be found is www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/fall_2005/fall_lesson_1_2005.asp?cc_section=lesson_1
2. Gina Mayer and Mercer Mayer, *A Very Special Critter* (New York: Golden Books, 1995).

Part II (1 hour)

A Visitor to Our Classroom

Invite a local community member who uses a wheelchair or who wears a prosthetic device to visit the class (or take the class to visit them) so that students have a chance to meet a person with a physical disability. In preparation of the visit, develop a list of questions that the students would like to ask about what it is like to live with a physical disability.

Note: If this is not possible, gather non-fiction books about people with disabilities so that students can learn more about what it means to have a physical disability and use a wheelchair (see suggested titles listed below). Refer to the ADL resource “Evaluating Children’s Books That Address Disability” for guidelines on choosing children’s literature on disability.) Suggested non-fiction books:

Apel, Melanie Ann. *Let’s Talk about Being in a Wheelchair*. New York: Powerkids Press, 2002.

Powell, Jillian. *Sam Uses a Wheelchair*. New York: Chelsea House, 2004.

Heelan, Jamee Riggio. *Rolling Along: The Story of Taylor and His Wheelchair*. New York: Peachtree, 2000.

At the conclusion of the visit, invite students to draw pictures and/or write about what they learned about people with physical disabilities. Once the students have completed their pictures and writing, assemble into a class book, and review with students.

Extension Activity A

Invite family members and/or schoolmates to a reading of the class book so that students can share what they have learned about people with disabilities. Assist students in answering any questions that guests may have about people with disabilities.)

Extension Activity B

Organize a field trip to visit a local school or community center that hosts athletic programs for people with physical disabilities. Have students talk to some of the sports players about their disability and how they became involved in the sports program. Visit the International Paralympics Committee website to find local athletic programs for people with physical disabilities.



Wheelchair basketball team.
Photo by Shemesheeshsha/commons.wikimedia.org

Part I (20 minutes)

A Useful Sign and Its Meaning

Hold up the International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities for all students to see. Ask students:

- a. **Have you seen this sign before? Where have you seen this sign?** (Encourage students to initiate the conversation.)
- b. **What does this symbol look like to you?** (Explain that this symbol is a picture of a person who uses a wheelchair, and is for people who are disabled. This sign can be found in parking spaces close to the entrance of a store, or a park, or a school so that people who use wheelchairs or who have trouble walking do not have to travel far to get inside. Sometimes it can be found on seats in buses or trains, and means that those seats are reserved for people with disabilities.)
- c. **What is a disability?** (Explain that a disability is a condition that limits a person in being able to see, hear, walk, or speak. Some people with disabilities may be blind, or deaf, or may use a wheelchair if they are unable to walk.)
- d. **Have you ever met a person with a disability?** (Explain that the class is going to read a book about a student who has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair. Invite students to join you in reading the book *A Very Special Critter* by Gina and Mercer Mayer.)

[Book summary of *A Very Special Critter*: Little Critter is nervous when his teacher announces that a new student who uses a wheelchair will be joining their class. After realizing that the new critter takes part in a lot of the same games and activities as the rest of the class, Little Critter and the other students are happy to have a new friend and classmate.]

Ask some or all of the following discussion questions as you read the story aloud to students:

- a. **Why do you think Little Critter was scared to meet Alex, the new student who uses a wheelchair?**
- b. **Why do you think Alex felt scared on his first day at school?**
- c. **How would you feel if you were the one who was different the way Alex was?**
- d. **How did Little Critter and the other students make Alex feel welcome?**
- e. **What could Alex do using his wheelchair?**
- f. **Was there anything that Alex could do using his wheelchair that surprised you?**
- g. **How did the other students help Alex?**
- h. **How did Alex help the other students?**
- i. **If a person who uses a wheelchair joined our class, how could we make him or her feel welcome? How could we make sure he or she could join us in all of our classroom activities?**



International Symbol of Access to People with Disabilities

