



# ABLEISM IN MEDIA: BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Created by Dr. Maya Kalyanpur

as part of the *Leaders for Inclusion Project*  
at the University of San Diego  
and generously funded by the Johnson Family Foundation  
August 2019

# Outline

- You will be introduced to the predominant ableist stereotypes in media and children's literature
- You will apply the given guidelines to evaluate the portrayal of people/ children with disabilities as a central character to select a suitable children's book
- You will create a lesson plan/ unit around the book you have selected.

# Alignment with DSE Tenets

The objectives of this module are to:

- Contextualize disability within the social sphere by highlighting deficit model attitudes towards people with disabilities, a form of ableism, often depicted in media.
- Promote social justice by challenging common stereotypes
- Present overt and subtle examples of negative and positive portrayals of people with disabilities in children's literature

# Ableism

- Ableism can be defined as discriminatory societal attitudes towards people with disabilities, similar to racism, sexism, or ageism, etc. It does not deny the presence of a disability, such as physical, behavioral or intellectual limitations, but recognizes that negative attitudes and stereotypes impose additional limitations that further handicap individuals with disabilities.
- Ableism occurs when dominant beliefs exclude the experiences of people with disabilities or use stereotypical representations. Ableism places the responsibility for discrimination on the able-bodied.
- Source for ableism: Haller (2010). *Representing disability in an ableist world: Essays on mass media*. Louisville KY: Advocado Press.

# Manifestations of Ableism

- Assumptions (belief that people with disabilities want a cure)
- The media (newspapers, books, movies, tv, etc.)
  - The language of disability
- Physical barriers (buildings don't have ramps, elevators, Braille, etc.)
- Transportation (No elevators, limited routes, etc.)
- Service delivery (segregated or special school systems).
- The Eugenics Movement (Structural practices of 'Improving the human race')

# Ableist Stereotypes

- Pitiabile and pathetic
- Bitter/own worst enemy
- "Atmosphere"
- Sinister and/or evil (villain)
- Laughable
- Burden
- Asexual
- Incapable of participating in everyday life
- "Supercrip"



[A Christmas Carol](#) by Fred Barnard. PD-US-Art

@MayaKalyanpur

# Pitiable and Pathetic

Tiny Tim in  
"A Christmas Carol"

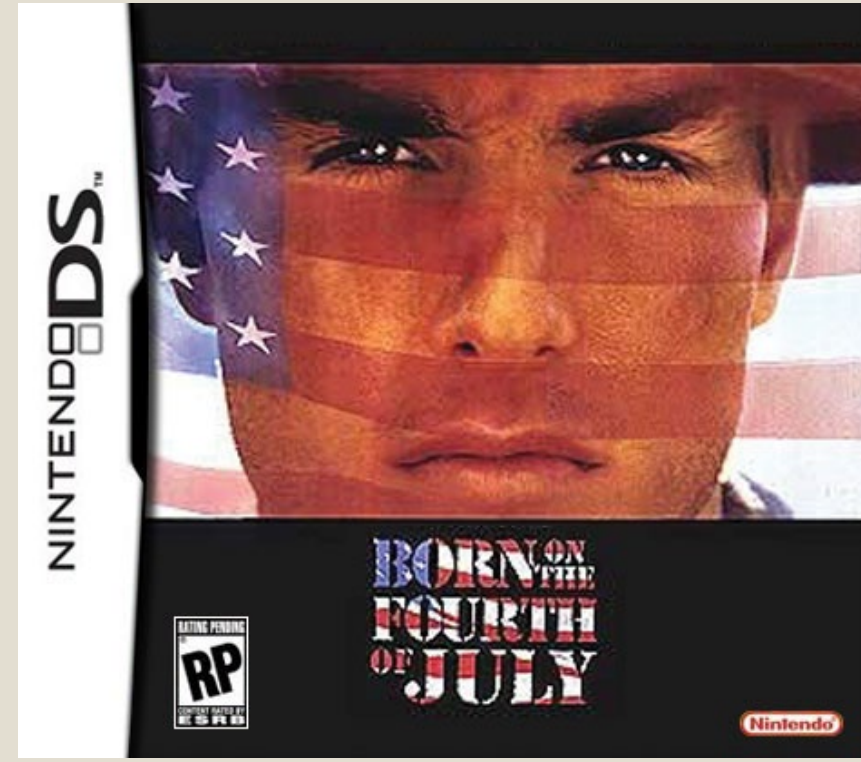
# Bitter/Own Worst Enemy

Lieutenant Dan in "Forrest Gump"



[That terrible time when we forgot our warriors...](#) by Greg Bishop. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) in  
"Born on the Fourth of July"



[DS Born on the Fourth of July](#) by Good Fynes. CC BY-ND 2.0



[Blind street musician playing](#) by Nikolaj Potanin. CC BY-SA 2.0

# “Atmosphere”

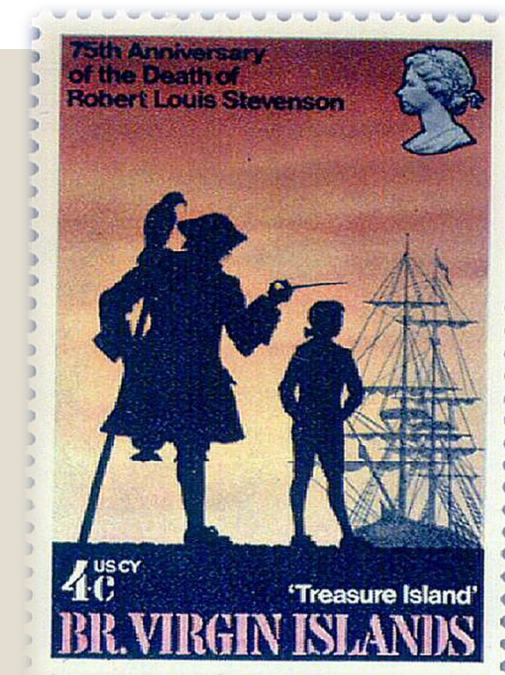
- Blind Musician
- “Murphy Brown” original version

# Sinister and/or Evil (Villain)

- Long John Silver in "Treasure Island"
- Captain Hook in "Peter Pan"



[Captain Hook](#) by Christopher Brown. CC BY 2.0



[Treasure Island stamps](#) by Jennifer Toombs. In the public domain.

# Laughable

- Dumbo
- Bobby Boucher (Adam Sandler) in "The Waterboy"
- Mr. Bean
- Mr. Magoo



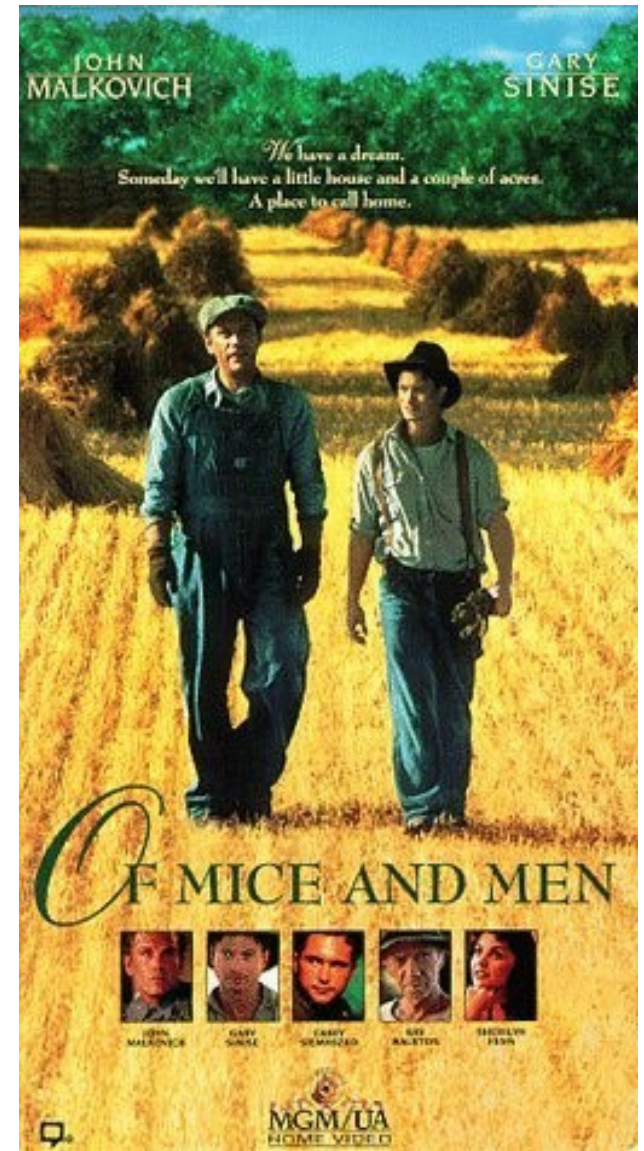
[Rowan Atkinson](#) by Antonio Zugaldia. CC0.



[Mr. Magoo in Hi-Fi](#) by Kevin Dooley. CC BY 2.0

# Burden

Lennie Small in  
"Of Mice and Men"



[Of Mice and Men mgm-us vhs front](#) by Jesper Wiking.  
CC BY-ND 2.0



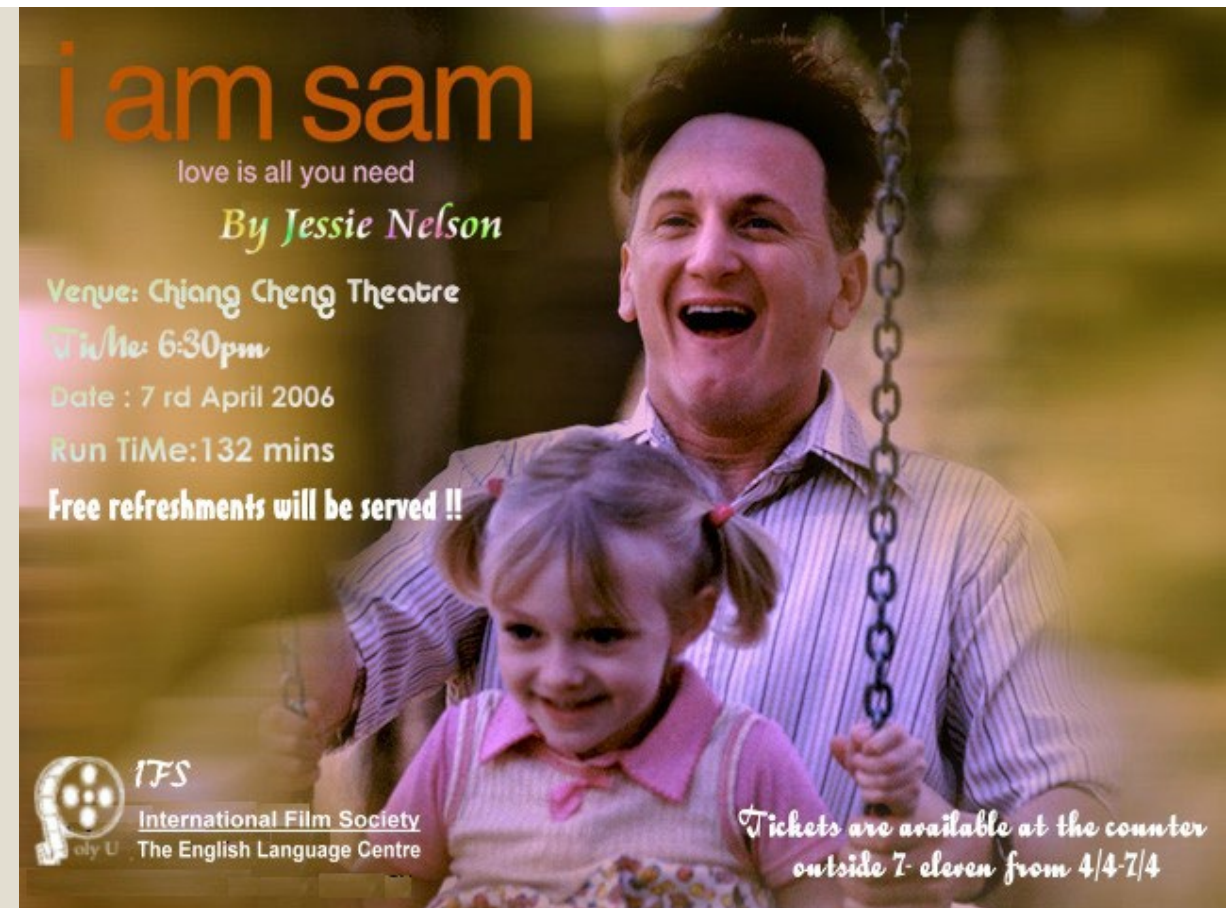
[Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs](#) by Dennis Jarvis. CC0

# Asexual

The dwarfs in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"


# Incapable of Participating in Everyday Life

Sam Dawson (Sean Penn)  
in "I am Sam"



**i am sam**  
love is all you need  
*By Jessie Nelson*

Venue: Chiang Cheng Theatre  
Time: 6:30pm  
Date: 7<sup>th</sup> April 2006  
Run Time: 132 mins  
Free refreshments will be served !!

 **IFSA**  
International Film Society  
The English Language Centre

*Tickets are available at the counter  
outside 7- eleven from 4/4-7/4*

[I Am Sam Leaflet](#). by Adam@ecadamf. CC BY 2.0

# “Supercrip”

- Raymond in “Rain Man”
- Individuals who had an X gene (that other humans didn’t have) and it provided them with special powers



[X-Men: Days of Future Past](#) by Global Panorama. CC BY-SA 2.0

## Rubric for Literature Critique

Critique a children's book for ableist portrayals of people with disabilities.

*Objective:* To become aware of the impact of ableist images and stereotypes in media, particularly in children's literature

1. Title, name of author, illustrator, date of publication, publisher's name.

Critique:

- Check the Illustrations, the Story Line and the Lifestyles (evaluate the book's illustrations or photographs and storylines for stereotypes, tokenism, and the lifestyles of the characters, checking to see if the child with a disability is shown in realistic situations and typical daily life settings)
  - Illustrations/photographs (Do these enhance/affect the images the author is trying to create? Was there a specific reason in using photographs, not illustrations?)
  - Depiction of disability (What activities is the child with a disability engaged in? Are they realistic, disablist or stereotypical?)
  - Narrative (Identify all imbedded and/or overt ableism or the positive images giving descriptions of where they occur within the text. Refer to specific stereotypes [eg, "supercrip", helpless]. If the stereotypes are deliberate, what was the author's purpose?)
- Consider the Language, the Copyright Date and the Author's Background (evaluate the story on the use of People First language, and look for any information on the author's or illustrator's background that might strengthen the value of their work. Also check the date of publication)

# ACTIVITY # 1:

Let's critique a book, using the guidelines on the hand-out given. (Guidelines are adapted from Myers & Bersani (2009), and Nasatir & Horne (2003) articles.)

## Rubric for Literature Critique

Critique a children's book for ableist portrayals of people with disabilities.

*Objective:* To become aware of the impact of ableist images and stereotypes in media, particularly in children's literature

1. Title, name of author, illustrator, date of publication, publisher's name.

Critique:

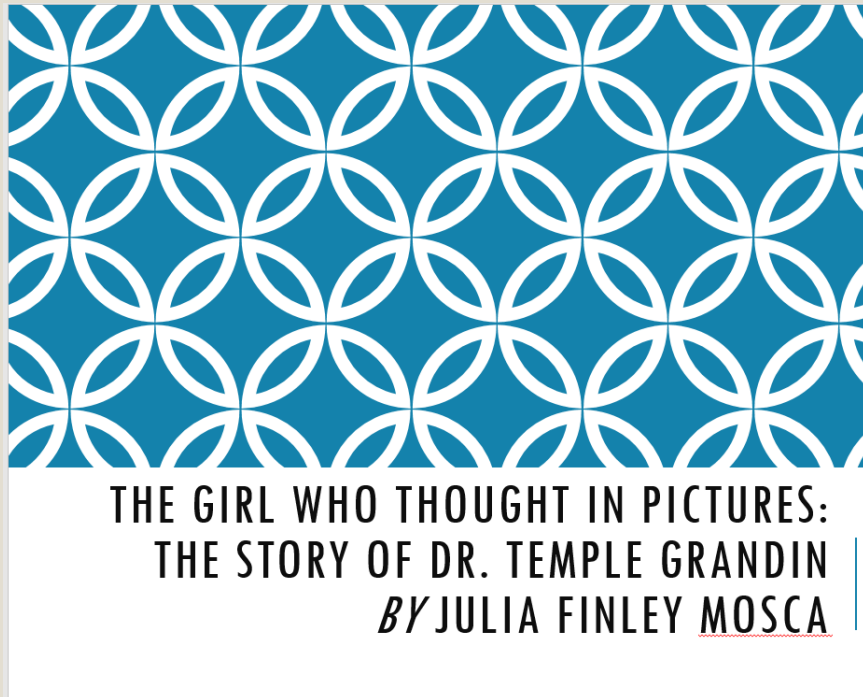
- Check the Illustrations, the Story Line and the Lifestyles (evaluate the book's illustrations or photographs and storylines for stereotypes, tokenism, and the lifestyles of the characters, checking to see if the child with a disability is shown in realistic situations and typical daily life settings)
  - Illustrations/photographs (Do these enhance/affect the images the author is trying to create? Was there a specific reason in using photographs, not illustrations?)
  - Depiction of disability (What activities is the child with a disability engaged in? Are they realistic, disablist or stereotypical?)
  - Narrative (Identify all imbedded and/or overt ableism or the positive images giving descriptions of where they occur within the text. Refer to specific stereotypes [eg, "supercrip", helpless]. If the stereotypes are deliberate, what was the author's purpose?)
- Consider the Language, the Copyright Date and the Author's Background (evaluate the story on the use of People First language, and look for any information on the author's or illustrator's background that might strengthen the value of their work. Also check the date of publication)

# ACTIVITY # 2:

Select a book and critique it, using the same guidelines

## Optional Activity # 3:

- Develop a lesson plan/ unit around the book.



## Female Scientists Who Made a Difference

Unit Plan by

JamieLouise Stinson, Ruth Hill, and Kathy Jun

MCC 1, Intersession 2019

University of San Diego

# Additional Resources

- Disability Bias in Children's Literature
- Disability in Children's Literature: A Website to Learn about the Portrayal of Disabilities through Different Mediums
- Dyches, T. T. & Prater, M. A (2000). *Developmental disability in children's literature: Issues and annotated bibliography*. Council for Exceptional Children, Arlington, VA. Div. on Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.
- Hughes, C. (2012). Seeing blindness in children's picture books. *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*. 6(1), 35-51.
- Holt, K. (2019). *The complicated politics of disability: Reading "The Little House" books and Helen Keller*. In M.A. Green-Barteet & A.K. Phillips (Eds.) *Reconsidering Laura Ingalls Wilder: Little house and beyond*, pp. 32-48. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

## Additional Resources (cont.)

- Myers, C. & Bersani, H.(2009) Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Ableism: Prejudice by Able-bodied and Ableminded People, *Rethinking Schools*, 23 (2), 52-54.
- Rubin, E. & Strauss Watson, E. (1987). Disability Bias in Children's Literature. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 11(1), pp. 60-67.
- Turner, N. D. I., & Traxler, M. A. D. (2000). *Children's literature for the primary inclusive classroom*. Albany, N.Y: Delmar Publishers.
- Vasan, P., Jose, A.M. (2018). Understanding Disability: A Study of Sharon M Draper's *Out Of My Mind*. *IRA International Journal of Education and Multidisciplinary Studies* (ISSN 2455-2526), 11(2), 43-48.



# Supplemental Resource Accompanying This Module

- A list of children's books with (mostly) positive depictions of a central character who has a disability.

# References

- Adam@ecadamf. (2007, February 11). I Am Sam Leadleat [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY 2.0
- Barnard F. (2012, May 2). *A Christmas Carol, Bob Cratchit and his son Tim* [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). PD-US-Art
- Bishop, G. (2012, September 11). *That terrible time when we forgot our warriors...*[digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
- Brown, C. (2013, July 19). *Captain Hook* [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY 2.0
- Dooley, K. (2008, August 17). *Mr. Magoo in Hi-Fi* [a photo]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY 2.0
- Fynes, G. (2006, December 24). *DS Born on the Fourth of July* [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
- Global Panorama. (2014, May 10). *X-Men: Days of Future Past* [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Haller, B. A. (2010). *Representing disability in an ableist world: Essays on mass media*. Louisville, KY: The Advocado Press.
- Jarvis, D. (August 22, 2017). *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC0
- Myers-Hughes, C., & Bersani, H. (2009). Ten quick ways to analyze children's books for ableism. *Rethinking Schools*, 24(2).

# References (cont.)

- Nasatir, D. & Horn, E. (2003) Addressing disability as a part of diversity: Through classroom children's literature. *Young Exceptional Children*, 6(4), 2-10.
- Potanin, N. (2013, July 25). *Blind street musician playing* [digital image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Toombs, J. (1969). *Treasure Island* [stamp image]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). In the public domain.
- Wiking, J. (2009, April 17). *of mice and men mgm-ua vhs front* [a photo]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC BY-ND 2.0 .
- Zugaldia, A. (2007, March 14). *Rowan Atkinson* [a photo]. Retrieved from ([here](#)). CC0.