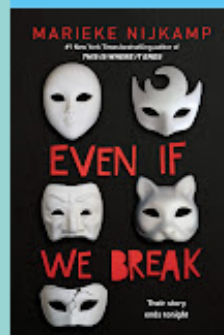


AUTISTIC AUTHORS



8 Amazing Books for a Summer of Autistic Learning



BY ADRIANA WHITE

I was diagnosed with autism at the age of 34, after a lifetime of misunderstandings. When I was growing up in the 1980s and 90s, autism was diagnosed almost exclusively in nonspeaking boys. It was a lot harder to get a diagnosis as an autistic girl – especially if you could talk and fake your way through most social interactions. Sometime around kindergarten, my parents had my hearing checked by an audiologist, after my mother complained that I never answered when she called my name. The test results stated that I had excellent hearing, and that was the end of it. I went off to kindergarten, and spent the next 29 years struggling to fit in. It wasn't until I crashed and burned during my senior year at Wellesley College that I started searching for answers to what was wrong with my brain.

The answer, I eventually discovered, was autistic burnout. Armed with this new knowledge, I learned how to accommodate for myself, and went on to earn

not one but two master's degrees. While working toward my master's in library and information science, I also received my official diagnosis of autism. Now, at the age of 36, I'm adapting to life with a new label, and a new understanding of my brain.

"This summer, after years of working toward degrees and jobs, I was finally able to focus on studying myself. I decided I needed to learn more about autism, and being a librarian, part of my research included reading a lot of books by autistic authors."

The following list features some highlights from my 2020 summer reading list. My recommendations skew toward Middle Grade and Young Adult titles, since that's the focus for my job as a middle school librarian, but many of these titles can be enjoyed by readers of all ages.

[The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic](#)

by Siena Castellon

British author Siena Castellon is only 16 years old, but she is already an excellent autism and neurodiversity advocate. Castellon created Quantum Leap, a website for autistic teens, when she was only 13, after she discovered that most of the information about autism online was geared toward parents of autistic children. Castellon's website, and her nonfiction book, offer advice and hope to autistic teens, so they don't have to feel so isolated and alone. Castellon's focus on autistic girls is especially unique, and her book discusses important topics like masking, menstruation, and consent in a way that is accessible to teen girls.

[Get a Grip, Vivy Cohen!](#)

by Sarah Kapit

Vivy is 12 years old and desperately wants to play baseball. Her mom doesn't like this idea, because Vivy would be the only girl on her team. Her mom also thinks that baseball is too much of a "special interest" for Vivy, and doesn't want to encourage her autistic "fixations." Vivy's mom wants her to just focus on fitting in with everyone else, but Vivy wants to be herself. This book is an epistolary novel, meaning it is written as a series of letters between Vivy and her favorite baseball player. Vivy is a great character, and Sarah Kapit is committed to creating more positive representations of autism in children's literature. Kapit has another novel coming out in March of 2021, *The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family*, that features two autistic protagonists who are siblings, one of whom is nonspeaking.

[I Overcame My Autism and All I Got Was This Lousy Anxiety Disorder: A Memoir](#)

by Sarah Kurchak

Like me, Sarah Kurchak grew up autistic in the 1980s and 90s, and did not receive a diagnosis of autism until her adult years. In her memoir, comprised of a series of essays, Kurchak documents her years of

struggling to fit in and "overcome" autism. Kurchak writes about the toll that masking can take on mental health, and highlights another common issue for autistic adults: having their autism doubted by neurotypical adults, especially parents of autistic children. The combination of masking to minimize autistic traits and having people question if you're really autistic enough can add so much unnecessary anxiety to an autistic person's life. Kurchak's writing on the topic is incredibly important, and her memoir is an equally important read.

[A Kind of Spark by Elle McNicoll](#)

by Elle McNicoll

11-year-old Addie lives in Scotland, but readers from the US will have no problem identifying with her struggles to fit in at school. Misunderstood by her classmates and her new teacher, Addie finds refuge in the library, where she learns about a series of witch trials that happened in her town. Addie strongly identifies with the accused women, and campaigns for a plaque to honor them. The book also features an autistic older sister, Keedie, who acts as a guide for Addie – an element not usually seen in books about autism.

[Rogue](#)

by Lyn Miller-Lachmann

Kiara, like many autistic people, uses the internet to help answer her questions about the neurotypical world around her. Some things in life, unfortunately, cannot be solved with an internet search – like how to make friends. Kiara strikes up a friendship with her new neighbors, but soon becomes ensnared in a dangerous situation. Like her favorite X-Men character, Rogue, Kiara gets manipulated by someone she thought she could trust, and has to deal with the fallout. Kiara ultimately has to figure out for herself what friendship really means, and how to fight for it.

Even If We Break

by Marieke Nijkamp

Five friends travel to a cabin in the woods for a weekend getaway, but things don't go according to plan. One of the five, an autistic high school junior named Maddy, must fight her way through the chaos of a murder mystery gone wrong while simultaneously deciphering the various reactions of her neurotypical friends. Maddy's friends are familiar with her autism, and make deliberate and touching efforts to meet her needs in the midst of an emergency. Maddy's behavior never comes across as illogical or irrational. Nijkamp writes Maddy as a flawed, human character without succumbing to autistic stereotypes – an impressive feat in an ensemble title that must balance multiple characters and viewpoints. (This book, Nijkamp's third novel, comes out on September 15, 2020, but I got to download an Advance Reading Copy from NetGalley in July.)

The Awesome Autistic Go-To Guide: A Practical Handbook for Autistic Teens and Tweens

by Yenn Purkis & Tanya Masterman

This nonfiction title has a positive tone that is wonderfully infectious. With chapter titles like “Big Yay for Being You!” and “Why You Just Might Be Awesome,” the book is a great counter to the typically tragic and deficit-focused narratives about children with autism. However, Purkis and Masterman know autism is not always a fun time, so their book also gives autistic teens tips for handling things like socializing and sensory overload. They also talk about disclosing your autism, and the importance of pride and self-esteem. Bullying is a common problem for autistic teens, so the focus on these topics is incredibly valuable.

Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse

by Susan Vaught

Jesse is confused and upset when her father is wrongfully accused of stealing from the school library, so she decides to solve the mystery herself and clear

his name. With her dog, Sam-Sam, and her friend Springer by her side, Jesse sets out to be a hero, just like her soldier mom in Afghanistan. An unexpected tornado complicates their detective work, but also allows Jesse and Sam-Sam to prove that they can be helpful and heroic in their own way.

The Importance of Autistic Stories

The books on this list are all titles that I desperately wish I had had as a child, as a teen, and as a young adult. Books, not about autism, but about autistic people. People like me. These stories would have helped me to feel less alien, and less alone. While I can't go back and relive my past, I can do the next best thing – help someone else who may be struggling with being autistic in a world that has not been built with us in mind.

Our stories belong in the world. We belong in the world.



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!