



10 Picture Books for Starting a Conversation About Autism



BY ADRIANA WHITE

Books for Kids By Autistic Authors

As a school librarian, I work hard to create a diverse collection of middle grade and young adult books. Being autistic, I also try to include books by autistic authors, whenever possible. And beyond the library walls, I speak at conferences about the importance of sharing stories about neurodiversity and mental health.

I talk about how stories can be powerful tools for introducing autism to students. How they can promote empathy and understanding in non-autistic students and staff. Stories can help explain autistic traits that may be confusing to non-autistic (or neurotypical) people. Most significantly, well-written stories about autism let our autistic kids know that they are not alone. That they are not broken. That the world needs all kinds of minds, and every kind of brain has its unique strengths and challenges.

“That’s why stories are an essential part of autism advocacy. Because stories move us in ways that facts and statistics alone sometimes can’t.”

At these conferences, one of the most frequently asked questions is, “What books should I use with little ones?” As a result, I’ve made it a personal goal to seek out great picture books about autism. While there aren’t quite as many autistic authors in the picture book market – compared to the middle grade and young adult sides of the industry – there are still some amazing books out there that are definitely worth reading.

The following list of picture books is a great place to start:

[The Little Senses Series](#)

by Samantha Cotterill

Cotterill has written and illustrated several picture books, including the “Little Senses” series. Through this series, featuring titles like *The Beach is Loud!* and *It Was Supposed to Be Sunny*, Cotterill captures some common frustrations and difficulties that autistic kids face, and models ways that kids can work through these obstacles. Cotterill’s illustrations are colorful without being overwhelming, and perfectly complement her text. Cotterill is autistic, and has taken inspiration for each Little Senses story from either her own personal experiences, or the experience of someone close to her. Her beautiful stories can be useful for both autistic and non-autistic readers. There’s something for everyone to enjoy in this wonderful series!

[Rosalee the Seeker](#)

by Nicole Filippone

Rosalee is the first in Filippone’s “Sensory Stories” series, and its publication was made possible through a successful Kickstarter campaign. The book is subtitled “A Sensory Processing Disorder Story,” but the story is relatable to anyone who experiences sensory processing issues. (Incidentally, SPD was removed from the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM V, and many who are diagnosed with SPD go on to be diagnosed with other neurodivergent conditions, like autism, ADHD, or anxiety.) Filippone herself now acknowledges that she is likely autistic, but she continues to be a strong advocate for increased understanding of sensory processing issues. Her website includes additional resources for adults, and Filippone is also currently accepting pre-orders for the second book in her Sensory Stories series, *Alexander the Avoider* (with an expected ship date of October 2021). Rosalee is a great book that can be enormously helpful for children, parents, educators, and anyone else who wishes to learn more about sensory processing issues.

[Just Right for You: A Story about Autism](#)

by Melanie Heyworth, illustrated by CeART

Just Right for You is a self-published book from Australia, and both its author and illustrator are autistic women. Heyworth is an autistic mom to three autistic children, as well as a PhD candidate and autism advocate. She also created the organization Reframing Autism, which offers workshops on autism to families in Australia. CeART, also known as I am Cadence, is an autistic artist and illustrator. In addition to *Just Right*, CeART has also illustrated a trio of other autism-focused book projects that are due to be released sometime this year. Together, these two women have created an adorable book that advocates for greater acceptance of autism. It’s also a great way to introduce the concept of autism to young children (both autistic and non-autistic).

[Too Sticky!: Sensory Issues with Autism](#)

by Jen Malia, illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff

A young autistic girl who loves science class, but hates sticky fingers, is incredibly worried about having to make slime in class! With some reassurance from others, she is inspired to give it a try. This story was inspired by the real-life experiences of Malia and her children (some of whom are also autistic). Before writing this book, Malia wrote an excellent essay for The New York Times about how she and her daughter were diagnosed with autism on the same day! Additionally, this book is a great choice for those who want to integrate STEM concepts into reading.

Talking is Not My Thing

by Rose Robbins

Talking is a book from the UK that tells the story of a nonspeaking autistic girl. Readers see the many ways that she communicates with her family – learning the valuable lesson that words aren’t always needed! The companion to this book, titled *Me and My Sister*, was inspired by the author’s real-life experiences with her autistic brother. Eventually, Robbins was diagnosed with autism herself, as well. A Spanish edition of the book, *¿Hablar no se me da bien!*, is also available.

Do You Want to Play? Making Friends with an Autistic Kid

by Daniel Share-Strom, illustrated by Naghmeh Afshinjah

This book comes from a Canadian author, Daniel Share-Strom, who is also an autism advocate. He began his public speaking career at a young age, and is dedicated to inspiring a more positive view of autism. This book, inspired by his personal experiences, tells the story of a non-autistic girl who wants to find the best way to play with a new autistic classmate. Seeing a neurotypical child make adjustments to improve her interactions with an autistic child is such an amazing thing. Far too often, the onus is put on autistic people to change to fit neurotypical norms.

Coming Soon: Other Autistic Authors to Watch

Flap Your Hands

by Steve Asbell (*Lee and Low*, 2022)

The pandemic pushed back the publication of this book, which was originally scheduled for Spring 2021. However, the end result should be well worth the wait! Asbell is the creator of the Stimmy Kitty webcomic, which masterfully portrays autistic experiences in simple text and illustrations. Definitely keep an eye out for this one!

Bitsy Bat, School Star

by Kaz Windness (*Simon & Schuster*, 2023)

Windness is the creator of *Mother Goth Rhymes*, and its upcoming spin-off title, *If Ur Stabby*. Windness has two additional books coming in the next few years, including *Bitsy Bat, School Star* – the story of an autistic bat who experiences some difficulties when starting at a new school.

More Children’s Books by Neurodiverse Authors

Some additional picture books, I highly recommend include the fantastic *Wiggles, Stomps, and Squeezes Calm My Jitters Down* by Lindsey Parker and Rebecca Burgess. (A Spanish version, *Meneos, Pistones, Y Apretones Para Calmar Mi Cosquilleo*, is also available.) Another picture book worth mentioning is Sally J. Pla’s charming *Benji, the Bad Day, and Me*. Pla did a wonderful interview with Geek Club Books back in 2019.

I hope all of these stories help spark important conversations about autism. I hope they help teach empathy and compassion to both children and adults. And I hope they offer neurotypical readers a small window into the complex world of autism.



By Adriana White

Adriana White is an autistic school librarian and former special education teacher. Since being diagnosed with autism in her 30s, she has set out to create more autism-friendly schools and libraries. She is also passionate about supporting #OwnVoices books by autistic authors, and thinks that every library collection should include them. Adriana has earned Master’s degrees in Education and Information Science, with specializations in Special Education and Storytelling, respectively. She can be found on Twitter at @Adriana_Edu, where she tweets about autism, libraries, and diverse books – especially books by #AutisticAuthors!