



A conference for children and young people  
about diversity in children's literature and publishing

**This speech was first given by Amelia at the Representations Mini-Conference for Children and Young People at Springwood Heath Primary School on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019.**

My name is Amelia and I'm 13 years old. I live with my mum, my big brother and my little sister. My brother and I have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and my sister is on the pathway. However, I am much more than a diagnosis:

- I love cooking with my nan
- Family is very important to me
- I'm a member of a disability sports team
- I love singing
- I hate wearing skirts

Autism is defined as a mental condition present from childhood that is characterised by repetitive thoughts and behaviours and difficulties with communication and social interaction. However, autism for me is my normality. It's just as difficult for me to imagine what it's like in a non-autistic brain as it is for you to imagine what it's like in mine.

The best thing about having autism is that it makes the way your brain works unique and you see the world from a different point of view. This is why it is important to have autism represented in literature because it shows the world in a completely different way. For example, in the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* we get to see a murder through the eyes of an autistic teenage boy and it not only shows a different perspective, but it makes the book better.

The worst part about having autism is that I struggle to understand other people and they struggle to understand me. Sometimes I can come across as cheeky, but I have no idea that's what I'm doing. Sometimes people think I'm not going to be clever because of my autism or think I must have a special talent.

Having autistic characters and voices in literature will help me to see myself in a book and be able to relate to stories. It would also help other people understand why I struggle with certain things.



I don't always feel like I'm reflected in the books I read. For example, not many books feature autistic characters or are written by an autistic perspective but when they are the book is all about the autism instead of just being a funny cool story where the character just happens to have autism. Also, representations of autism are usually the same boy who likes number order and don't like people whereas I'm a messy girl who hates numbers and loves being surrounded by people.

If my little sister is diagnosed with autism (I'm 100% confident she will be) I want her to be able to read stories she can relate to. If you read Tracy Beaker, then you may feel better about growing up in a children's home. If you read Diary of a Wimpy Kid, you may feel better about struggling in school. I want my little sister and other kids with autism to feel represented in the books they read and not just in a novelty way.

It is important for children's books to feature different types of characters because then they grow up more understanding and more accepting.

When I saw *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* with my Nan, I was so happy to see an autistic character being portrayed on a stage (as it was when I was first diagnosed). However, when the boy had a meltdown, it wasn't what a meltdown might look like for every autistic person and his makes me feel like it doesn't represent me or the other autistic people I know and people will think that's what I'm like.

I want to read books about autistic girls with autistic friends, autistic girls with 'normal' friends, girls who don't like makeup or skirts, girls who aren't afraid to share their opinions, autistic families and siblings. I want to read books about girls like me because girls like me are more interesting than people think and we usually get in a lot more trouble.

