

**CHOOSING AND USING GOOD BOOKS TO HELP CHILDREN
WITH EVERYDAY ISSUES AND TOUGH CHALLENGES**

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Presented by Cheryl Coon, author of *Books to Grow With: A Guide to
Using the Best Children's Fiction for Everyday Issues and Tough Challenges*
(Lutra Press; 2004; ISBN 0-9748025-7-3)

SAMPLE PLAN FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT AN ISSUE USING FICTION BOOKS

TOPIC: DIFFERENCES, PREJUDICE

SAMPLE BOOK CHOICES:

Loudmouth George and the New Neighbors, by Nancy Carlson.

Lerner Publications, 2003. (Ages 4-8)

George is convinced that pigs make the worst possible neighbors. He believes that they're dirty, they eat garbage, and above all, they're different. So when a family of pigs moves in next door, George doesn't want to get to know them. But when all his friends go over to play with the pigs George is left alone. Finally he goes over, planning to stay just for a moment, and ends up having a lot of fun. At the end, when a family of cats moves in, even though George has his hesitations, he agrees to go meet them. Humor helps convey an important message about being different.

The Big Orange Splot, by Daniel Manus Pinkwater.

Scholastic, 1993. (Ages 5-11)

Mr. Plumbean lives on a street where all the houses are the same. One day, after a seagull drops an orange splot on his house, Mr. Plumbean begins to paint his house and ends up making his house a remarkable sight. After that he builds and paints and changes his house in many creative and ingenious ways, all to the disapproval of his neighbors. To their criticism, Mr. Plumbean always replies, "My house is me and I am it. My house is where I like to be and it looks like all my dreams." One by one, the neighbors try out his philosophy and by the end the street is filled with original designs and is the most interesting street around. A story that celebrates the joy of expressing one's individuality.

DISCUSSION: Each of these books offers opportunities to talk about differences.

- **Set the stage** by sharing the setting and the time period in which the story takes place.
- **Read the book together.**
- **Reflect together** on the subject matter of the story, using questions to draw comments from children.

For *Loudmouth George and the New Neighbors*:

- What does George assume about pigs?
- Why doesn't he want to know his new neighbors?
- What does he discover about his new neighbors when he meets them?
- What happens when he hears that more new neighbors – cats – are moving in? Does he do anything different this time? If so, why?

For *The Big Orange Splot*:

- Why are all the houses the same on Mr. Plumbean's street?
 - Why would the people there want to have their houses look the same?
 - Why does Mr. Plumbean decide to change his house?
 - What does he do to it?
 - How does Mr. Plumbean feel about what he's done?
- **Personalize** the stories. (Sometimes it helps to focus on a particular part of the story):

For *Loudmouth George and the New Neighbors*:

- Have you ever assumed something about someone?
- What was it based on?
- Did you ever find out if it was true?
- How did you feel if you were right? Wrong?
- Has anyone ever assumed anything about you, based on something about you? How did that feel?

For *The Big Orange Splot*:

- Would you like your house to look the same as all the houses in your neighborhood? What might be nice about that?
- If you decided to change your house, would your neighbors be surprised?
- What could you do to show how you are different from everyone else?
- Are there ways that you look like everyone else? Ways that you look different? Do you like that?

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

If you are looking for information about specific authors and illustrators, you can get lots of good information from this website: <http://www.childrenslit.com>

If you would like more information about children's literature generally, these websites are excellent:

<http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/index.html>

<http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com>

<http://www.planetesme.com>

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander>

<http://www.carolhurst.com/index.html>

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If you would like recommendations on specific books, these websites offer thoughtful selections:

<http://www.ci.eugene.or.us/Library/staffref/therapy.htm>

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/bibliotherapy.htm>

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/Culture/index.html>

<http://childrenwithdisabilities.ncjrs.org/read.html>

<http://home.earthlink.net/~esmejake/biblink.htm>

http://maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/pub/eres/EDSPC715_MCINTYRE/Biblio.html

<http://www.helpingbooks.lib.oh.us/home.htm>

<http://bibliotherapy.library.oregonstate.edu/>

If you're interested in reading more about the history or philosophy of bibliotherapy, these websites offer lots of good information:

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/winter95/Myracle.html>

http://maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/pub/eres/EDSPC715_MCINTYRE/Biblio.html

<http://www.kellybear.com/TeacherArticles/TeacherTip34.html>

<http://www.childhelper.com>

<http://home.earthlink.net/~esmejake/biblink.htm>

<http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~nrcgt/news/winter97/wintr972.html>

<http://www.helpingbooks.lib.oh.us/links.htm#Bibt>

<http://www.ci.eugene.or.us/Library/staffref/therapy.htm>

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/bibliotherapy.htm>

<http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed436008.html>

http://www.ldonline.org/ld_store/bibliotherapy/eric_digest82.html

<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/Culture/index.html>

<http://childrenwithdisabilities.ncjrs.org/read.html>

If you would like to keep up-to-date on new books on specific topics, I write a monthly newsletter to which you can subscribe, free of charge, with updated book recommendations on a wide variety of themes. You can sign up at:

<http://www.lutrapress.com/newsletter.htm>

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