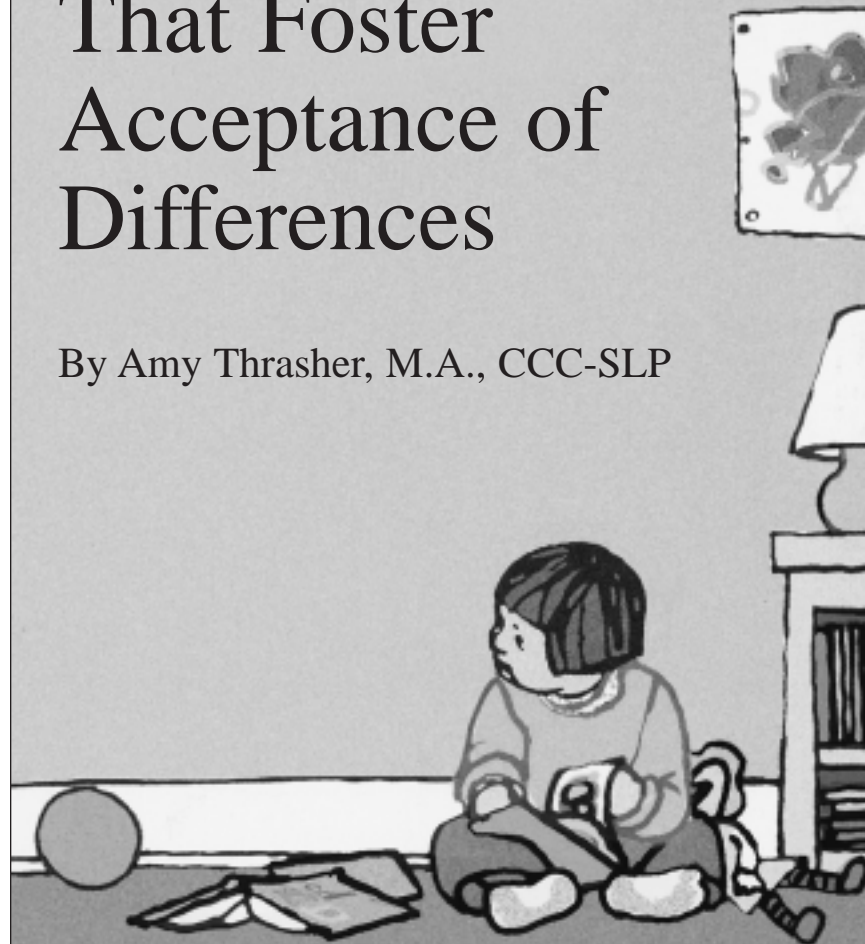


A TEACHER'S GUIDE
to My Friend Isabelle

Classroom Activities
That Foster
Acceptance of
Differences

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The companion guide to
My Friend Isabelle by Eliza Woloson



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INTRODUCTION

Supporting Acceptance of Differences



Charlie's mother says in *My Friend Isabelle*, "...differences are what make the world so great." Teachers in inclusive classrooms have a wonderful opportunity to make the world a more tolerant place by encouraging children to appreciate our many differences. This Teacher's Guide to *My Friend Isabelle*, with preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students in mind, provides ideas and activities designed to support you in creating a classroom environment in which differences are discussed openly, all children are valued, and learning takes place through friendships.

When children grow up in an atmosphere of diversity, they are much less likely to develop biases toward others who seem different from them. This does not mean that children in inclusive classrooms do not notice differences. These children develop a sophisticated understanding of self, of others, and of difference. If their natural curiosity and attempts to understand their world are met with respect, encouragement, honesty, and with words that make sense to them, children will learn to view differences with acceptance.

The teacher is the most effective tool in creating a classroom community in which diversity is discussed and welcomed. By demonstrating genuine appreciation for the special interests and strengths of *every* child, the teacher creates an atmosphere in which individuality is viewed positively. Teachers can encourage acceptance of difference everyday in the classroom by...

- Creating opportunities for *all* children to engage in activities, communicate with each other, and notice each other's strengths;
- Drawing on information provided by a child's family. In talking with families, go behind labels like "Down syndrome" to get deeper impressions of their child's personality. Use the words the family chooses to describe their child.
- Focusing attention on what children do—on their unique abilities—not on how they look or what they wear. For example, "You love to paint, Vanessa," rather than "What pretty braids you have today.";
- Being specific with comments to children when they cooperate, play with a variety of friends, help each other, or jointly solve problems. For example, "You and Jonah are building a very tall tower together," rather than "Good job, boys."

Addressing Comments and Answering Questions

As children begin to understand the concepts of "same" and "different," they use their developing language skills to test their theories of how things work in the world. Their attempts to understand differences are natural learning opportunities. How you respond to questions and comments about differences will help reinforce acceptance of diversity in your classroom. *Here are some hints:*

- Prepare for possible comments and questions. Look at your classroom through the eyes of a child. What might a young child notice as "different"?

- Closely observe interactions among children so you will understand the context or reason for a comment or question.
- Address comments and questions in the moment. Postponing a discussion can cause uncertainty or discomfort.

Not all "questions" sound like questions. Children often comment on what they see as a way to confirm their impressions and theories. *Treat comments like questions.* For example:

In a classroom of 3-year-olds, Ahmed crawls to get around. After watching him for a few moments, Ella states, "Ahmed is a baby." You may not be sure what prompted Ella's comment. *Ask her a sincere, non-judgmental question to find out why she thinks this.* Sometimes, just rephrasing a comment will cause a child to elaborate. "You think Ahmed is a baby." Then, by pausing and looking expectantly yet patiently at Ella for her thoughts, you encourage her to say more about her reasoning. From there, you can continue the open discussion.

You may need to supply information or perspective. Ella's comment reveals that she is working to understand the concept of age. She naturally associates behavior (Ahmed's crawling) with age (babies crawl). If Ahmed crawls to get around the classroom because of mobility issues, while his classmates walk and run, Ella might test her theory that "3-year-olds walk, babies crawl; therefore Ahmed is a baby." One way to respond would be to say, "You and Ahmed are both 3 years old. Ahmed likes to play with other 3-year-olds, but it is hard for him to move sometimes. He crawls to meet his friends."

Reading *My Friend Isabelle* to Your Class

Reading *My Friend Isabelle* to a group of children naturally provokes discussions about differences. Read each page, show the illustration, then pause. Your children will notice the exquisite drawings that supplement the text's meaning. The following activities support children's questions and comments and suggest ways to explore the concepts in the story. Responses to the story from children in my own classroom and strategies that I have used are sprinkled throughout.

Experiences That Correspond with the Story



“Even though we are the same age, we are different.”

When you read this page, many children will naturally hold out their feet for inspection. Try imitating this action, providing a model for the children who do not immediately join in. Draw children into the conversation, who are unlikely to participate verbally in a large group, by pointing out shoe similarities and differences. “Oh, look! Deneeka has flowers on her shoes like you, Tara. Deneeka’s are purple and yours are white.” By connecting two children in the same remark, children begin to see each other in relation to one another. Try incorporating movement, since

some children may not have enough language to participate verbally. When reading this page to my class, I commented, “Thomas has new light-up shoes!” and stomped my foot. Thomas, who doesn’t yet have words to talk about his shoes, imitated me and stomped his foot. I made sure to stress that even though Thomas’ feet are smaller than Tara’s, Thomas and Tara are the same age, like Isabelle and Charlie in the story.

Idea #1: Shoe Store

Create a mini shoe store in your classroom. Collect and set out shoes of all sizes, from baby shoes to Daddy-sized shoes. Include specialized shoes, braces, casts, or orthotics that children can explore. Assist the children in measuring and comparing their foot sizes. You can use a foot measuring device from a shoe store, trace the children’s feet on construction paper, or use a measuring tape or ruler. Outfit your classroom’s dolls with a variety of shoes and ambulatory accessories as well! Have materials such as ace band-a-ges, toilet paper rolls, velcro, and foam packing material available to make ambulatory accessories.

Supporting child interactions:

Encourage your students to act out various shoe store scenarios, for example looking for a particular size or style of shoe. Teachers can assist by prompting children with appropriate words or gestures. Pair children and allow those who are adept at pretend play to model for children who have less experience.

Resources:

You can buy or borrow shoe boxes, shoe horns, foot measuring devices, etc. from local shoe stores. Collect old shoes, boots, ski boots, braces, orthotics, shoe boxes, and more from your students’ families. Check with occupational and physical therapists for items they are no longer using. Tap local orthopedists, clinics, medical supply stores, or hospitals for resources. Check the Lakeshore Learning Materials™ catalog for materials for dolls with differing abilities.

Idea #2: Foot Painting

Cover your classroom floor with sheets of paper from a large roll. Allow the children to stand on the paper, holding an adult's hand so they don't slip, and paint the bottom of one of their feet. To personalize their prints, give them a choice of paint color. Then they can stomp their footprints! When the paint dries, encourage the children to write their names next to their footprints and discuss any differences in size, shape, and paint color.

Supporting child interactions:

If they will tolerate it, allow pairs of children to paint each other's feet. After they have had their foot painting fun, the children can wash their feet in buckets of warm, sudsy water and dry them with towels. While cleaning up, the children, who might not otherwise pair up, will be encouraged to share their excitement over the project.

Special Considerations:

If a child in your class has something different about their feet, this is a natural opportunity to discuss it. All children can participate in these activities, even those with mobility issues, so be creative and seek out opportunities for these differences to be discussed openly. "Lucy has a differently formed foot. She is learning to strap on the braces that help her walk. Maybe you can help her with the velcro straps, Terrence." While some families welcome the opportunity for peers to explore their child's assistive accessories, others might find this discomfoting. Always ask the family and the child for their preferences.



"I am tall. Isabelle is short."

It will take just a moment, but the children will notice that in this illustration, Isabelle is standing on a stool. (All children can relate to feeling small in a grown-up sized world.) Likely, discussions about their own heights will begin. It is important that the teacher sets a tone of acceptance. Indicate that people come in all shapes and sizes, and that all shapes and sizes are valued. Take care not to reinforce societal stereotypes, such as that short or small is somehow inferior.

Idea #1: Body Tracing

To explore height and body shapes, have the children lay down on big paper and trace them with a marker. For added interest, children can be traced striking poses or holding hands with another child. Children love to individualize these images of themselves with markers, collage materials, or their own personal items such as barrettes, shoe laces, and even band-aids!

Supporting child interactions:

The tracings can be cut out and placed on a wall in different groupings of friends on different days. This suggests to the children that they can be friends with *all* members of the class. "Carrie and Alma are buddies on the wall today!" Reinforce the connection by having the pair share classroom responsibilities, such as passing out lunches or watering the plants.

Idea #2: “Look How I’ve Grown!”

A common object in early childhood classrooms, the height chart, takes on more meaning as children explore concepts of size and measurement within the context of this story. **You may have a child in your class who uses a wheelchair or cannot stand up** to be measured. You and the child’s friends can hold a piece of string against the child’s body from head to toe, cut it, then tape the string to the height chart. If you use this string method for one child, use the same method for *all* children.

Supporting child interactions:

Have the children measure one another. Make sure the children know to tell the child being measured that they will be touching them with the string, as unexpected light touches can be unpleasant for many children.

Other ideas to try:

Height, size, and shape differences are easily related to other physical differences. To explore other physical differences, try these ideas:

- Provide a variety of mirrors in the dramatic play section of your classroom and elsewhere.
- Create life-size self-portraits using a variety of skin-toned papers, paints, markers, and collage materials that truly reflect the children’s skin color, eye color, hair color and texture.
- Create a “family pictures” wall. Give each child the opportunity to show and tell their friends about their family in the photos on the wall. In some families, relatives look similar, in others, each person looks unique. A child may point out, “Chen doesn’t look like her mommy. She has black hair but her mom has yellow hair.” Use this opportunity to talk about family differences, and be sure to use the families’ words for these differences.
- Cut out pictures of people of a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and ages from magazines for the children to use in collages.



“I run fast. Isabelle takes her time.”

This page of the story addresses not only ways of moving, but ways of being, which, for children can often seem like the same thing. Many children will excitedly say, “I run fast, too!” One boy in my class, who has very few words, stood up and ran a few steps into our circle, expressing very clearly and proudly that he understood and identified with Charlie. Another child, who has a quiet, observant demeanor, went home and told her mother that we were reading *My Friend Isabelle*. After a moment, she exclaimed, “Isabelle takes her time!” as if to say that she had found a positive image of herself in the character of Isabelle.

Idea #1: “Chase Me!”

“Chase” is one of the earliest interactive games that children of all abilities enjoy, in one form or another. If we focus on what movement *feels* like, rather than racing and competing with each other, we *all* win. Actually being caught is not really the point, but the thrill of movement, pursuit, and interaction can create shared moments of joy between peers who may not otherwise play together. Through the joy of chase, I have seen friendships begin among children who seem to be at very different levels in the classroom. By communicating through movement, children begin to see children of differing abilities as potential play partners.

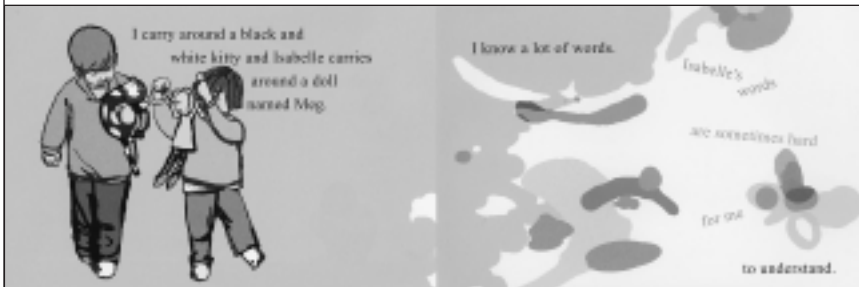
Supporting child interactions:

It often takes a teacher’s suggestive remark about the actions of a child to encourage others to join that child in play. “Look at how fast Conrad runs! Julia, I bet Conrad would like it if you chased

him!” “That’s a slippery slide, Francesca! Watch out, here comes Michael, chasing you down!”

Idea #2: “Move Like Me!”

By holding up visuals and calling out ways to move, you can encourage children to move together in similar ways. Hold up a stop sign, a green light, a checkered flag that says “*fast!*” or a yellow sign that says “*slow!*” Have the children take turns assisting you in calling out the ways of moving. Add silly ways to move, like crab-walking or running while “bicycling” arms. **If a child in your class has limited range of movement**, make the ways that this child moves some of the choices. This will not only give the child a chance to move along with his friends, but will also provide an opportunity for his friends to take his perspective for a moment.



“I know a lot of words. Isabelle’s words are sometimes hard for me to understand.”

The story begins to shift here from addressing physical differences to more abstract differences among people. Young children are just beginning to understand the concepts of words, and the power of communicating through them. This simple text and the illustration help children begin to understand that we are all learning to communicate in our own way. Even though sometimes our friends may be hard to understand, they are trying to tell us something. It may just take a little time and “detective work” to figure it out!

Idea #1: Word Detectives

Fortunately, in our diversifying society, children are being exposed to languages other than their own home language. Children know that “Rosa speaks Spanish and is learning English”; “Anton speaks English *and* German.” Encourage children to be “word detectives,” to keep an ear out for new words heard in their own or other languages, and to seek out clues to their meanings. Keep a list of these words and their definitions posted in your classroom. This ongoing activity will do wonders for your students’ vocabulary and understanding of cultural and linguistic differences and similarities.

Supporting child interactions:

If you have children in your classroom whose “words are sometimes hard to understand,” encourage your students to be “word detectives” and uncover clues as to what their classmates mean. Is their friend pointing at something? Does it sound something *like* a word they know? In this way, the responsibility for communication is on both communicative partners: the speaker and the listener. You’ll find that children become better listeners and more cooperative as they try to understand one another. You’ll be amazed at the empathy that will develop among children. “Leila sounds like she’s going to cry a little. I think she’s hungry. Do you want some crackers, Leila?”

Idea #2: Signed Stories

American Sign Language (ASL) is its own true language, with its own syntax and morphology. If a family member of a child in your classroom is fluent in sign language, or if you know anyone in the Deaf community, it is an eye-opening and engaging experience for the children to see a story told in ASL. Children become absorbed in the movements and expressions that bring the story alive.

Try showing the pictures from *My Friend Isabelle* while it is being signed (voice off). The children might recognize some signs because of their iconicity—they “look like” what they refer to. Then read the book aloud while it is being signed (voice on). Ask the children to describe the different ways in which they experienced the story with and without spoken words.

Hand signs and gestures are frequently used by children whose “words are sometimes hard to understand” or who have trouble understanding spoken words. Have the children pick out a few words from the story and learn the corresponding signs. Hand signs and gestures are frequently used as stepping stones to spoken words!

Supporting child interactions:

Become familiar with the signs that a child in your class uses, and begin to use them with *all* the children during daily routines. Some common signs used with children to augment their speech development are “more,” “all done,” “yes,” “no,” “stop,” and words for activities, such as “eat,” “drink,” “potty,” etc. Ask the child’s family if there is a particular sign language dictionary they use, or if they have pictures that demonstrate the signs. (Some signs are different across regions of the country, and some families may use their own versions of signs/gestures.) You can post these sign pictures along with the written labels in your classroom. Children love learning signs, and if you remind them, “Victor is using his signs and now you know what he is saying,” you’ll find them interacting with Victor more often as they look forward to figuring out what his signs mean.

Idea #3: Sign Names

Create sign names for each child in your class. Sign names are signs that usually incorporate the first letter of a person’s name, plus some unique characteristic of that person. For instance, Audrey has a twinkle in her eyes, so we sign her name “A” by the eye. Typically, sign names are given by people who are Deaf. If

you are unable to have a person from the Deaf community join your class on this day, let the children decide what makes for the most appropriate sign names for each other. Start by pointing out unique qualities that each of the children have. Encourage everyone to contribute to the list. This is a great opportunity to open up a discussion about differences in a natural and positive way. Raul has curly hair, he wears glasses to help him see, he always tells the funniest jokes, and he loves cars. Maybe the person from the Deaf Community or the children will decide to use the “R” hand shape when signing “car” for Raul’s name. The easiest way for children to learn everyone’s name signs and begin to interact using them will be through your “hello song” that recognizes each child.

Resources:

There are a number of attractive sign language books for children out there, including *The Handmade Alphabet* by Laura Rankin. Look for more at your local library.



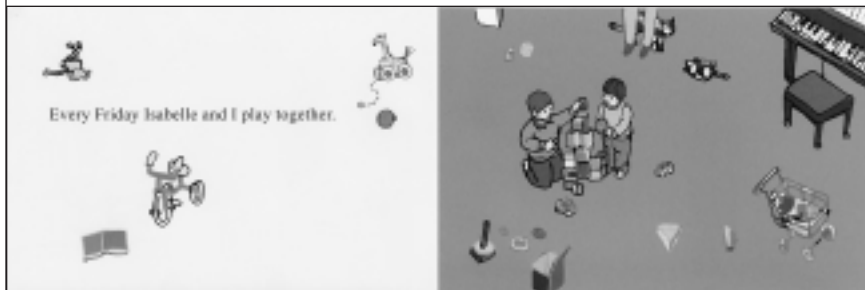
“Mommy says that differences are what make the world so great.”

This is the essential message of the book. Inspire a discussion of differences by posing this thought-provoking question to the children: “What would it be like if we were all the same?”

Idea #1: “I Spy”

Encourage the children to find people in this illustration doing different activities, using different modes of transportation, or

with various physical distinctions. “I spy with my little eye a person riding a unicycle.” Give each child a turn “spying” something. Then ask the children why these differences make the world so great. Record their answers on a poster that they can add to throughout the day, the week, or however long you spend with the book.



“Every Friday Isabelle and I play together.”

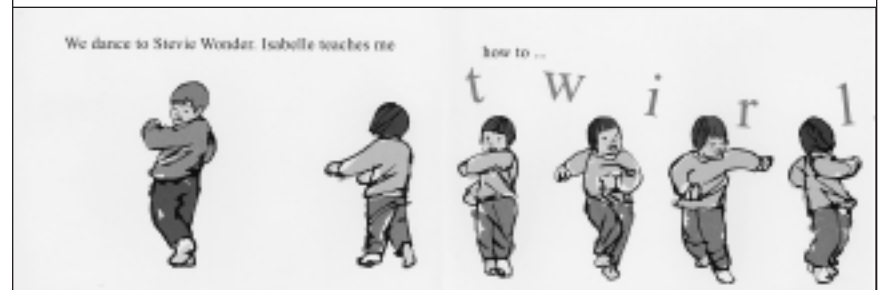
During their early childhood years, children use their developing social-emotional skills to build friendships. Through friendship, children learn from each other and construct meaning together. Reading this page provides an excellent opportunity to talk about friendships. We have all kinds of friendships and special people in our lives. Do the children in your class have a special day with Grandma? Do they have their cousins or neighbors over to play? Do they have playdates with friends? By engaging the children in a conversation about family and friends with whom they play already, you can then begin to talk about playdates among the children in your class. The children will see themselves as potential friends outside of school. “Sandy, if Lena came to your house, what would you like to play with her?”

Supporting child interactions:

Teachers play a vital role in encouraging and supporting parents in arranging playdates for their children. Encourage families of children with disabilities to be proactive in seeking out playdates for their children. Bring up the topic of playdates at drop-off or

pick-up times, at conferences, or home-visits. Discuss how the children interact with each other during class and which children might enjoy a playdate together. Be specific with your suggestions: “I’ve seen Noelle and Carter playing at the sensory table together a lot lately. They might enjoy a playdate that centers around a sandbox.”

Playdates where both families are present, such as at the park, help families understand that their children *do* have things in common, and go a long way to assuage any concerns about differences or behaviors. As an early childhood teacher, you know how much learning takes place within the context of friendships. Spread this important gem of knowledge to the families with whom you work. Create your own playdate tipsheet to post on your family bulletin board, send home, or include in your newsletter.



“We dance to Stevie Wonder. Isabelle teaches me how to twirl.”

Young children love to dance and twirl, and to be recognized for a special movement! When we come to this page during story-book circle, we all take a twirl. It can be very difficult for young children to sit quietly while being read to, so this opportunity for movement, which connects meaningfully to the story, is helpful to me as a teacher! Movement is often very organizing for children; it helps them quiet their bodies so they can focus their attention on the task at hand.

Using Music To Encourage Communication and Interaction

Music in the classroom can be used to enhance understanding, stimulate communication, calm or alert children, ease transitions, and support child interactions. When used just as background noise, music only creates more stimuli for a child to filter through their auditory system. This can cause some children to “tune out”; others may become over-stimulated. But when a child is *engaged* with music, it can help her organize her body and thoughts. Children who have few or no words are often very attuned to music.

The repetitive nature of children’s songs and simple lyrics connected to hand movements provide children with opportunities to associate meaning with words. Melody and rhythm also help children attend to lyrics, and later help them recall and reproduce those words when they begin joining in with songs. One technique that encourages word production is to leave off the last word in a familiar refrain, such as leaving off “boat” when singing the second refrain of “Row, Row, Row Your (Boat.)”

Supporting child interactions:

Children can relate to one another through songs that incorporate hand holding, such as “Ring Around the Rosie” or “London Bridges,” or other physical connection. Other songs can be adapted to increase the amount of child interaction. For instance, children can face each other sitting down and holding hands while rowing and singing, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

Idea #1: Music Jam!

Invite families to send in music that they listen to at home with their children. Dance around the room as each child leads the movement to their own “special” music. Often you will find there are musicians among your students’ families who may be willing to come in and play for the children.

Supporting child interactions:

Record a mixed tape or CD of all the different styles of music that the families share. Lend it out to families or make copies for each family so the children can listen to the music at home and associate each song with a friend from class.

Idea #2: Special Songs

Most children like to be recognized in song and to be imitated by their friends. Songs and activities, like those listed below, give children the opportunity to shine as individuals and show respect to their classmates.

Supporting child interactions:

“Simon Says”—In this game, I always say “Simon says...” and skip the trickery part, which children in this age group don’t usually grasp anyway. Let the children take turns being “Simon.” When it is Theo’s turn, he leads the group for three movements, each time saying, “Theo says...” For children who don’t initially grasp the concept of leading “Simon Says,” I might notice the child’s position or movement and say, “Oh look, Karen says, ‘Put your hands on your knees!’”

“Everybody Do This”—This is a simple song or chant to do in a circle. Ask a child what movement he or she would like the group to do, or, if the child cannot answer that type of question, “catch” the child doing a movement. Then sing and imitate the child’s movement, “Everybody do this, do this, do this. Everybody do this, just like Jackson.”

“Something Special Song”—This song or chant highlights what a child views as special to her. Ask a child what he or she would like to sing about, such as her nail polish, baseball hat, or the kitty on her shirt. Look for the slightest movement from physically challenged children or those with limited language as an indication of what they would like to sing about. “Bella has blue shoes, blue shoes, blue shoes. Bella has blue shoes on today.”

We pretend to go shopping for grapes at the store.
We cry when one of us forgets to share.



***“We pretend to go shopping for grapes at the store.
We cry when one of us forgets to share.”***

Children readily identify with this page on many levels. Grocery shopping is a familiar family activity and they love to re-enact it, with themselves in the “grown-up” role of the shopper, rather than as the passive participant in the shopping cart! In “pretend,” they get to choose what they would like to bring home from the store. But the children also relate to the feelings of frustration that can accompany pretend play, when conflicts over toys or roles occur.

Idea #1: Grocery Store

Because it is such a familiar routine in our society, the dramatic play theme of “Grocery Store” draws children together regardless of gender, experience, or ability. You can increase feelings of belonging among all of the children in your class by including foods that are eaten in their homes. Ask children and families what their family favorites are, write “grocery lists” with the children, and ask families to send in cans or empty boxes to bring authentic cultural and literacy experiences into your dramatic play area. As an added benefit, these realistic props help some children relate to the more abstract ideas involved in pretend play. Real paper bags with familiar logos from the children’s local grocery store can help children make connections between this in-class symbolic representation and their own family shopping experiences.

Supporting child interactions:

All children learn through repetition, and some children need more than others. Set up various play scenarios focused on grocery shopping so children can practice their social skills. By providing a familiar play script, such as “shopping to make a recipe,” you can allow for novelty, since elements like the recipe can change, while the basic play script remains the same for children who need more practice. If at first Michelle needs a lot of assistance in the “grocery store” to pay her friend Marquel, the cashier, for the orange, you can support her and then fade back your assistance day by day as you see her becoming more adept and confident.

Idea #2: Feeling Faces

Children need to identify their own feelings before they can begin to understand the feelings of others. Picture cards of faces depicting various emotions can help some children identify how they are feeling when they don’t have or can’t find the words to express it. While reading *My Friend Isabelle*, pairs of children can take turns pointing to or holding up the “feeling face” card that corresponds to the emotions of Charlie and Isabelle in the book. When you reach the page about crying, you can reflect what the children demonstrate with the picture cards, “Aisha thinks that Isabelle is mad. Conor thinks that Charlie is sad.” Talking about the differences and similarities among these kinds of emotions, and how different people might feel a different emotion in the same situation, helps children begin to understand and accept differences among their friends.

Supporting child interactions:

You can use these feeling faces along with words throughout the day to acknowledge how children are feeling about various situations. Later, the children may begin to use the feeling faces or words to identify each other’s feelings. The children’s awareness of their friends’ feelings will increase, a critical step in the development of empathy. It is appropriate to choose a moment when

things are calm to ask children how they feel when a friend won't share or to ask them about other emotions. Writing down what they say and later reading it back to them is very powerful. In order to include everyone in these discussions, be sure to ask the families of children who are unable to communicate at this level how their children experience and express emotion.



"We drink apple juice and eat Cheerios at the little red table and chairs. We bring our sippy cups together and say 'CHEERS!' Kitty and Meg say 'CHEERS!' too."

Children love the picture of Charlie and Isabelle making their stuffed animal friends, Kitty and Meg, say "Cheers!" They relate to this page because they too eat Cheerios, drink apple juice, and believe that their own special toy or stuffed animal is real.

Idea #1: Fun with Cheerios!

Cheerios are one of the first and favorite finger foods given to young children. They provide tiny hands with lots of practice refining their pincer grasp, necessary for later grasp of utensils, zippers, and pencils. Try out these fun recipes and activities.

Cheerio trail mix—Making this is a great way to explore differences in preference. Out of all the many tasty treats we offered to make trail mix, one four-year-old only wanted the Cheerios and chocolate chips! Other children liked a wider variety in their mix. Charting children's favorite ingredients provides a visual means to understand different preferences. Children love to make food in

the classroom, and when each child has the opportunity to do a step in a recipe, they feel they belong and contribute to the group.

Cheerio necklaces—If you use yarn to string Cheerios, apply tape around one end to make it easier for all children to poke through the holes. Pipecleaners and lanyard string also work well.

Cheerio books—There are counting books available illustrated with Cheerios. Children can match real Cheerios to the picture, count, and eat!

Idea #2: Teddy Bears' Picnic

Children will love to bring their favorite toy or stuffed animal to school for a special toys' tea party or a teddy bears' picnic! Have them write and decorate invitations to their "special friend." Ask families to RSVP by sending in a note or short story including the special object's name, the history of how it came to be the child's favorite, and possibly an adventure that the "carry-around" went on with the child. With these personalized stories, you can help *all* children "show and tell" about their special toys.

Supporting child interactions:

During the tea party or picnic, encourage children to have their special toys converse. Say "Cheers," and pretend to eat like Isabelle and Charlie do. Some children feel safer relating to others through objects first, before relating personally.

Special Considerations:

If you have a child in your class that has a special diet, you can talk frankly about this with the whole class and all the families. The more the children and their families know about their friend's dietary needs, the safer that friend will be. "Peanuts make Jessie feel very, very sick. He likes cream cheese and jelly sandwiches instead of peanutbutter and jelly!"

If a child has a dietary need that is more complicated to explain, such as a gluten-free diet, you can say, “Some breads and foods make Mona feel sick. The grown-ups will check the ingredients and make sure that our snacks are good for her stomach.” Discussing food restrictions and diets during snack time is yet another opportunity to explore our differences in a natural way.

If you have a child in your class who is unable to eat orally, it is likely that the child will have a g-tube (gastrostomy tube) or another feeding apparatus. These can seem intimidating to young children at first because of the simple fear of the unknown combined with fears about bodily mastery during this developmental stage. Be open and honest in explaining what their uses are. “Carmen uses a feeding tube because it is hard for her to swallow. The food goes right to her tummy from the tube through this button.” Children may become confused, and think that the opening created for the g-tube is similar to their bellybutton. Prepare yourself for many questions by asking the child’s family what words they use to explain g-tube feeding. Include anyone who joins your class to assist in g-tube feeding, such as a nurse or assistant, in these discussions with children so that you are consistently explaining it in a simple, positive way.

Supporting child interactions:

Much socialization occurs during snack and meal times, and it is important that children with feeding issues have the opportunity to be with their peers at the table (unless it is otherwise counter-indicated). By giving the child with feeding issues special jobs to do, you can make that child an integral part of socializing at meal times. “Lisa, will you pass out the cups to your friends, please?”



***“We go down the big slide at the park...
We both like to do it ourselves.”***

Open up the discussion by asking about the children’s favorite outdoor activities. Mention that all children like to do things “by themselves,” but sometimes need help. This is an important discussion to have, because although we want to encourage children to help each other, sometimes children take on the role of caregiver to children they perceive as less able. This kind of interaction can interfere with children viewing others as true friends. It is important to emphasize that helping is good, but letting our friends learn how to do things by themselves is another way to help.



“Mommy is right. Life is more fun with friends like Isabelle.”

After reading *My Friend Isabelle* several times and exploring differences and friendships through activities such as those suggested here, involve the whole class in a project that affirms “Life is more fun with all of my many friends!” Make a collage of the children’s drawn pictures, their photos, or their handprints using the skin tones of each child. Create a book about the members of the class, recording what the children say they like about each child. Ask the children what special activity they would like to do with all of their friends. Display these projects proudly in your classroom for families and children to enjoy. Revisit these whole-class projects throughout the year, adding to them and reaffirming the children’s acceptance of differences.

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