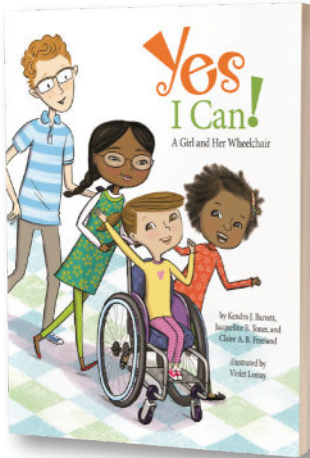




Library Features *Yes, I Can!* in Inclusion Read Aloud



Tina Dolcetti is a Children's Librarian at Moose Jaw Public Library in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada. She recently held a video Bedtime Story read aloud on Facebook Live where her guest, Russell Hippert, a Special Olympian, read *Yes I Can!: A Girl and Her Wheelchair* by Kendra J. Barrett, DPT, Jacqueline B. Toner, PhD, and Claire A. B. Freeland, PhD. We asked Tina about that experience and choosing books to share with young readers.

Magination Press: Why did you choose *Yes I Can!: A Girl and Her Wheelchair* for Russell to read?

Tina Dolcetti: I chose this because all children need to see books about characters who mirror their situation or who open windows onto new worlds. While there are more books about children with disabilities, we need to keep developing within this area! Finding inclusive sports picture books was difficult, especially books where we had access to online read aloud permission. This book was the only book I found that featured wheelchair bowling. Having worked with a bowling athlete who used accommodations, the illustrations, to me, reflected the bowling alley experiences of a person using a wheelchair.

MP: *Yes I Can!: A Girl and Her Wheelchair* and the other books your guest read focused on inclusion. Why is that an important topic for young children to explore?

TD: Inclusion is so very important. It fosters a culture of respect and understanding. More important than that, being inclusive benefits ALL children. Books with representation allow children to see all people as valuable contributors. Our Bedtime Stories program focuses on inclusion.

MP: Beside the message of inclusion, what else about *Yes I Can!: A Girl and Her Wheelchair* appealed to you?

TD: It is full of girl power and positive problem solving.

MP: Why is it important for children to see a diversity of people and experiences reflected in children's books?

TD: Children deserve to meet new heroes within their community, and to hear a diversity of voices! Diversity may validate their own experience or broaden it. They learn to see new possibilities. There is an opportunity to develop empathy and for acceptance.

MP: How do you choose topics for your read alouds?

TD: For my Bedtime Stories, I make my best effort to find books that relate to the story of the reader. Each reader tells me about their history, or what appeals to them. I do my best to find a book that relates to that.

MP: And how do you choose the books that will be read? What challenges do you encounter when looking for books?

TD: I purchase through the standard ordering channels, including standing order lists, book review media, etc. It is hard, since not all books that are popular feature kids who are diverse, and not all that do have the subject headings that are searchable! Despite my diligence, sometimes books on specific disabilities can be harder to find than others! It was also more difficult to find a book that had open reading permissions in this area than I had anticipated.

MP: As a librarian, what other kinds of children's books would you like to see published?

TD: There is a current lack of diverse early readers—we need more diversity in terms of culture, disability, and accessibility. More diversity in early readers and beginner chapter books is important. More accessible sports stories in a broader array of disability diversity are needed. We need more children's books to be published accessibly as well. We have completed an accessibility audit of our board book collection and have recognized a need for growth in that format. Additionally, we need more books where characters experience multiple areas of diversity at the same time.

MP: Tell us about your video read alouds. Did you start them during COVID or did you do them before then?

TD: COVID gave us an excellent opportunity to start our video story times! We were looking for ways to start a story time that specifically focused on diversity, so Bedtime Stories was the perfect partnership.

MP: Are they always at bedtime or do you do them at other times, too?

TD: We do offer daycare zoom story times in the morning, but our recorded story time is always broadcast in the evening.

MP: Do you always have a guest or sometimes is it just you?

TD: I always have a guest or cohost. I have had my horizons broadened through this experience and have met new friends through the past year through Bedtime Stories.

MP: What age listener are you targeting?

TD: We target preschoolers and older.

This Article's Authors

Kendra J. Barrett, DPT, is a pediatric physical therapist who has worked in early intervention and public schools for eight years since graduating from Ithaca College with a doctorate in physical therapy. She currently works in a public school for students age 3–21 with intellectual and physical disabilities. This is her first book, and she was thrilled to work with her mom on this project. Dr. Barrett lives in Towson, MD, with her husband, and she welcomed her first child, a boy, during the process of writing this book.

Jacqueline B. Toner, PhD, is the co-author of a number of books for children and teens addressing social and emotional challenges. She practiced clinical psychology for over three decades serving children, teens, and families. Dr. Toner lives in Baltimore, MD, with her husband. They have three married daughters and two grandsons. It has been a special joy to co-write this book with her second born!

Claire A. B. Freeland, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in private practice, working for more than 35 years with youth and their families. With an interest in bringing psychological concepts to a wide audience, she has co-written several books for children and teens on subjects related to emotions and behavior. She lives with her husband in Baltimore, MD. They have two grown children.