

WORKING WITH THE LIBRARIAN

Objective

This activity is designed to allow students to learn how people with disabilities are portrayed in children's books and to understand the meaning of "handicapism."

Materials

- Books (Suggested reading list included)
- Handicapism Scale (included)

Teacher Preparation

Make a copy of the "Handicapism Scale" for each student and have students keep the scale in the back of the book they chose to read as a reminder.

Activity

1. Have students meet with the school librarian to talk about how people with disabilities are portrayed in children's books.
2. Ask the librarian to help the students collect as many books as they can which have people with disabilities in them. Some books they might look out for are:

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Heidi

The Little Humpbacked Horse

Apt. No. 3

The Little Lame Prince

Peter Pan

Stupid Marco

Leo the Late Bloomer

Amy Maura

The Sneely Mouthed Snerds and the Wonderoctopus

Karen

The Summer of the Swans

(Some of these are good in how they treat people with disabilities. Some are not so good.)

3. Have each student choose a book to read. After reading the books, have the students analyze the portrayal of people with disabilities in each book with the "Handicapism Scale."

4. Have the students make recommendations about which books are good and which books are bad according to the scale.
5. Have the students help the librarian prepare a display using posters and books about disabilities and how people with disabilities want to be treated.

Discussion

Handicapism is the unfair treatment of people who have disabilities. Lots of stories make characters with disabilities into bad or evil people; some story writers make all people with retardation happy-go-lucky, smiling people. Other stories make it seem as if people who are missing an arm or leg are crooks and wrongdoers.

The truth is that all people with disabilities have the same feelings of love and friendship and anger as anybody else. People with disabilities, like anyone else, can be good or bad. It is unfair to make people with disabilities into fools or villains or extra loving people all of the time.

HANDICAPISM SCALE

Handicapism is the unfair treatment of people with disabilities. Answer the following questions about the story to see how it treats people with disabilities.

	YES	NO
Do people in the story show pity towards the character(s) with disabilities?	_____	_____
Is the person with disabilities a minor character? (People with disabilities are rarely cast as heroes.)	_____	_____
Is the character who has disabilities put in the story to spice up the scenery, like a fancy car or a funny hat?	_____	_____
Is the character with disabilities portrayed as a villain?	_____	_____
Do other people hurt the person with disabilities or does an accident occur to harm him/her?	_____	_____
Is the person with disabilities shown as being sad most of the time?	_____	_____
Is the person with disabilities portrayed as bumbling and not skillful?	_____	_____
If the person with disabilities is an adult, is he or she treated like a child?	_____	_____
Is the character with disabilities portrayed as having extra special powers to do something?	_____	_____
Does the character with disabilities pity himself or herself all of the time?	_____	_____