Student Experiences of a Diversity-Positive Chapter Book: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis Using an Arts-Informed Analysis

by

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the lived experience of school-aged children engaging with a diversity-positive chapter book in a classroom setting. Participants were 9 third-grade students and 26 sixth-grade students and their respective teachers in a Canadian urban school. An interpretive phenomenological analysis with an arts-informed approach was utilized to collect and interpret data.

Before the study, I created a children's chapter book, *The Book of Can't and Don't*, exploring the friendship between a fictional child living on the autism spectrum and her new cousin internationally adopted from Haiti. Book creation involved implementing feedback from people with disabilities, racial minorities, immigrants, and community professionals. Teachers read the story to students over four weeks, with two chapters read aloud per week. In addition, once a week, the students participated in a *Draw and Write* activity where they drew scenes inspired by each week's readings.

The following major themes emerged in the coding process: a) expression of negative emotions, b) expression of positive emotions, c) experiencing or noticing individual differences, and d) experiences of emotional or internal conflict resolution. Most student responses described experiences from their lives that they perceived as emotionally equivalent to experiences of the characters in the book. Notable developmental differences were observed between students in third grade and students in the fifth-sixth grade classroom. Third-grade children often described caregiver separation and nighttime fears (e.g., ghosts). The older students tended to describe the fear of embarrassment in peer social situations, fear of peer rejection, and individual differences as a component of their identity (e.g., race). I expected more responses where students discussed disabilities, race, or other individual differences. However, only a few student responses

mentioned these themes. Extant literature supports the idea that school-aged children are at a developmental age where they are peer-oriented and desire to assimilate with peers. Both abilities to understand the emotional state of others and self-concept continue to develop during this period. As children approach adolescence, self-concept separate from others grows in importance, and children become increasingly independent from adult caregivers.

The results from this study support the use of *The Book of Can't and Don't* as a tool for a) facilitating discussion in classrooms on social and emotional learning and intersectionality, b) creating opportunities for validation and acceptance of students with individual differences, and c) creating a sense of community in classroom settings by putting students and teachers into the mindset for shared understanding.

Keywords: Autism, Adoption, Culture, Intersectionality, Neurodiversity, Diversity, Children, Literature, Empathy, Emotion, Disability, Classroom, Friendship

Preface

This dissertation is an original work by Laura Lynn Gilmour. The research project associated with this dissertation received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research board, "Developing and Understanding a Cultural Neurodiversity Book for Autistic Students and Students Who are Internationally Adopted" No. Pro00075523, December 19, 2018.

Dedication

In 2003, I won a student essay contest on establishing peace through trade. As a result, I had the opportunity to connect with Guy F. Tozzoli, the World Trade Centers Association president. At the time, I was an eager high school social studies student concerned about increasing global conflict and hatred for people who have differences. Guy Tozzoli believed that countries that traded with each other were less likely to engage in war. He wrote to me in an email the year before that we shared a dream of "one world with a bright future." Unfortunately, he left this world in 2013. However, his ideas for a better world will live on in my mind and many others. I dream of a world where human differences, including race, disability, and culture, are normalized, and celebrated as part of the human experience.

I believe that exchanging ideas and constructive debate in conversations with others can also help achieve this goal of establishing peace through shared human understanding. Another great individual helped open my mind towards accepting others who see the world differently. This person is my former undergraduate research supervisor and lifelong mentor, Dr. Melike Schalomon. Our collaborations and eventual close friendship have led to a shared understanding between my autistic brain and her Bavarian immigrant perspective. We share a mutual ambition to reduce barriers for marginalized students and unconditional acceptance of all students as human beings. She leads by example in treating everyone with respect and fairness while maintaining high expectations for academic achievement among students. She is currently the Dean of Arts and Science at MacEwan University and reminds me and others of the importance of shared ideas among all humans and respectful debate. She says in a podcast we co-authored in 2019 for Stairway to STEM (www.stairwaytostem.org), "You don't have to agree, but you do have to get to the point where you can respect the other person's opinion." The values and

worldviews I learned from Guy Tozzoli and Dr. Melike Schalomon have helped this project become a reality and made me a better human being and global citizen.

Through an exchange of ideas

Trading unites our world

We may never be one world with a bright future.

But we can make a brighter future.

When minds from worlds apart

Meet, Share, and Understand.

But remain Ourselves.

-Laura Gilmour, 2020

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In addition, I thank Miranda Macaulay, also from MacEwan University is an expert in autism therapy in schools and has assisted establishing connections with schools. I also extend thanks to fellow graduate students Andy Sung, Gabrielle Helston, and Nicholas Denomey for helping with school recruitment and ideas for successful classroom implementation. Finally, I want to thank the Edmonton-area school and the teachers and students who allowed me to spend time their third and sixth grade classrooms. It was a pleasure to work with all of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, there has been substantial interest in serving diverse students' social and emotional learning needs. Resources created for social and emotional learning in classroom settings must be created to represent the current student demographics. For instance, there has been a concurrent increase in the prevalence of autistic children and those who have experienced major life disruptions in Canadian classrooms. In addition, the global conflict has increased the number of migrant and refugee children. The ongoing COVID19 pandemic has contributed to the number of children who have experienced major life disruption (e.g., Ferget et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2021).

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines intersectionality as the interaction of memberships in multiple minority groups and how they relate and contribute to inequality. For instance, a student could have a diagnosis of autism and be an immigrant from a country with distinct social norm differences from the North America.

It is challenging to find resources that represent students belonging to more than one minority group, despite many of these students existing in Canadian classrooms. Existing diversity research in elementary school settings typically focuses on children with a single condition or adverse life experience. For instance, a 2016 scoping review of adoption literature in Edmonton Public Libraries which I conducted as part of my candidacy showed a limited selection of adoption books about children of color. This will be discussed in further detail in the literature review chapter.

In this dissertation, I created a children's book and accompanying *Guide for Teachers* which explored the analogy of autism and cultural diversity. I aimed to explore the socially constructed meaning of the book to students in inclusive classrooms in Edmonton-area schools. I aimed to create a platform for classroom discussion to create a platform for conversations that may lead to empathy and normalization of differences among teachers and students.

Both autism and belonging to a cultural minority create barriers to social acceptance and full participation in society. I created this book from a neurodiversity and social model of disability perspective (e.g., Oliver, 2013). In this paper, I portray many of the barriers created by neurological and cultural differences as socially contracted and mitigated by increased social understand and acceptance of divergent communication styles and ways of learning.

Statement of the Problem

Both autism and adverse childhood events can negatively impact childhood social and emotional learning (SEL) (Bevilacqua et al., 2021; Płatos & Pisula, 2021). Emotional awareness and regulation are crucial for school-aged children to achieve social and academic success (Denham & Bassett, 2020). Literature shows a combined consequence of fewer friendship nominations for children who are both autistic and racial minorities. Students who belong to both groups are less likely to be nominated as friends by peers than students who are either autistic or a racial minority (Azad et al., 2017). This example from the literature illustrates the potential impact of intersectionality on classroom social climates. In some instances, autistic students or those who belong to racial minorities attempt to mask their communication differences to pass as neurotypical or North American-born (Botha & Frost, 2020; Dababnah et al., 2020). There is minimal research that addresses social and emotional learning in non-homogenous populations. A diversity focus for social and emotional learning is relevant because most educational settings

are mixed populations with the aim of diversity and inclusion. For instance, classroom settings typically contain disabled, cultural minorities, and neurotypical students of the dominant culture.

Minority status can create barriers to social and emotional learning and peer and teacher acceptance. Often, individuals who are autistic or members of cultural minorities have difficulty understanding rules that govern social behaviour in the dominant culture. For instance, autistic children have developmental delays in awareness of the emotional states of others (i.e., cognitive empathy) compared to their peers (e.g., Baron-Cohen & Wheelright, 2004). In addition, existing literature provides evidence that children who are refugees are at risk for social and emotional difficulties (e.g., Raslan et al., 2021). Therefore, children from minority groups may need more emotional scaffolding than typically developing North Americans.

In addition to considering the impact of developmental delays, social and emotional learning instruction should consider teaching guidelines for understanding interaction styles beyond the social norms of the dominant culture. It is known that misunderstandings can occur due to cultural barriers to understanding intent versus deficits. A Government of Canada (2015) guide for supporting refugee children shares that Syrian refugee children may be perceived as aggressive for their cultural style of speech and hand gestures.

Autistic people, like members of ethnic minority groups, are better at emphasizing and understanding the intent of other autistic people than neurotypical people are at understanding autistic emotional states (Milton, 2012). However, extant research focuses more on autistic inability to interpret the emotional states of neurotypical people (e.g., Baron-Cohen & Wheelright, 2004). The barrier to understanding between autistic and neurotypical people is sometimes referred to as the double empathy problem (Milton, 2012). Raising awareness of

different communication and emotional expression styles may help avert inaccurate and negative peer judgement.

Study Purpose

I created a children's book that aims to address the cultural and neurodiversity and their intersections in classroom settings in addition to exploring common childhood emotional experiences. Exploring common emotional themes among children aims to normalize differences by focusing on commonalities between neurotypical North American students and their classmates who belong to minorities. In addition, this creates classroom opportunities for discussion of social and emotional awareness relevant to all students.

According to Kucirkova (2019), stories may help children develop empathy for members of minority groups. Creative bibliotherapy uses fictional stories to assist individuals in obtaining skills and resolving emotional challenges (Montgomery & Maunders, 2015). This study aimed to understand the lived experience of students engaging with a diversity-positive chapter book I developed for this study. The book is entitled *The Book of Can't and Don't* and creates an analogy of disability and cultural diversity. It tells the story of the friendship between a girl internationally adopted from Haiti and her autistic cousin.

Conceptual Framework

This study is an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) described in Smith et al. (2009) which utilizes an arts-informed approach to analysis. A hermeneutic framework (Gadamer, 1998) is utilized for data analysis. I was an active ingredient in authoring the book and interacting with participants. This approach does not erase my fore-conceptions from life experiences or writing the book. However, I am expected to engage in reflexivity in which I constantly revise my interpretations based on emerging evidence obtained through being in the

research environment. My lived experience is a component of the framework, but the focus needs to be on "the things themselves" (Gadamer, 1998) in that my interpretations must be driven and molded by the data.

I utilize arts-informed methods to facilitate discussion with students and understand their lived experience engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't*. Barone and Eisner (2012) describe arts-informed research (e.g., storytelling, drawing) as creating co-constructed meaning between researchers and participants. As suggested by (Kucirkova 2019), the teacher will act as the facilitator in this activity. The *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) will allow students to describe their interpretations and feelings beyond expressing verbally (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Non-verbal methods for communicating emotions are important because many students face barriers to in-depth verbal descriptions, such as being English language learners. In addition, children who have experienced trauma or are learning to discuss emotions may be more likely to interact in an environment with a fictional medium versus being asked direct questions about their feelings (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

Relevant Researcher Lived Experiences

I have had the personal life experience of growing up autistic and experiencing rejection by peers, especially in childhood. I perceive myself as having to work harder than my peers for others to see me as capable and intelligent. People who first meet me may notice my differences in body language, conversation style, and atypical cadence of speech before they recognize my intelligence. I often choose to befriend or collaborate with classmates or supervisors who belong to minority groups, often immigrants or other cultural minorities. In developing those collaborations and friendships, I often find common ground in shared emotional experiences of recipients of implicit biases, such as others perceiving direct communication style as rude versus

honest. The influence of my friendships with members of cultural minorities on my intersectionality worldviews and this project is discussed further in chapter three, where I explore the novel development.

In an education workshop I attended several years ago, a presenter told the story of a Muslim student who would not make eye contact with his female instructor and spent the lectures looking down. As a result, the instructor initially perceived this student as uninterested in the course until she spoke to him during office hours and realized he performed adequately on assignments. These life experiences and reading of emerging literature on autism and intersectionality and cultural communication, and potential for social misunderstandings and discrimination based on different communication styles have influenced this project's development. As mentioned above in the conceptual framework section, my fore-conceptions based on my lived experience must continuously be revised so that my interpretation is congruent with the data versus personal bias.

Research Question and Reflections

There is a need for classroom social and emotional learning resources that incorporate intersectionality. In addition, there is a need for creative bibliotherapy activities that incorporate multiple opportunities for interactive learning to ensure students can transfer learning beyond the context of the reading activity. Shortcomings of bibliotherapy studies which rely on a single activity will be discussed in subsequent sections of this paper (e.g., Kanarowski, 2012)

Potential classroom uses for this book may be:

a) improve student understanding and empathy for diverse populations,

b) facilitate shared understanding between students belonging to different minority groups, and c) create a platform for interactive classroom discussion using *The Book of Can't and Don't*.

I explored the following research question in this study:

What is the lived experience of students in an Edmonton-area urban school engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* as learners?

Definitions of Key Terms

Arts Informed Research

Ayer (1952) described arts-informed research (e.g., storytelling, drawing) as creating shared empathy and co-constructed meaning between researchers and participants. For instance, in the current study, the participants are school-aged children who may find it easier to express their emotions and thoughts about a story through drawings versus a structured interview. Furthermore, the arts for participant responses remove communication barriers such as limited language abilities (e.g., children, people who are learning English) (e.g., Silver, 2001). In addition, arts-informed methods create an environment that equalizes the power between participants and researchers and can create an avenue for shared vulnerabilities and understanding (Ayer, 1952).

Autism

The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines autism as a neurological disorder resulting in impaired communication, sensory and emotional regulation difficulties, and stereotypical and repetitive behaviour. Although the American Psychiatric Association (2013). supports a medical model, which views autism as a disorder and utilizes the term autism

spectrum disorder (ASD), neurodiversity models to describe autism are increasing in popularity. A recent move by autistic adults has rejected pathologizing autism (e.g., Pantazakos, 2019). In this dissertation, I am deliberately using the term "autistic" instead of "person-first language" to respect the voices of autistic self-advocates and their lived experience as a minority group (Pantazakos, 2019). I support a neurodiversity/social model of disability approach in this dissertation. Like members of cultural minorities, autism interventions should focus on improvement on quality of life while maintaining authentic self, versus aiming to make autistic people appear indistinguishable from neurotypical people.

Canadian Multiculturalism Definition

Under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985), restricting harmless differences is discriminatory. For example, learning English is necessary for survival in Canada, but immigrants often speak their language at home with their families. For autistic citizens, it could be argued that some differences are diversity versus abnormality. Suppressing diversity is discrimination under Canadian laws. I support this worldview, like the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985) for autism treatments to improve quality of life but not suppress individuality. For instance, as an autistic individual and an autism researcher, I advocate for autistic children to understand the verbal and non-verbal communication skills of neurotypical people to the best of their abilities. However, I oppose oppressing autistic styles of communication and non-neurotypical interests.

Creative Bibliotherapy

Creative bibliotherapy uses fictional stories to assist individuals in obtaining skills and resolving emotional challenges (Montgomery & Maunders, 2015). Bibliotherapy originated

based on psychodynamic theory (Jack & Ronan, 2008). However, bibliotherapy today is rooted more in cognitive and behavioural psychology than psychodynamic theory.

Display Rules

Saarni (1999) defines display rules as social expectations for emotional expression in the dominant culture. For instance, individuals are expected to avoid public displays of strong positive and negative emotions beyond the early childhood years. For example, a school-aged child may feel discomfort when experiencing a minor fall during a neighbourhood game but would be expected to rejoin the game versus lay on the ground crying. Adherence to dominant culture display rules may vary across cultural and neurological differences.

Double Empathy Problem

The double empathy problem (Milton, 2012) refers to neurotypical people faring poorly at interpreting the emotions of autistic people. A neuroimaging study demonstrated that autistic people show more responses in the brain to emotional scenarios involving autistic people than neurotypical people (Komeda et al., 2015). In addition, autistic people outperformed neurotypical people on a physiological response for scenarios involving empathy for other autistic people (Komeda et al., 2015).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Phenomenology originates from philosophy but is increasingly being used in research in psychology and education in studies that attempt to understand ways of knowing (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research methodological framework that explores the lived experience of phenomena for participants. For instance, in this paper, I explore the lived experience of school-aged children interacting with a diversity-positive children's book.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is defined as the combined effect of belonging to multiple minority groups on societal barriers to full participation, such as discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Howard & Renfrow, 2014). For instance, both autistic individuals and individuals who identify as sexual minorities face discrimination. Individuals who identify as sexual minorities are overrepresented on the autism spectrum (e.g., Gilmour et al., 2012). Dual minority status may create additional barriers to being accepted by society. In this paper, I expand the intersectionality to concept to explore potential for shared understanding among members of different minority groups facing common barriers (e.g., an autistic individual having empathy for an immigrant who faces similar communication barriers).

Masking and Code Shifting

Autistic people experience societal pressure to appear neurotypical by masking natural autistic behaviours. Although masking can increase social acceptance in the short term, it risks long-term mental health consequences (Bargiela & Mandy, 2016). These health risks are created by the fatigue of constant cognitive overriding natural social behaviours and frustration at the inability to be their authentic selves (Boulton et al., 2016; Bargiela & Mandy, 2016). Similarly, people of colour or cultural minorities often describe shifting their natural communication style to blend with the dominant culture. This is referred to as code shifting (Boulton, 2016). For instance, (Boulton 2016) states that black women often try to dress in Caucasian styles at work and alter their conversation styles to match expected white communication styles. Like with autistic masking, code shifting is stressful, exhausting, and increases the risk of future psychological distress (Boulton, 2016). It is hopeful that normalization of differences in social

and emotional learning instruction may reduce the burden on individuals who are cultural minorities or neurodivergent to suppresses their authentic selves to be accepted by others.

Shared Empathy

Intersectionality research often focuses on the minority membership of single individuals. However, it may be helpful to consider similar emotional experiences among different minority groups. Experience of difficulty understanding the social norms of the dominant culture may create opportunities for shared empathy between members of different minority groups (e, g, autistic people, and new immigrants). One potential example of this is that children who are internationally adopted, especially those adopted as older children, face a multitude of family and school issues which can affect their development of positive self-identity and in establishing relationships with others (Rutter et al., 1999; Ferrari, Ranieri, Barni, & Rosnati, 2015). Like internationally adopted children, autistic children experience delays in social and emotional development (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Therefore, children belonging to these groups can empathize with each other about the emotional distress caused by barriers to understand the social norms of the dominant culture.

Social Model of Disability

Oliver (2013) describes the social model of disability as the idea that societal barriers versus personal characteristics are responsible for a lack of access to full societal participation. For instance, discrimination against harmless autistic behaviours may result in autistic people being rejected by peers. Similarly, the lack of a ramp keeps wheelchair users from entering a building, but a wheelchair user has no problem entering a building with a ramp. As mentioned earlier in this section, this paper takes a social model of disability viewpoint.

Theory of Mind (TOM)

Theory of Mind (TOM) is the ability for individuals to understand the perspective of others (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). This ability is necessary to intuitively respond to social situations and desire to engage in prosocial and helpful behaviour within a society. According to Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004), cognitive empathy indicates the ability to recognize the emotions of others and reason as to why these individuals may experience emotions (understanding that bullying can make people upset and why). Affective empathy requires individuals to experience feeling related to the emotional states of others internally.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is organized into chapters. A literature review follows this introductory chapter. The literature review explores medical and neurodiversity models of autism, child emotional development and creative bibliotherapy. The third chapter describes the development of the therapeutic novel, including researching existing children's literature on related topics and revisions to the book based on stakeholder feedback. Chapter four focuses on the methodological and theoretical framework and provides an overview of participants' recruitment, procedure, and considerations for ethics and rigour. The fifth chapter describes research findings in the classroom, including theme emergence from the student *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995). The paper's concluding chapter discusses the implications of the research, including the role of researcher and teacher life experiences in co-constructing meaning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This chapter provides the literature background for understanding perspectives on autism, social and emotional learning literature, and bibliotherapy. Exploring extant literature illustrates the gaps in existing research that are explored in this paper. The first section of this chapter contrasts the neurodiversity and medical models surrounding autism and other disabilities. This next component provides overview of the intersectionality of neurodiversity and multiculturalism. This autism exploration is followed by an exploration of relevant childhood social and emotional developmental theories. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of existing literature supporting creative bibliotherapy with children.

Autism Perspectives

As mentioned in the key terms section of chapter one, autism can be viewed either as a medical condition or as a minority group where autistic individuals face societal barriers to full participation in their communities (Oliver, 2013). The upcoming section of this paper contrasts the medical model with neurodiversity theories that promote social perspective views of autism. Throughout most of this paper, I support a neurodiversity/social model of disability perspective on autism. However, I use the terms Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) sporadically throughout the medical model section of this paper to emphasize tendencies to pathologize all characteristics of autism.

The Medical Model: A Concept of Autism Spectrum Disorder

As mentioned in the key terms section in the introduction, the (American Psychiatric Association (2013). defines autism as a neurodevelopmental disorder resulting in impairments in social communication, language, play, atypical motor skill development, and repetitive

behaviours. Being autistic comes with social consequences. Research suggests that children with ASD have fewer friendships than neurotypical children and are more likely to be targeted for bullying than children with other special education needs such as Down Syndrome (Rowley et al., 2012). In addition to social barriers, autism is often accompanied by medical and psychological comorbid conditions, creating demand in the healthcare system. For instance, according to Anagnostou et al. (2014), some genes linked to the development of ASD autism contribute to developing medical conditions such as cancer, seizures, or congenital organ malformations.

Research utilizing the medical model may result in quality-of-life improvements or treatments for dangerous co-occurring conditions (e.g., Anagnostou et al., 2014). However, sometimes this research can be problematic. For instance, McDiarmid et al. (2018) compared behaviour in genetically modified nematode worms to autistic characteristics in humans with similar genetic mutations. In addition to the potential for anthropomorphism, comparing disabled people to animals with minimal central nervous systems such as worms can propagate stereotypes or mistreatment of autistic people or those with other disabilities as acceptable. It is not surprising that harmful stereotypes about autistic people are portrayed in some resources for family members of autistic people. For instance, the Neurotypical Site (www.theneurotypical.com), a page designed as a support site for family members of autistic people, describes autistic individuals as unable to empathize with others and being callous parents and marriage partners.

Many people have traits associated with autism that are apparent in infancy or early childhood. However, sometimes ability to mask autism symptoms can result in individuals being diagnosed later in life when demands exceed autistic people’s coping mechanisms. For example,

according to Tierney et al. (2016), females typically have higher social expectations from their peers than males, and many autistic females have learned to pass for normal by observing and imitating their peers' behaviour. Masking may initially result in more social acceptance for autistic females than males but carries a risk of psychological complications later in life (Mandy, 2018).

Traditionally treatment for autism has focused on making autistic people appear indistinguishable from their neurotypical peers. One example of a widespread normalization social skills program is the Children's Friendship Training Program (Frankel & Myatt, 2003). Frankel and Myatt designed the Children's Friendship Training Program for school-aged children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Laugeson (2014) adapted the program for autistic adolescents. The aim of both programs is to increase friendship prospects for children with neurological differences by teaching them to behave like their typical peers. For instance, toys or clothing considered unpopular for age or gender are discouraged, and instructors tell children to let playdate guests choose activities. The masking techniques could be helpful in situations such as cooperation with classmates in an assigned group project. However, autistic advocates such as Kapp et al. (2019) express concerns about the social fatigue and long-term stress people will experience by avoiding stereotypical behaviours associated with autism.

Neurodiversity and Social Model of Disability Theories

Many therapies for autistic children aim to enable the individuals to appear as normal as possible. Autistic advocates and researchers often refer to normalization practices as teaching camouflage or "masking" (Bargiela, Steward & Mandy, 2016). Although camouflage techniques may make an autistic person appear more normal, the literature suggests potential long-term

psychological effects of masking on the development of mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression) (Bargiela, Steward & Mandy, 2016).

Debate remains about the benefits of autistic people fitting into society versus having the freedom to be authentic (Kapp et al., 2019; Frankel & Myatt, 2003). TC Waisman discussed the risks and benefits of autism intervention at a speaker panel as part of the 2021 International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) (Kapp et al., 2021). Waisman identifies as autistic and is racially black and stated that therapy should not make autistic people appear indistinguishable from non-autistic people (Kapp et al., 2021). However, she supported treatments that would improve the quality of life of autistic individuals (Kapp et al., 2021). As mentioned earlier in this paper, there are psychological risks to assimilation where autistic individuals have no opportunities to pursue activities they enjoy or communicate in a way that feels natural (e.g., Bargiela et al., 2016).

Intersectionality of Neurodiversity Theory and Multiculturalism

As mentioned earlier, Canadian law theoretically protects autistic individuals and cultural minorities from discrimination. However, some policies and behaviour present throughout Canada enable systemic ableism and discrimination. For instance, Oliver's (2013) social model of disability emphasizes societal barriers (e.g., stairs versus a ramp on a building) versus biological causes as barriers for individuals with disabilities from full participation in society. Similarly, the government of Canada supports immigrants in maintaining their languages and culture but expects new immigrants to learn to speak English and understand the rules of society as stated by the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and the Canadian Human rights Act**.** It would be unethical not to have therapy goals that aid autistic individuals in achieving their highest potential in communication and self-help skills. However, restricted interests, and in some cases,

the desire for less social interaction than neurotypical peers, may not always be a problem for autistic people (Cribb et al., 2019). Similarly, it would be inappropriate to state that someone who immigrated to Canada should only celebrate Canadian holidays.

There are some limitations to freedom for both autistic individuals and cultural minorities. For example, legal practices in some countries would not be appropriate in North America. Zaske (2018) writes of her experience moving from the United States of America to Germany and being surprised that children as young as second grade were allowed to take public transit alone. Young children can take public transit unsupervised in many European cities. In North America, it is illegal to let young children travel independently on public transit (Zaske, 2018). Like unsupervised children being unacceptable in Canada, some co-occurring behaviours with autism can also create safety concerns. For instance, some autistic people have emotional outbursts in public (APA, 2013). Although these behaviours occur due to communication, sensory, and emotional regulation barriers (APA, 2013), therapy needs to reduce these behaviours to help keep autistic people and the public safe.

When considering the intersections of autism and culture, autism must not be interpreted the same across cultures, unlike a non-behavioural condition such as pneumonia (Grinker, 2007). This phenomenon of cultural understandings of autism is described in *Unstrange Minds* by anthropologist Roy Grinker. For instance, in Navajo culture, autism is accepted as a normal state of perpetual childhood and interventions are discouraged (Grinker, 2007). Some autism characteristics are viewed as undesirable behaviours in Canada may be socially acceptable in other cultures. Other autistic behaviours may have more significant consequences in non-Canadian societies. For instance, according to Rahill (2011), lack of eye contact is a sign of respect for authority in Haiti, whereas it is considered rude in Canada. Discomfort with eye

contact may be less of a communication barrier in Haiti than in North America. However, some Haitians view disabilities as punishment for sins of the family or a result of poor parental discipline of children. Despite these differences, finding common emotions and experiences among students may help children develop empathy based on shared emotional aspects.

Both disabled people and those who belong to cultural minority groups face societal pressure to override behaviours perceived as abnormal by the dominant culture cognitively. As a result, membership in one or more minority groups can contribute to discrimination and a different perceived social reality than members of the majority culture in a society. As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Intersectionality is the interaction of memberships in different minority groups and how they relate and contribute to inequality (Crenshaw, 1989; Howard & Renfrow, 2014)). For instance, a student who is autistic and Black may experience additional discrimination over a student who only belongs to one of these minority groups (Dababnah et al., 2021). Despite official legal protection for the rights of minority groups, both autistic people and cultural minorities are victims of discrimination and mistreatment. For instance, a mixed-methods study by Dababnah et al. (2021) indicated that black families with autistic children experienced decreased emotional wellbeing both for fear of marginalization by race and autism status.

Members of cultural minorities are expected to adjust their natural behaviour to blend socially with the dominant culture is called code shifting. For instance, Hall et al. (2012) describe African American women's fatigue from constantly adjusting their dialect and non-verbal communication styles to be socially acceptable in predominately white workplaces. One problematic barrier that comes from a lack of societal understanding is that autistic students and ethnic minorities must conceal aspects of their personality or culture to appear socially

acceptable to neurotypical, white Canadians (Botha & Frost, 2020; Dababnah et al., 2021). Although camouflage techniques may make an autistic person appear more normal and code shifting may make cultural minorities more accepted by peers, the literature suggests potential long-term psychological effects of masking, such as mental health conditions (Bargiela et al., 2016). Despite evidence that masking natural behaviours can have long-term negative psychological implications, some professionals think eliminating behaviours that appear different may make autistic people more socially acceptable to neurotypical people.

In my experience, masking to appear neurotypical made social interactions intended for pleasure into work that requires cognitive effort. I often preferred to play alone as a child and choose my activities. Activities that encourage class discussion and empathy for differences, such as creative bibliotherapy, may reduce the need for minority students to mask behaviour to be accepted.

Overview of Childhood Social and Emotional Learning

The following section of this chapter explores the current body of child social and emotional learning. It begins with exploring Erikson (1959), whose theories laid some of the groundwork for understanding the developmental progression of social and emotional understanding and relating to the world across the lifespan. Next, the relevance of Erikson to recent psychosocial development research is explored in the context of autism, multiculturalism, and adoption. This Erikson (1959) overview is followed by an overview of the current research on social and emotional competence in children. The impact of intersectionality is considered throughout these sections.

Exploring Erikson as a Framework for Social and Emotional Competence

Erik Erikson (1959) devised a social and emotional internal conflict model that included eight stages of psychosocial development. Each life stage presents a central psychosocial conflict involving aspects of the individual and surrounding society, and people must overcome these conflicts to develop and maintain a positive self-identity. For example, individuals' first psychosocial conflict in life is trust versus mistrust, typically between birth and 18 months of age (Erikson, 1959). Children learn whether they can rely on their primary caregivers for feeding and protection in this stage. The basic virtue of this stage is said to be “hope,” whereas infants whose caregivers meet their needs have a sense of security throughout life. In contrast, infants who receive inconsistent caregiving will become withdrawn rather than responsive to caregivers (Erikson, 1959).

Primary caregivers have often abandoned infants and children raised in orphanages, and then these children face inconsistent caregiving and under-stimulation in an institutional environment (Rutter et al., 1999). As a result, many of these children have difficulties forming attachments with adoptive parents (Rutter et al., 1999). Difficulty forming secure attachments may indicate a failure to successfully resolve the first psychosocial conflict of trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1959). In addition to affecting children in these first stages, institutional environments such as orphanages may impact later child development. For instance, Erikson’s (1959) second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt, begins once children are mobile. Children growing up in a stable home have positive experiences with obtaining independence (e.g., toilet training). However, in orphanages with a low staff-to-child ratio, staff may restrict the movement and exploration of children and punish normal child behaviours such as toilet

training accidents. As a result, children in these situations may learn shame and doubt rather than autonomy (Erikson, 1959).

The third stage, initiative versus guilt, begins at preschool age (Erikson, 1959). Children in a traditional Canadian family usually have opportunities to play and explore, whereas orphanages are often impoverished environments. Children may lack toys, playground equipment, or even adult interaction to stimulate mental development (Rutter et al., 1999). Lack of appropriate choices for play and exploration leads to many orphanage children developing self-stimulatory and self-harming behaviours (Rutter et al., 1999). Normal childhood behaviours may be discouraged or punished. Erikson's theory supports the idea that impoverished environments may lead orphans to shame and doubt instead of autonomy and guilt in place of the initiative.

The industry versus inferiority stage begins at school age, and in this stage, children either identity with feeling competent or incompetent (Erikson, 1959). Often orphanage caregivers do not give children the freedom to explore and solve their problems. As a result, children raised in orphanages often develop learned helplessness and give up easily on tasks (Gindis, 2012). These children often have poor impulse control and have less social and emotional regulation abilities than typically developing children of their chronological age (Gindis, 2012). However, as these children do not believe they can rely on caregivers, they can be overly independent in aspects of their lives that typically developing children would trust parents or caregivers to manage (Gindis, 2012). For instance, an eight-year-old securely attached to parents would not feel responsible for keeping younger siblings safe.

When a child approaches adolescence, the identity versus role confusion stage emerges, and children begin to question who they are as a person, in addition to psychosocial conflicts

revolving around trust and independence (Erikson, 1959). Racial and cultural identity becomes more critical (Brocious, 2017). Children who are racially different from their adoptive parents and community members are more likely to experience a conflict of their birth cultural identity versus the culture they are raised in (Ferrari et al., 2015).

Difficulties with psychosocial conflicts in childhood may continue into adulthood. For instance, children who do not learn to trust and form attachments may have problems establishing romantic relationships in the intimacy versus isolation stage, which begins in late adolescence (Erikson, 1959). In addition, children who did not have positive early experiences with parents may have difficulty raising their children, creating problems in the generativity versus stagnation stage early to mid-adulthood (Erikson, 1959). Finally, individuals who never developed a positive social identity may have low satisfaction about their lifelong self-concept and feel unfulfilled and depressed near the end of their life, resulting in a poor outcome in the eighth stage of integrity vs despair (Erikson, 1959).

Research on Effective and Appropriate Social Communication

Meeting social and emotional needs across the lifespan requires social and emotional competence. The goal of emotional expression is to communicate social needs to others. For example, basic emotions such as crying allow infants to communicate with caregivers to meet needs (e.g., fear, pain) (Denham, 2019). However, as children become older, emotional needs become more complex, and expectations for the expression of emotion become increasingly complicated. Saarni (1997) states that display rules are societal expectations regarding context-dependent emotional expression and are important for communicating emotional needs to others while simultaneously being socially accepted. Display rules are discussed in further detail in the key terms section.

Emotional competence is important for all children, but autistic children and those who belong to cultural minorities face additional barriers to success in this domain compared to neurotypical peers. For instance, individuals who are autistic or members of cultural minorities often have difficulty understanding display rules (Saarni, 1997). In addition, children who have experienced war may be less likely to engage in reciprocal positive emotions in play situations with other children (Warren et al., 2009). In addition. Autistic children often have developmental delays in awareness of the emotional states of others (i.e., cognitive empathy) compared to their peers (e.g., Bageer et al., 2011; Bevilacqua et al., 2014).

Research on Theory of Mind and Empathy

According to Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004), autistic children are often later than their neurotypical peers in developing these skills. According to Deschamps et al. (2014), by school age, most neurotypical children understand complex emotional nuances such as sarcasm or attempts to deceive peers (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, 1994). In addition, autistic children may be later than their peers to recognize when their social interactions appear uninteresting or even upsetting. Difficulty with understanding the emotional state of others makes autistic students both more likely to be victims of bullies and accidental bullies (Deschamps et al., 2014).

It is easier for humans to have cognitive and affective empathy for people they see as their perceived social group members. A study of 15 autistic and 14 neurotypical adults showed that ventromedial cortex activation was greater in autistic participants when they read excerpts about the emotions of autistic characters than when they read about neurotypical characters. (Komeda et al., 2014). For neurotypical participants, fMRI imaging showed the opposite pattern. Thus, Autistic adults may have more cognitive and affective empathy for other autistic adults.

Although childhood stress may differ, the emotions shared by children who face barriers may be similar enough that a shared understanding is possible. For instance, most children in an elementary school classroom may feel capable and adequate compared to their peers and disability or cultural barriers may negatively affect this psychosocial process. However, the development of empathy for peers and emergent understanding may help mitigate these negative feelings and perceptions of low self-concept.

Creative Bibliotherapy for Social and Emotional Learning

Bibliotherapy may normalize children's feelings by reading about children at a similar developmental level experiencing the same feelings when overcoming a psychosocial conflict. For example, older children who have difficulty trusting their adoptive parents may read fiction about another child overcoming trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1959) and realize they are not alone in their feelings. In turn, feeling validation leads to a reduction of negative emotions. In addition, stories showing children solving problems independently (e.g., reading about a character coping with conflicting birth identities and adoptive race and culture) may serve as role models for readers. However, it is important to remember that bibliotherapy uses stories as prompts in a learning environment, not simply reading books with children or telling them to read books. Undirected reading is not creative bibliotherapy.

Potential for Diversity-Positive Creative Bibliotherapy Interventions

Both cognitive and affective empathy may require some understanding of a shared environment. Similar life experiences may facilitate autistic people's more empathetic abilities for other autistic people versus for neurotypical people (Komeda et al., 2014). According to a conceptual framework paper devised by Kucirkova (2019), the use of stories may help children develop empathy for members of minority groups.

A scoping review by Kucircova (2019) provided a theoretical framework for using children's books to teach empathy for minority groups. Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004) define cognitive empathy as understanding the rationale behind the emotions of others. Affective or emotional empathy is experiencing emotions in response to perceiving the feelings of others (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, 2004). Bloom (2016) describes in-group empathy (empathy for those like oneself) and out-group empathy (empathy for those who are dissimilar compared to oneself). If others are perceived to have a worldview or objectionable feelings, out-group empathy can sometimes create hostility versus inclusiveness (Bloom, 2016).

On the other hand, reading can create in-group empathy for minority groups if children can emotionally identify with characters from diverse backgrounds. For empathy creation to be successful, books must be engaging to children and utilized as a prompt for discussion between children and their caregivers (Kucircova, 2019). For instance, Adrián et al. (2007) found that mothers needed to use metacognitive and emotional language when reading to children to maintain emotional learning from books

Importance of Caregivers as Facilitators in Bibliotherapy

Current research supports the idea that caregiver interaction is necessary to reinforce learning and for children to transfer what they learned from books to other situations beyond the limited scope of book content. However, reading stories to students without discussion or activities to reinforce learning has limited effectiveness and potential for children's inaccurate and even harmful interpretations of the material. For instance, Kanarowski (2012) tested a short story about a child who used an alternative communication device with a sample of 71 first-grade students. The intervention aimed to reduce stereotypes about communication disabilities

among students. Instead, reading this story to the group of children increased negative stereotypes. (Kanarowski, 2012).

Similarly, a study by Mare and Acosta (2008) examined the impact of a Clifford the dog movie on increasing acceptance of disabilities. In one condition, the characters were afraid of a three-legged dog and eventually befriended this dog. In the second condition, the dogs formed a friendship without being initially scared of the dog with three legs. Children were more likely to misinterpret the story in the fear condition. However, most children misunderstood the story's intent and responded to its moral, which indicated that they could not generalize their learning beyond the movie. For instance, students gave answers that showed the film intended to teach people to be friendly to dogs with three-legs and did not think about the applicability of the message to humans with disabilities.

The available literature on bibliotherapy supports its use across various circumstances when used correctly. For instance, when Wang et al. (2015) combined literature about bullying with reinforcing discussions and activities, results indicated gains in pro-social behaviour in third and fourth-grade students. In addition, the experimental group showed improvements in social-emotional assets and pro-social behaviour when compared to controls. Similarly, a study of 72 boys with aggressive behaviours (Schectman, 2006) included three conditions: 1) integrative counselling, 2) bibliotherapy and integrative counselling 3) no counselling. Again, the boys who received bibliotherapy and counselling displayed the most significant reduction in aggressive behaviours.

Summary

Autism is a neurological condition that may be viewed as either a neurological disorder in need of treatment or a neurological difference where autistic people face barriers to societal

accessibility. As an autistic individual and a researcher, I support a balanced approach where treatments for autism are aimed to improve the quality of life of autistic individuals versus making them indistinguishable from neurotypical peers. Creative bibliotherapy could generate discussion to improve understanding between autistic, cultural minority, and neurotypical people. The following chapter provides an overview of the development of the diversity positive chapter book, *The Book of Can't and Don't*.

Chapter 3: Children's Book Development

Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore novel development and how I engaged in a hermeneutic process to create and revise *The Book of Can't and Don't*. The first section of this chapter will explore the impact of my experience as an autistic individual, including societal barriers and the development of intersectional friendships. The second section will explore locally available children's literature on interracial adoption to further understand bibliotherapy potential and gaps in this area. The last section of this chapter will describe my novel revision process as I learned from interacting with minority group stakeholders, educators, and academic leaders.

In this section I explore the available international adoption literature in Edmonton area which features characters who are cultural minorities. I contrast the themes and characters in these books with *The Book of Can't and Don't* where I attempted to contrast culture, neurodiversity, and childhood misunderstandings that can create barriers to friendship formation.

Overview of Novel in Current Study

The Book of Can't and Don't tells the story of eight-year-old Malika, a newly adopted child from Haiti who fears her new adoptive family will decide to send her back if she makes mistakes. She forms a bond with her autistic new cousin, Zendaya who, like her is uncomfortable with social norms of the dominant culture such as eye contact with adults. The two girls write a survival guide that they update each day with all the things you are not allowed to do in this country. However, Malika finds out that Zendaya owns a dog, and she is terrified of dogs due to a previous experience of being bitten by a dog. Malika fears she will lose her new home if she discloses to her family the fear of her cousin's dog. Zendaya seems hurt that Malika does not

want to come to her house to play and will not tell her why. She thinks that she made Malika angry by bragging about her spelling test score when Malika failed the test and hopes her cousin will forgive her and come to her birthday party (see Appendix for the complete book).

Considering Local Trends and Literature Availability

My life experiences as an autistic person and autism researcher gave me some pre-existing knowledge about the social context of autism before starting this project. However, I needed to understand more about adoption, immigration, and racial barriers to author this novel responsibly. I wanted my book to accurately represent current adoption trends within the province of Alberta, Canada. Understanding the demographics of local schools would ensure the book was relevant to children attending schools in this city. In addition, it was important to consider current global crises such as the Syrian war and other global crises which brought refugee children to Canada.

As part of the process of reflexivity, in 2016, I conducted a literature search of Edmonton public libraries to understand what books on the adoption of children of color and who were members of cultural minorities were currently available to Edmonton-area families with school-aged children. I focused on books aimed at children of elementary school age or teenagers versus picture books designed for young children as this was more appropriate for my intended audience. In addition, I chose to search the local libraries versus commercial places for book purchases in consideration of families who may not have the means to pay for a book in a bookstore or order it online.

Exploration of Available Adoption Literature

Edmonton Public Libraries and University of Alberta Libraries were searched for juvenile fiction using the search term “adoption.” I performed the search to simulate Alberta

families or educators searching for adoption books to capture what would be readily available to these people. I excluded books about domestic adoption that did not include interracial adoption and books about children raised by relatives. I found five books in the Edmonton area which met the above criteria. Two of the five books focused on adopted children as older children and faced major cultural and attachment adaptations (Kadohata, 2014; Peacock, 2012). Three titles featured children adopted as infants and focused on coming of age and identity formation concerning birth versus adoptive race and culture (Gibney, 2015; Hartley, 2015; Sevah, 2015).

See No Color portrays the conflicting emotions of 16-year-old Alex. This biracial girl grew up in a white family who demonstrates an inability to accept her conflicting identities of culturally white and racially black (Gibney, 2015). Her parents state that they are "colorblind" and refuse to discuss race. In See No Color, Alex begins to navigate her black identity without the support of her adoptive parents (Gibney, 2015). She travels to a black hair salon on her own, discovers styling techniques for ethnic hair, navigates a relationship with her first black boyfriend, and makes an independent road trip to meet her birth father. Alex is in the identity versus role confusion stage (Erikson, 1959) and has difficulty maintaining honest relationships (i.e., fidelity) with her family and first boyfriend. For instance, she is uncomfortable with her black boyfriend being around her white parents, so she lies to the boyfriend about not wanting her to date. She even accomplishes a road trip to see her birth father by lying to her adoptive parents about her whereabouts on the weekend she travelled to see him.

Ferrari et al. (2015) indicate that children raised by families of a different race often feel conflicting emotions about their race and culture. Parental acceptance of these differences and exploring birth culture influence psychological well-being. A biracial adoptee wrote See No Color based on her life experiences (Gibney, 2015). Based on current literature, there may be

bibliotherapeutic potential in See No Colour in helping young readers explore their cultural and racial identity independently without the support of parents or caregivers. In addition, See No Color provides an example of a youth who overcomes role confusion to form an identity (Erikson, 1959; Gibney, 2015). Race is not the main story arc in *The Book of Can't and Don't*. For instance, in one scene, Malika says that her adoptive mother does not know how to braid hair, but the focus is more on cultural and behavioural traits than physical appearance.

In Dara Palmer's Major Drama (Shevah, 2015), Dara's parents encourage her to explore her cultural identity, allowing her to have regular contact with another adoptee from the same country and giving her the option of visiting her birth country. Like Alex, Dara is in the identity versus role confusion stage (Erikson, 1959; Gibney, 2015; Shevah, 2015). Unlike Alex, Dara's adoptive parents support her cultural identity (Gibney, 2015; Shevah, 2015). In Dara's case, she can be open and honest (i.e., have fidelity) and explore her identity by building rather than harming relationships. Dara is initially disappointed that her teacher believes her Cambodian identity is not suited to roles in traditional plays such as The Sound of Music and wishes to be white to fit with her identity as an actor. Dislike of one's skin colour is an example of role confusion (Erikson). Throughout the story, with the help of a teacher she initially dislikes, Dara learns that acting is about discovering roles that are true to yourself and being authentic rather than becoming somebody you are not. Acting on stage as a person quite different from oneself is relatable to the concept of autistic masking versus being authentically autistic and including this as part of identity. After the novel, Dara creates a play where she, a Cambodian character, plays the lead role and tells the story of her birth and adoption. She sees her identity as a contribution rather than a barrier to her planned acting career and realizes she doesn't have to be a

stereotypical white actor. Dara successfully progresses from role confusion to identity (Erikson, 1959).

Zendaya balances autistic authenticity with empathy and understanding for her family and classmates in *The Book of Can't and Don't*. Zendaya must decide when to behave as her autistic self and when it is better to appear neurotypical to avoid being ostracized by her classmates. She realizes that understanding the worldviews of others can increase her friendship prospects and quality of life and not take away from her authentic self. For instance, Zendaya's cousin Malika will feel safer at her house if Zendaya is respectful of her fear of dogs, despite Zendaya's wish to have her dog Kalib included in every activity. Putting the dog away at the birthday party let Malika enjoy the party, and she was able to slowly introduce Kalib to Malika without scaring her.

The novel, Half a World Away (Kadohata, 2014) tells the story of Jaden's inability to attach to his adoptive parents for fear of abandonment. Instead, Jaden acts out through stealing, food hoarding, and fire setting. Feeding is a primary focus of the trust versus mistrust stage (Erikson, 1959). In addition, lack of impulse control (e.g., stealing, destructive behaviours) is an anticipated consequence of failure to master the developmental stage of autonomy versus shame and doubt (Erikson, 1959). Rutter et al. (1999) state that attachment difficulties are common in individuals whose parents adopt them as older children.

Jaden and my character, Malika from *The Book of Can't and Don't*, are examples of characters who show a failure to resolve the trust versus mistrust stage (Erikson, 1959). Malika's emotions are like Jaden's, but she displays internalized versus externalized behaviours. For instance, Malika does not steal or set fires. However, she is afraid to admit she fears her cousin's dog if this results in her new family sending her back to Haiti, fears sleeping alone at night, and

considers herself a failure at school. Rutter et al. (1999) described withdrawal from affection in children who were not given appropriate emotional caregiving in young childhood. These children show the ability to improve with time in an enriched environment, but many of them continue to have lasting deficits.

In Half a World Away, Jaden falls in love for the first time since his abandonment by his birth mother with a toddler at an orphanage. He can see some of himself in this toddler, especially when he learns that nobody wants to adopt this little boy due to his developmental disabilities. This book is one of the few examples in extant children's literature of the value of shared empathy in intersectionality between members of different minority groups (Kadohata, 2014).

Jaden remembers how it was difficult for him to find a family as an older child when many adoptive families desired infants. However, when his family realizes his emotional attachment to this toddler, they agree to adopt it. Jaden realizes how much his family loves him and their sacrifices out of love for him and other children. The presentation is realistic as Jaden continues to have issues with attachment and loss but is working towards overcoming them (Kadohata, 2014). This novel may help young readers overcome psychosocial crises by reducing negative emotions and using characters as models for independent problem-solving. In addition, it may facilitate intersectionality discussions and activities in classrooms. However, it would be unsuitable for elementary school students due to extreme behaviours and abuse references.

In Red Thread Sisters, Wen, newly adopted from China, is surprised that her parents love her unconditionally and not only when she behaves perfectly (Peacock, 2012). When her family undergoes financial difficulties and cuts back on extras, she worries that she is an "extra" and her family will send her back to China. Even though Wen does not have serious attachment

problems, she still displays a sense of loss where she fears her adoptive parent's love is conditional and could change at any time (Peacock, 2012). Wen displays internalized behaviours, like my character, Malika, versus acting out like Jaden in Half a World Away. These children had poor experiences overcoming the trust versus mistrust stage (Erikson, 1959). Wen had some consistent caregivers, which may have allowed her to adjust to her adoptive family easier than Jaden (Peacock, 2012). Malika in *The Book of Can't and Don't* have some positive relationships in early childhood. She bonded with her birth mother, who died in a hurricane in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. She missed her schoolteacher—Madame Moreau, who showed her animal videos on her phone.

In addition to battling trust versus mistrust, Wen also faces identity versus role confusion as she establishes her identity as a newly adopted American. For instance, Wen learned some English at the orphanage in preparation for her transition to America. However, the transition shock makes her briefly forget what she has learned and cannot use it. At the beginning of the novel, she does not understand American style and wears three new shirts to school at once, and her peers tease her for her broken English. Malika and Zendaya show atypical preferences for clothing in a scene in *The Book of Can't and Don't*. Zendaya tells the class about her autism and love of dolls and shows off hand flapping in another scene. Zendaya is surprised when her classmates laugh at her instead of interested in her story.

Throughout Red Thread Sisters, Wen's English and confidence in American culture develop (Peacock, 2012). She learns to relate to her classmates and establish friendships. Red Thread Sisters shows Wen battling both trusts vs mistrust and identity versus role confusion and can help readers feel validation, harmful emotion reduction and provide a model for independent problem-solving. Like Wen, Zendaya learns some of the social norms for blending into Canadian

culture, and her mother answers her questions about how to blend in socially at school and avoid teasing. For instance, bragging about her spelling test scores will hurt the feelings of students who are not good at spelling, including her cousin, Malika, who she views as her best friend.

In The Finding Place, thirteen-year-old Kelly, and her mother return to China, where her parents adopted her from birth (Hartley, 2015). Brocious (2017) states that returning to birth countries and learning the language can aid in positive racial and cultural identity formation. Kelly is in the identity versus role confusion stage, and her return to China makes her consider the implications of being racially Chinese and culturally white (Erikson, 1959, Brocious, 2017). Kelly feels awkward around Chinese people because they expect her to be fluent in the language and culture and see her as slow when her Chinese. Her inability to speak fluent Chinese negatively affects her perception of identity (Erikson, 1959). Kelly meets a woman adopting an infant who considers not adopting the child because of potential health problems (Hartley, 2015). Kelly asks the woman if she were diagnosed with complications in pregnancy if she would have an abortion. When the woman says abortion would not be an option, Kelly begins to wonder if adopted children are valued less by families than birth children. Kelly still experiences some aspects of trust versus mistrust.

Khanna and Killian (2015) state that many adoptive families have specific requirements for adoption, such as adopting an infant over an older child or avoiding the adoption of children who are black. Most parents who birth a child do not give up or abandon a child that does not meet parents' expectations (e.g., a minor disability). Adopted children may relate to Kelly's feelings that adoptive parents may view their children as more disposable than biological children. The novels included in this paper explored Erikson's psychosocial conflicts in childhood. Bibliotherapy of this type may validate young readers' feelings regarding racial and

cultural identity development and establish attachment and trust with their adoptive parents. In turn, this may reduce the negative emotions of readers and encourage independent problem-solving in overcoming psychosocial conflicts (Erikson, 1959).

Considering Limitations of Available Adoption Literature

One of the most noticeable limitations in this sample of children's books is an uneven race distribution compared to Alberta's 2015 to 2016 adoption statistics. Canadians adopted 2,127 children internationally in 2009. The top five countries were China (22%), the United States (12%), Ethiopia (8%), Vietnam (8%), and Haiti (7%), respectively. However, adoption trends have changed in Alberta since 2009.

Recent statistics available from the province of Alberta indicate that between 2015 and 2016, Adoptive families brought 90 children into Alberta from other countries during this period. Adoptions from China have decreased since 2009, potentially due to stricter adoption requirements. Only three children were adopted into Alberta from China in 2015 and 2016. Currently, the United States, where 22 children (primarily African American infants), is the most popular country for Albertans. Haiti is the second most popular country. Albertans adopted eight children from Haiti in these two years.

The literature available when I began drafting the book still reflected dated trends. For example, four out of the five books in this sample featured white or Asian children (Shevah, 2015; Hartley, 2015; Kadohata, 2015; Peacock, 2012), whereas only one of the books featured a child who was half African American (Gibney, 2015). If this sample of books represents the entire body of adoption books, adoption literature overrepresents Asian countries. This underrepresentation of black children in literature may create additional difficulties for young

readers, especially those in identity versus role confusion. Racial and cultural identity has more significance to young people than early childhood (Brocious. 2017).

According to Khanna and Killian (2015), adoptive parents in the United States are reluctant to adopt black children domestically and prefer to adopt Asian or Eastern European children abroad. They propose that children from Asian countries are associated with positive traits, whereas black children are associated with undesirable characteristics. Therefore, an increase in available literature about the adoption of black children may help internationally adopted children of colour form positive self-identity despite societal stereotypes.

In Red Thread Sisters (Peacock, 2012) and Half a World Away (Kadohata, 2014), the novels portrayed America as a better country than the character's birth countries. For instance, the orphanage staff are cruel to Wen's friend Shu-Ling, who has a mild congenital foot deformity, stating that she is worthless and does not deserve an education (Peacock, 2012). Getting adopted into America is the way to give her a good life. In Half a World Away, Romania is extreme poverty where homes do not have electricity. Jaden thinks his birth mother would not have abandoned him if they had electricity (Kadohata, 2014). According to Khanna & Killian (2015), adoptive parents view certain countries as more desirable than others, with Asian countries like China being more favourable than racially black countries like Ethiopia. The idea of North American countries being preferred countries while considering birth countries "poor countries" reinforces stereotypes and may make it difficult for a child who is adopted to develop a positive cultural identity. Writers portraying birth countries as hostile locations may harm internationally adopted children's positive cultural identity. Concerns about heritage and country of origin become most relevant during the identity vs role confusion stage (Brocious. 2017; Erikson, 1959).

In addition to exploring racial and cultural identity issues, children adopted as older will experience challenges transitioning to a new language and culture. Out of the sample of books I obtained, two of the children were adopted as older children rather than as infants (Peacock, 2012; Kadohata, 2014). Only one of the five books, The Red Thread Sisters, focused on the timeframe and the months immediately following an adoption (Peacock. 2012). The Government of Alberta website showed that almost half, or 40 out of 90 children, were five years old or older at the time of adoption. Canadian adoptive parents only adopted 22 of these children as infants. If this sample is representative of the children's books available on international adoption, it indicates a need for more literature focusing on the immediate adaptation of newly adopted children rather than children who were adopted as infants or in their new country for several years. More literature is also needed that addresses the experiences of older children who are still overcoming this psychosocial conflict.

I chose a Haitian character for the main character in the book I created. The Alberta Human Services Website indicates that from 2014 to 2015, over 37% of children adopted into Alberta were from countries with a primarily racially black population. Haiti was the most common country of origin for adopting older children out of these countries. I selected female characters due to the media saturation of stories of males with autism, particularly male savants and the under-diagnosis and recognition of females on the autism spectrum (Bargiela et al., 2016). Like adoptees of colour, females with autism are often an unheard voice in literature.

Impact of Researcher Lived Experience on Novel Development

The Lens of the Researcher

One important aspect of Gadamer (1998) is that the life experience and worldview of the researcher are embedded in the data. The concept of translates to being there or existing. For

instance, I had the life experience of going through the education system as an autistic person from kindergarten to graduate school. Although acceptance for different communication methods had improved since 1990, when I began kindergarten, stigma still exists. For example, in one graduate-level class about managing classroom behaviour, the instructor said that eye contact expectations differed across cultures. However, he believed in forcing autistic students to make eye contact. I thought of this experience and professional situations where superiors criticized my cadence of speech.

Intersectional Friendships and Shared Empathy

When I entered university, I noticed that I preferred to interact with classmates and instructors who were cultural minorities over white Canadians. I observed in some instances that members of diverse cultures shared compatible communication styles with my non-neurotypical style of conversation. For instance, I can often not understand implied meanings or non-verbal cues and need direct instruction. My natural communication style is direct, and I prefer honesty over vagueness. As a result, others sometimes see me as rude and unable to perceive social cues. My undergraduate research advisor, Dr. Melike Schalomon, a professor, and immigrant from Germany, grew up in a remote Bavaria village and has a heritage from an alpine ethnic group, the Allgäuer. Her culture's communication style worked well for my autistic brain. This quote is from a 2018 podcast for Stairway to STEM (stairwaytostem.org), a National Science Foundation-funded educational website that helps neurodivergent students transition from high school to university (Gilmour & Schalomon, 2018). This excerpt discusses the intersectionality of communication styles and the potential for effective communication and shared understanding among members of two different minority groups:

> **Dr. Melike Schalomon:** I'm fairly blunt myself, so I think your style simply worked for me. I didn't have a problem with that. I also don't have a problem with saying things like, "Okay, my class is starting now; I can't talk anymore." I think I started doing that quickly…I do think that, just as with any student, it's a question of having a similar interactional style... Other students find it offensive if I'm blunt, and I just say, "Sorry, but I'm out of time now." So, your and my style was compatible…For me, from my end of things, it's a personality style, and it just happens to work out that well (Gilmour & Schalomon, 2018).

Shallen Blanchard is a Métis artist from Regina, Canada, and a human rights advocate. The Métis people are an indigenous group that originated from land that is now Western Canada. Like Melike, Shallen grew up in a remote farming community with a distinct culture that differed from the dominant culture in her country. I met Shallen online in 2017. At the time, she tutored Syrian refugee children and volunteered with amnesty international. When I mentioned my project to her, she shared some tutoring experiences. In addition, we had a shared understanding of some barriers to full participation in society, despite varied reasons. The quote below is from a podcast we created for Stairway to STEM:

> **Shallen Blanchard:** I have dark hair but fair skin and blue eyes. I recall having a hard time fitting in. I identified as Métis. However, I was "too white" for the Natives and "too Native" for the whites. I found myself changing my personality to fit in with whichever crowd I was hanging out with at the time. I didn't know who I was or where I fit in. My Caucasian friends would be asking me, "Why do you talk that way?" Why do you have that accent?" "You

sound like an ‘Indian,’ they would tell me.” My native friends would get upset with me for hanging out with people that weren’t native (Gilmour & Blanchard, 2020).

Shallen describes code shifting between Métis and white cultures to be accepted among her diverse groups of peers (Gilmour & Blanchard, 2020). Similarly, Melike must adapt her “blunt” communication style to avoid being perceived as rude by some students. Melike and Shallen must code shift (e.g., Boulton, 2016) to blend in as typical members of Canadian society (Gilmour & Schalomon, 2018). Their code-shifting experiences allow them to emphasize my autistic experience of masking certain behaviours so peers and colleagues will perceive me as polite and competent (Bargiela & Mandy, 2016).

Relating Lived Experiences to the Present Study and Novel Development

The above experiences partially inspired my idea to create a children’s book on the potential for friendship between autistic individuals and members of minority cultures. Individuals who are not members of the dominant culture may form shared empathy from emotionally similar experiences. I refer to this as between-group intersectionality, which expands the idea of intersectionality to focus on interactions between people belonging to different minority groups. Some experiences enhanced my quality of life and self-concept, such as my friendships with Shallen and Melike. The experience with a professor in my graduate program, who made the comments about forcing eye contact, was an example of a negative experience. I am hopeful that classroom discussions among teachers and students and engaging in a story supported by Kucircova (2017) create a platform for constructive debate and shared empathy.

When I developed *The Book of Can't and Don't*, which I was in the process of writing at the time I created the intersectionality podcasts, one example of engaging in reflexivity was having to consider developmental differences between adults and children. This excerpt from *The Book of Can't and Don't* describe fictional child characters, Malika and Zendaya, rejecting the social norm of eye contact:

> "Zen, remember to look at me when I am talking to you, sweetie. It shows you have listening eyes," said Aunt Erin. She smiled at Zendaya and pointed to her own eyes. "Okay, Mom," said Zendaya. She shrugged her shoulders and looked at Aunt Erin. I looked away from Aunt Erin. "I do not want to look at Auntie," I said. "It is rude in Haiti to look at grownups in the eyes." "I don't like to look at people either," said Zendaya. I smiled and touched Zendaya's hand. Maybe she was like me in some ways. "Do you have to look at grownups here?" I asked.

The examples in the podcasts and *The Book of Can't and Don't* portray the consequences of miscommunication, masking and code shifting. However. The experiences of minority children and minority adults have distinct developmental differences, so the social context in *The Book of Can't and Don't* is markedly different from that portrayed in the podcast. These children know that an adult corrects them for violating a social expectation. Yet, adults are still providing emotional scaffolding to help them navigate the social climate with young children. The following section of this chapter will examine communication with community stakeholders to revise sections of the book to ensure developmental appropriateness for children and character believability.

Implementing Stakeholder Feedback in Book Revisions

Feedback from stakeholders was important when considering the issues of migrant children, orphanages, and adoption. When learning about orphan and refugee children, I had to revise some of my pre-existing biases about what constitutes poverty. For instance, some children living in orphanages are severely food insecure while still having access to luxury items in Western society (e.g., cell phones). In October 2019, I attended a presentation by a panel of undergraduate students at MacEwan University. These students travelled to Ukraine with an organization known as Help us Help the Children (helpushelp.org). After their presentation, I asked this panel questions about their experience leading activities with refugee children. This group of students described how in Ukraine, cell phone plans are low-cost and often provided to children by sponsors for free. However, despite widely available cell phones, necessities such as nutritious food are prohibitively expensive. Students described children with severe stunting of growth due to malnutrition who owned cell phones (Personal communication, K. Dryden, J. Higgins, V. Luca, A. Malmquist, L. Schalomon, and H. Wright, October 3rd, 2019). It is a common stereotype that developing countries have primitive or outdated technology. The Vertile Foundation (vertilefoundation.org) runs a children's home in Haiti and shares stories about their organization on social media. Their website mentions that residents of the children's homes have access to the internet for their schooling. As a result of the student panel and social media groups, I revised scenes in my book which originally describe the Haitian orphanage as having VHS tapes and a VCR for animal movies. My revision described Malika viewing animal movies on her teacher's phone.

Another example of revising my preconceptions was implementing feedback from an adoptive parent. This conversation and revision resulted in me improving the voice of Malika's

character. JM, a woman who adopted a nine-year-old girl who experienced severe neglect helped me understand why older adopted children often distrust adults and it takes time for such children to view adoptive parents as parents. I rewrote some scenes of the book so that Malika took weeks to call her adoptive mother "Mama" versus calling her "Mama" right after being adopted. An excerpt from JM's comments is illustrated below as an example. JM's feedback allowed me to modify sections of the novel to reflect the experience of a newly adopted child more accurately.

> **JM:** Workers will never push a child to use the words, Mommy and Daddy." This is not something that happens right away but usually after the child is settled…You want kids to understand being scared is OK. Feeling alone and sad is OK. Being angry is Okay. Whatever they feel is Okay… Helps kids and adoptive parents understand that what they are going through is normal. The change from a new country, new language, new family is not a good thing … her affect would probably be flatter since [Malika] would be putting up walls to protect herself.

Following feedback from JM, I revised sections to illustrate the process of Malika learning to trust her new family. For instance, in the paragraph in my first draft, Malika appears confident with her new family. However, the revision shows her referring to her adoptive mother by her first name and grieving the loss of her birth family and home country, including the significance of taking the last name of a new family and giving up her birth family name. Another parent of a school-aged child suggested that it was more likely an orphan child would carry a cloth doll than a miniature drum replica as dolls are commonly distributed to children by

workers in third-world countries. These excerpts display the opening paragraph of *The Book of Can't and Don't* before and after implementing JM's revisions:

> **Initial Opening Paragraph:** I put my hand in my pocket and touched the toy drum that my first Mama gave me. She died when I was three. I had a new Mama and a new last name now. I used to be Malika Anabelle Jean-Baptiste. Now I was Malika Anabelle Zeppelin because Mama adopted me.

> **Revised Opening Paragraph Implementing JM's Feedback:** I put my hand in my pocket and touched the Haitian doll the workers gave me when I lost my first Mama. I was three then, and I was eight on the day I came here to the new place. My family was new, and so was my last name. I used to be Malika Anabelle Jean-Baptiste. Now I was Malika Anabelle Zeppelin because Ms. Eva adopted me. She let me keep my first name. My name and the doll were all I had left of my life.

In 2016, I engaged in personal online communication with a Haitian woman who immigrated to the United States as a child. She told me that a Haitian child might be uncomfortable eating at a house other than their own. She said parents teach children that accepting charity from others lacks pride or that strangers may poison food. In addition, this woman informed me North American food and recipes were different than most dishes Haitians ate. For instance, Haitian beans and rice are different from the frequently used minute rice in many Canadian dishes. In addition, a child might refer to adults as Madame or Auntie versus a title such as Mrs. or a first name as expected in North America. One such example of

implementing this in my book is a scene where Malika greets her new teacher as Madame Baker versus Mrs. Baker and then corrects herself afterwards and feels self-conscious.

Education and health professionals provided insight into optimizing the book and accompanying activities for classroom use. For example, teachers and education leaders informed me that it was essential to consider the book's reading level. Utilizing the Advantage Touchstone Applied Scientists Association Open Standard (ATOS) complexity tool to determine readability ensured that the book was understandable by students when read aloud to them by a teacher. Another suggestion I received from educators was that entering the classroom several times would enrich data and make it easier for teachers to stay on task with the study.

Creating Relatable Characters

When designing *The Book of Can't and Don't*, I aimed to create characters that were relatable to most children. In addition, I wanted to have characters in the book who were underrepresented in currently available literature. For instance, much like the lack of children's books about black adoptees, most books about autistic people are about men (ref). Although autistic men outnumber females when consulting official statistics on autism prevalence, autistic females are often underdiagnosed due to the ability to mask autism symptoms and display autistic traits differently than their male peers (ref). Sometimes autistic females are not diagnosed until adolescence or adulthood and sometimes they never receive a diagnosis but face physical and mental health challenges later in life due to the psychological burden of masking (Botha & Frost, 2020; Tierney, Burns, & Kilbey, 2016).

I intended to use this novel in public schools, so I avoided religious references in the book for ethical reasons. The intent was to create an authentic voice for Malika while avoiding controversial references such as Catholicism and other religious practices standards in Haiti.

Malika and Zendaya were designed to be believable and realistic characters but not have traits that would alienate peers. For instance, the author deliberately chose the main character, Malika, not to show severe reactive attachment disorder symptoms such as destroying property or the inability to feel empathy. However, she is shorter than expected for her age due to having poor nutrition living in post-earthquake Haiti. In addition, Malika experiences separation anxiety, distrust of adults, and fear of abandonment for disclosing her fear of her cousin's dog, who was "here first." It was realistic for an adopted older child from Haiti to speak English. Many orphanages educate school-aged children in English to prepare them for adoption in researching Haitian orphanages. For instance, God's Littlest Angels Haitian Baby Ministry schools their children in English and French to prepare children for communicating with parents post-adoption.

I deliberately avoided referring to Malika or Zendaya witnessing or experiencing violence or any form of abuse in the book. I wanted the book to be age-appropriate and avoid potential triggers for students while allowing space for students to bring in experiences from their own lives if they felt comfortable disclosing subjective experiences. For example, a conversation with a university professor who studied children's literature in 2019 resulted in questions about whether the novel would include LGBTQA characters. No characters were LGBTQA. However, I responded to the professor that I thought open-ended discussions on social norms such as clothing and toy preferences might result in LGBTQA students disclosing discrimination in these aspects of life for distinct reasons than the characters.

As suggested in Kucirkova's (2019) framework, it was important for my characters to appear different from average but still relatable to most students in the class and for these instances of potential common ground to be illustrated. Zendaya has characteristics of autism,

including a particular interest in dogs and princess movies and mannerisms such as skipping and hand flapping. When she is distressed, she can display inappropriate behaviours like ripping up a piece of paper or kicking a garbage can. However, I decided that Zendaya would not exhibit explosive outbursts that are a problem for some autistic children. A student in a third-grade classroom with average intelligence probably has had therapies as a young child, which allowed her to develop some coping skills. Malika and Zendaya shared several common interests with their classmates, such as interest in a popular trading cards game, enjoying squirt gunfights at a birthday party, and a desire to join in games on the playground with classmates.

Summary

This chapter explored the scholarly and reflexive processes I engaged in as a researcher to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of *The Book of Can't and Don't*. I described the process of exploring local adoption literature, reviewing government documents to obtain demographic data on refugee and adopted children, intersectional friendships, and communicating with community stakeholders. The following chapter will detail my methodological framework and procedure of researching children's experience of reading *The Book of Can't and Don't*.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Chapter Overview

The first section of this chapter describes the methodological framework used in this study. This framework is followed by reflecting upon considerations for arts-informed research. Next, I describe the procedure of the study. I finish this chapter with a rationale for methodological and ethical decisions.

Approach Overview

Qualitative research methods support the worldview that human experiences are subjective to individuals and influenced by life events, social interactions with others, culture, and existing biases and worldviews (Creswell, 2012). There is not expected to be a single, objective meaning that is viewed as truth (Smith & Osborne, 2009). This study used a specific form of qualitative research known as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2008). An IPA approach supports a relativist worldview in that participants are expected to form unique socially constructed meanings of events and interactions with others (Ayer, 1952). Therefore, IPA is useful for understanding the process of participants attributing socially constructing meaning to life experiences (Smith & Osborne, 2008). In the current study I chose this methodology to capture the complexity of participant interpretations and experiences of engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* (Creswell, 2012). Despite the goal of wanting to understand participant subjective experiences, it is impossible for me to have access to participant worldviews in their entirety due to the privacy and complexity of inner thoughts (Smith, 2015). However, I can engage in a process where I collect data from participants that captures their interpretations of *The Book of Can't and Don't* and then utilize IPA methodology to attempt to make sense of participant interpretations (Smith, 2015). I must recognize as a

researcher that I bring my own preconceptions and biases into the study. Understanding theory and epistemology of IPA will enable trustworthy data interpretation, which is less likely to be obstructed by personal bias.

Theoretical Components of IPA

Phenomenology

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, IPA is a form of phenomenology. The study of components of human experiences and the ability to differentiate experiences from each other is the research aim of phenomenology (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Theories surrounding IPA originate from multiple disciplines including philosophy, hermeneutics, and ideography Husserl (1970) utilized phenomenology for understanding experiences in relation to human consciousness. Currently, two major streams of thought exist in phenomenological research. Descriptive phenomenology aims to create an objective understanding of participant interpretations of experiences by bracketing out researcher biases and worldviews (Fischer, 2009). Interpretative phenomenology involves an interaction between participant interpretations of experiences and researcher interoperations of participant responses (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Hermeneutic methodology is defined as understanding both participant interpretations of lived experiences and researcher understanding of participant perspectives (Heidegger, 1962; Laverty, 2003). Gadamer (1998) built upon the early hermeneutic theories of Heidegger (1962) and Husserl (1970) to further develop methodological frameworks for hermeneutic research. An IPA approach involves a double hermetic in that both the researcher and the participants are actively involved in constructing meaning from the data (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Pietkewicz, & Smith, 2012).

Ideography

Ideography is another crucial component of IPA. Ideography refers to the in-depth study of aspects of specific cases, versus data generalizable to all cases (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Ideography is particularly important for the generation of themes in data analysis. For instance, as a researcher I must be able to determine if themes are appropriate for specific cases and inappropriate for others (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA focuses on characteristics of individual cases in addition to shared characteristics of an entire small sample. As IPA is focused on creating rich interpretations on a small amount of data, most IPA studies utilize a small sample (Larkin & Thompson, 2009).

Epistemology

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is impossible for me as a researcher to extract participant interpretations of interacting with *The Book of Can't and Don't* from their minds in unaltered forms (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In some cases, barriers such as language abilities may prevent full disclosure. In addition, some participants may feel uncomfortable discussing certain experiences with the researchers (e.g., a child may have been reminded of a traumatic experience by a scene in the story and did not want to discuss this with me or my research assistant). The need for a researcher to recognize their epistemology is essential prior to interpreting participant experiences (Willig, 2013). In addition to participant barriers to disclosure, IPA recognizes that participant biases and worldviews may impact data interpretation. As a researcher, I must remain open to changing my pre-existing biases and worldviews in response to the data. This interaction between participant interpretations of engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* and researcher interpretations of participant responses is grounded in social constructivism (Creswell, 2012). Social constructivist theory asserts that experiences and perspectives are subjective to each

individual and influenced by factors such as environment, culture, worldviews, and interactions with others (Creswell. 2012). This is relevant to the current study because it is expected that school-aged childrens' interpretation of a book about neurodiversity, multiculturalism, and social and emotional learning will differ from my understanding of the book as an autistic self-advocate with formal training in education theory. My personal background is described in further detail in chapter three. Social constructivism is embedded in this study's conceptual framework as it allows for the emergence of multiple worldviews from myself as a researcher, the classroom teachers, and the students (Creswell, 2012).

A hermeneutic conceptual framework for data analysis allowed me to reflexively revise my fore-conceptions in response to emerging evidence. These fore-conceptions can be both an asset and detrimental to data interpretation. The goal of hermeneutics is not to abandon fore-conceptions but to be open to the process of change and revision in response to data. Thus, researcher biases must be molded in response to the data so that interpretations of finding are led by the data itself.

Arts-Informed Analysis to Capture Subjective Meaning

As mentioned throughout this chapter, IPA holds a relative relativist worldview that there are multiple ways of knowing and that understanding lived experiences is subjective (Smith et al., 2009). I implemented an arts-informed approach to data collection and analysis. Ayer (1952) advocated that arts-informed research takes a relativist worldview that supports multiple ways of knowing or impacting specific individuals over absolute answers. This subjective nature of interpretation is useful in capturing the unique socially constructed meaning of participant lived experiences. An arts-informed data collection approach is congruent with the subjective nature of IPA

In this study, I wanted to understand the lived experience and meaning by third and sixth-grade students in Edmonton-area classrooms engaged in conversation about the book and participated in four *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995). The *Draw and Write* is described in further detail in the instruments section of this chapter and a copy of the handout for participants is available in Appendix E. Arts-informed research and hermeneutic analysis generate uncertainty versus absolute answers (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Gadamer, 1998). This uncertainty creates an environment where the focus is on the process versus the product. Early philosophers (e.g., Plato) understood the vital role of the arts, including storytelling, in evoking human emotion. Through art, people become aware of things not physically in their environments.

According to Barone and Eisner (2012), arts-informed research can generate data surrounding experiences that participants cannot describe verbally. Arts-informed activities may make describing emotions and experiences accessible to non-verbal or those who do not speak the language of the researchers. For instance, a child with limited English may not find the words to describe relevant emotional experiences in class discussions but can convey their feelings through a drawing. The inclusion of drawings has the dual benefit of generating data from participants who do not provide verbal descriptions and creates a real-world activity that reinforces learning from the book. Figure 1 displays a model for students proposed cognitive process of engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* and subsequent class discussions and *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) tasks. A shared environment and group discussions will allow students of divergent backgrounds to find shared empathy through emotionally similar experiences. Students will revise pre-existing worldviews as pre-conceptions (e.g., stereotypical beliefs about autism) are challenged through interaction with others. I do not

expect students in elementary school to use words like intersectionality or think about reflexivity. However, students can engage with these cognitive processes and ideas in ways that are congruent with their development. For example, caregivers communicating with children about emotions during reading helps children use books as facilitators for metacognitive awareness (Adrián et al., 2007). Likewise, students can discuss emotionally relevant thoughts and experiences with researchers during the drawing to reinforce ideas from the book and class discussions.

Figure 1 adapts the Gadamer (1998) concept of hermeneutics for the current study. As an autistic researcher, I entered the study with pre-existing worldviews described further in the introduction and chapter three. Students and teachers had their life experiences and worldviews separate from my experiences. *The Book Can't and Don't*, discussions, and *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) activity created a shared environment that allowed me as a researcher, classroom teachers, and students to reflect upon and revise existing preconceptions.

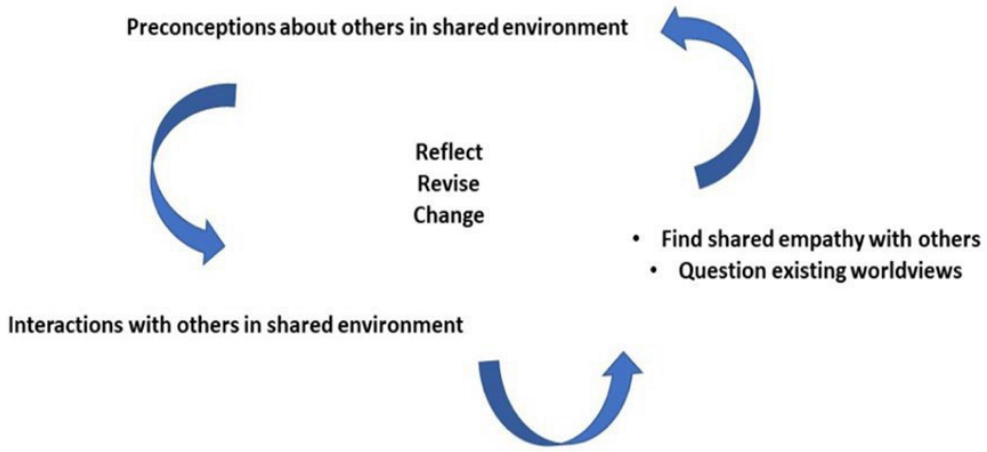


Figure 1. A hermeneutic circle of intersectionality discussions.
(Adapted from Gadamer, 1998)

Trustworthiness of Research

In phenomenology researchers must understand the impact of biases and engage in reflexivity and constant comparison of changing interpretations (Creswell, 2012). I explicitly described my biases and worldviews as an autistic self-advocate with research experience in educational theory. In addition, I described my perceived experience of finding it easier to form friendships with individuals who are members of cultural minorities (e.g., immigrants, Indigenous Peoples) than North Americans who do not belong to visible cultural minorities. This enabled readers to understand how my interpretation of the data was influenced by my worldviews and life experiences (Creswell, 2018).

Memoing

As I participated in classroom research and communicated with stakeholders, I documented my evolving worldviews and perspectives through regular journal entries. For instance, I took weekly notes of my observations during my time in the classroom. I also took notes when attending workshops on this project, such as the student panel working with Ukrainian orphans or a psychiatrist who worked with Syrian children who experienced trauma. These journal entries were necessary to understand my hermeneutic circle and change my worldview throughout the study. Careful documentation helps maintain authenticity at all stages of the research.

Auditor for Data Triangualtion

Triangulation is defined as multiple source agreement on interpretation choice (Creswell, 2018). My research assistant, who was present in the research environment, took independent notes as an auditor of my hermeneutic process. Enlisting an auditor helped establish that my interpretation had a logical flow for someone else who had been present in the classroom with

me and took independent notes. Korstjens and Albine Moser (2018) suggest that an auditor's inclusion may help improve the trustworthiness of researcher interpretations of data. The project must present authentic worldviews of participants in addition to researcher worldviews.

Mitigating Member Checking Limitations

Due to ethical limitations of classroom research, it would have been difficult to re-enter the classroom and question teachers and students following the study. In addition, if several weeks had passed since data collection, student and teacher worldviews may have changed since data collection. McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) does not recommend member checking for research as it contradicts the hermeneutic process for participants to revise their contributions following data collection. However, I did approximate member checking within the limitations of this study by providing students opportunities to produce drawings on four separate occasions spaced one week apart. With the teachers, I informally communicated with them on classroom dynamics prior to the study and I engaged in exit interviews following the study where I was able to ask questions which allowed me to understand the relevant background behind many of the student responses. For example, knowing that a child who drew pictures of objects that scared him experienced trauma would help me understand the emotions and rationale behind his choice of drawings.

Considerations for Amplifying Minority Voices

Another important consideration is that my narrator is a child of colour, and I am racially white. Therefore, I decided to provide a hypothetical perspective of autism being interpreted as a culture by a child of a minority culture who has no previous experience with autism or western countries. I wished to create the analogy of an individual from another minority group that faces frequent stigma and explore intersectionality and shared empathy. In addition, I wanted to

provide a platform for marginalized students to tell their own stories and amplify minority voices versus stealing the stories of people of colour. Two racially black women reviewed the novel: a Haitian immigrant to the United States and an immigrant from Ghana to Canada with an autistic daughter of school age. I accepted feedback from these women and revised my work based on their suggestions. In addition, I read government documents, academic articles, and fictional literature and biographies about Haitian people, including books and memoirs written by Haitians and by families who adopted Haitian children. Although I am not of that background, I wanted to make sure my interpretations and written portrayal were accurate and amplified the voices of minority groups rather than speak for minority groups or reinforce negative stereotypes or stigma. Ideally, the book should severe as a platform for students to feel comfortable sharing their personal stories and forming classroom connections

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Sample

Participants were 9 third grade and 17 split fifth-sixth grade students and two teachers at an urban Edmonton-area school. According to teacher interviews the school had several immigrants and refugee students. Some children in the third and fifth-sixth grade classrooms were autistic or had other developmental disabilities. Children whose parents did not consent to participate were given an alternate activity by the teacher or allowed to listen to the story but not participate in the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). I did not collect data from children whose parents did not consent to participate or from students who could not understand and complete the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). If students declined to give assent via the student assent form, I did not use their data even if they completed a drawing.

Instruments

The Book of Can't and Don't

The Book of Can't and Don't is a fictional story I created that explores an analogy of disability and cultural diversity. Themes address common childhood emotions, facing fears, and the importance of family and friends. The novel is written on a grade 1.5 level (ATOS complexity) and may be suitable for students between the second and sixth grades. *The Book of Can't and Don't* is available in Appendix B.

Guide for Teachers

The *Guide for Teachers* is a companion manual to the book which provides instructions for teachers reading the book with their students. In addition, it contains reading instructions for teachers. The *Guide for Teachers* is available in Appendix C.

Draw and Write Activity

The *Draw and Write* was adapted from Pridmore and Bendelow (1995). Appendix E contains a copy of the form handed out to students during data collection. Teachers read the instructions aloud to the students. Children had the option of drawing pictures or writing a short response about anything the chapters they read that week made them think about or feel.

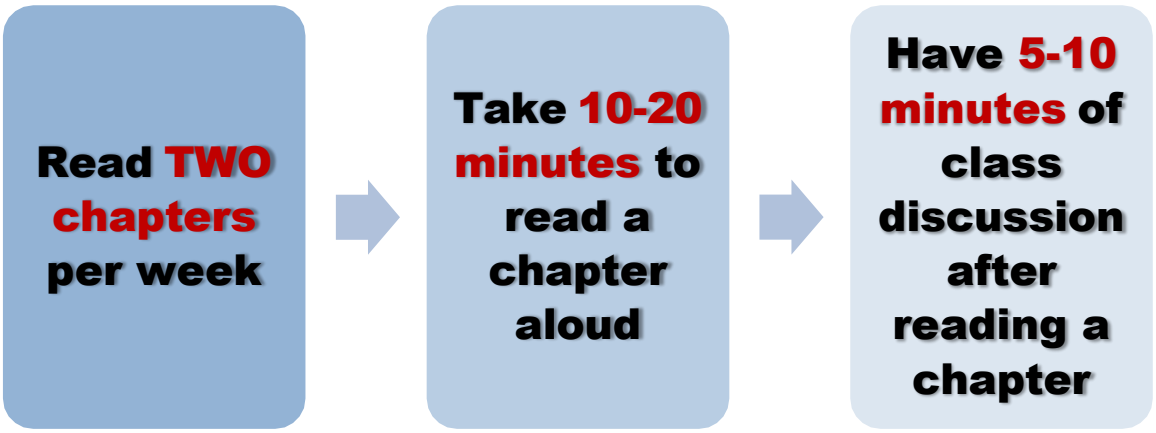
Procedure

Before data collection or recruitment, I received approval for ethics from both the University of Alberta and the Edmonton Public School Board. Following approval, I contacted school principals to recruit teachers per the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) ethics protocol. When I visited the schools, I distributed consent forms to the teachers and sent them to parents. Teachers returned completed consent forms to me.

Figure 2 provides a visual guide of procedural steps that were easy to follow, including estimated timeframes for each component, such as reading book chapters or class discussions. Following the weekly reading, teachers were encouraged to engage in a classroom discussion about the book and respond thoughtfully to student questions and comments. As shown in Figure 2, I entered the class once a week with my research assistant during a designated time slot which remained the same each week. We distributed the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) activities and gave children approximately thirty minutes to draw a scene from the book. Students could talk about their drawings with my research assistant or myself following the drawing task. We recorded notes on their verbal responses. At the end of the four weeks in each classroom, teachers had the opportunity to participate in a semi-structured interview. They described the experience of reading the book with their students to provide additional context to the classroom environment and student lived experiences. Appendix D provides some sample open-ended question utilized in teacher exist interviews.

Activity Instructions

This book is intended to be read aloud by the teacher as a whole-class activity:
Book will be read over FOUR weeks



- Researchers will come into the classroom **ONCE A WEEK (four times total)** for **about AN HOUR** to do a **DRAW AND WRITE** activity with students.
- Sample questions and points for discussion are provided for each chapter in this guide.

Figure 2. Classroom procedure for teachers.

Data Analysis

IPA analysis involves switching focus between snippets of data to the entire dataset (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This requires engaging in constant comparison throughout the data analytical process. In the context of this study, I engaged in constant comparison and reflexivity. My focus alternated between individual codes, overreaching themes, and supporting data such as memos and teacher interview transcripts. Before I began the coding process, I reread my memos and teacher interview data to immerse myself in the data and the classroom environment. I compared notes and memos with my research assistant who spent time in the same classroom to ensure our perceptions of the classroom environment were congruent.

Following data immersion and review of memos, I engaged in a coding process The which included three levels of analysis: a) Open Coding, b) Focused coding, and c) Theoretical coding. In the first stage, open coding, I created manually for each drawing but used NVivo (released in March 2020) for the organization. At this stage, I derived most codes from student direct quotes or observations (often referred to as in vivo coding). Focused coding was the second step in the coding process. I used NVivo (released in March 2020) software to identify codes with frequencies of two or more and clusters of codes that overlapped (i.e., codes that commonly occurred together with drawings). Codes that captured the same concept were combined, and I removed codes with less than two instances. For example, I combined the codes of nighttime fear and separation anxiety because I always coded them for the same drawings.

I combined codes that captured the same concepts in some cases. For example, codes with less than two instances were removed or combined with other codes. Finally, I created operational definitions for each code and cluster of codes to ensure coding consistency and make the auditing process transparent and rigorous. The operational definitions for the codes which became themes can be found in the results section. The third coding step, theoretical coding, consisted of creating overreaching themes for the codes. I accomplished this by creating tables and concept maps to understand relationships between clusters of codes. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a second graduate student was an auditor to ensure consistent researcher cognitive processes.

At all stages of the coding process, I compared my generated codes and emergent themes to the teacher interviews and memos to ensure my focus remained on the data itself and was not confounded by personal interpretations. Although I kept note of the number of male and female students in each class, I did not focus on assigned gender for student data. In addition, I chose to

use initials versus assigning pseudonyms to participants whom I used as exemplar data in the results section. I made these choices because I wanted to ensure that when coding and summarizing the data that I was guided by the data itself (Gadamer, 1998). Assigning researcher-created names or focus on gender assigned at birth to students had the potential of influencing my interpretation of the drawings and responses versus letting the drawings and student responses guide the data.

Assumptions and Limitations

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, an axiological approach, as described by Ayer (1952), supports the idea that there are multiple ways of knowing or relativism. This worldview recognizes that the values individuals assign to an experience are more important than the arbitrary value assigned by non-participants. This project is open-ended and is expected to vary in meaning to individuals (Ayer, 1952). Therefore, findings of socially constructed meaning for school may not generalize to schools where students and teachers are from markedly divergent backgrounds.

Ethical Assurances

Consent and Assent. My research assistant and I distributed consent forms to teachers. Teachers sent parent consent forms home to the parents of children. However, as an additional safeguard for informed consent, children were asked to complete an assent form to indicate their desire to participate in the Draw and Write (Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995) task. Appendix A contains a copy of the children's assent form.

I did not offer any incentives for participation to students or teachers. However, students received a digital copy of their drawings returned to them at the end of the study. Returning pictures to the students with a brief thank you message accompanying the drawing allowed the

students to maintain ownership of a copy of the drawings and avoided coercion to participate. I discarded forms where students did not give assent.

Privacy and Security. I conducted audio recordings when interviewing the teachers. Following transcription, I anonymized the transcripts and stored the audio recordings in a password-protected virtual drive and encrypted. This data will be kept for five years and then destroyed. In the case of the student Draw and Write (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) task, there was no audio recording. I did not record audio for student verbal responses to ensure privacy protection, including the privacy of non-participant children who may enter the classroom. Instead, I replaced names with initials that consisted of combinations of letters from their first or last names. If verification is needed, I keep a primary copy of the data in a locked filing cabinet. I will destroy this data after five years.

Summary

This chapter explored the theoretical framework and procedure for the current study. I chose an interpretative phenomenological analysis using an arts-informed approach as a methodological framework. This approach is compatible with arts-informed research and recognizes that arts-informed research can have multiple meanings to participants (Ayer, 1952). The following chapter will describe the findings of this study.

Chapter 5: Findings

This section contains the results of the arts informed interpretative phenomenological study described in the previous chapters. Tables, figures, and small data samples are placed strategically throughout this section to illustrate theme development and researcher hermeneutic process. Several students who provided rich data responses were chosen as exemplars to illustrate major themes. As mentioned previously, the study explored the following research questions:

What is the lived experience of students in an Edmonton-area urban school engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* as learners?

Participants

A total of 26 students in the third grade and a split fifth-sixth class in an Edmonton-area school participated in the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). Table 1 lists demographic information. Nine students were in the third grade, and 17 were fifth-sixth grade students. Data on ethnic background, gender, and presence or absence of disabilities were deliberately not recorded in individual student submissions to avoid bias in interpreting responses. However, some student responses featured these themes and made their self-identification of membership in these groups apparent. In addition, teacher descriptions provided in exit interviews painted the two classrooms as mixed students' racial and cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, gender, and abilities.

Classroom Environments

JS Fifth-Sixth Grade Classroom

JS's class was in an urban school in Edmonton, Alberta. The classroom consisted of 10 female and 13 male students. As stated in the teacher interviews, several students were migrant

or refugee children. JS told me that several students in the class were Syrian refugees and mentioned that one student had witnessed the violent death of a family member in Syria. She told me that the student disclosed this privately to the teacher during class discussions about the book. Some students were from other countries such as Haiti and Iran. In addition, at least one child within the class had an autism diagnosis, and another child disclosed living with an anxiety disorder during the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). One child indicated preferences for clothing perceived by her family as gender-non-conforming during the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). The classroom had several aides, and some other university students were conducting a study on nutrition. FJ had a graduate degree and was interested in implementing research in her classroom to further curriculum goals. JS described using *The Book of Can't and Don't* to teach students social and emotional awareness. JS was also familiar with using trauma-informed practices such as healing circles and combined these with book scenarios for her students' social problem solving and conflict resolution opportunities.

FJ Third Grade Classroom

FJ had a graduate education degree and identified herself as a woman of colour and an immigrant. She shared her experiences as a minority who had to learn English during the story discussion to reduce power differences between herself and the students and generate empathy. FJ's class was located within the same school as JS's. This classroom had 7 female and 13 male students. As disclosed in the teacher exit interviews, several students were Syrian refugees. In addition, a student within this class said he was from Haiti. One boy whose *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) response suggested he had experienced multiple homes and confirmed by FJ that some students within this class were foster children. One student who did not contribute data but listened to the story and sometimes drew independently during the *Draw*

and Write (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) was autistic and had minimal verbal skills. However, this individual had above-average skills in a specific academic area which the student's classmates recognized during this study. In this class, several of the students' parents were new immigrants who did not have the language ability to understand the consent forms, which created a barrier to signing their children up for the study.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the major themes found in the coding process. The children's *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses focused on emotional expression, identifying individual differences, and social problem solving. Children often related their own emotions and life experiences to those of the characters.

Table 1

Major Themes

Theme	Operational Definition
Expression of Negative Emotions	The themes of drawings focused on emotions that humans typically perceive as unpleasant. (e.g., fear, anxiety)
Expression of Positive Emotions	The themes of drawings focused on emotions that humans typically perceive as pleasant. (Family love, peer welcome, enjoying hobbies, humour)
Experiences of Individual Differences	A student feels different from other peers or siblings for any reason/feels outside of the group and experiences discomfort with this feeling. (e.g., disabilities, racial differences, academic ability)
Experiences of Social Problem Solving	Students describe a situation where they either overcome a personal barrier (e.g., overcoming fear) or resolve a social conflict (e.g., talking things out)

Expression of Negative Emotions

This code was used as an overreaching term to describe emotions typically perceived by humans as unpleasant. I assigned the majority of students' *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses to this selective code. Students welcomed the opportunity to discuss negative feelings and related to stories about characters who experienced similar situations to themselves or their peers. For example, one scene in the book where Zendaya touches Malika's curly hair without asking permission generated many responses about unwanted interactions with peers or family members and students' wishes for people to respect them saying no to an interaction. AA, a sixth-grade student, stated it made him think of "my mom touching my hair, and I didn't like it." Figure 3 shows AA's drawing of his mother trying to care for his hair. His hair sticks up, and his mouth corners turn as his mouth hangs open in distress. His mother stands beside him, holding a hairbrush or some other hair care accessory in her hand. His hands were out as if he wanted to block his mother from coming near him with the brush. This attempt to stop his mother may indicate he is trying to protect himself and does not consent to this interaction and the power differential between children and adults. BY, a third-grade student, referred to a classmate whose "hair was smooth" experienced classmates touching her hair despite being repeatedly asked to stop by her.

Figure 4 displays BY's drawing in which Zendaya's mouth hangs open in apparent surprise as she attempts to touch Malika's hair. Maybe BY thought that Zendaya did not expect Malika to be upset and is confused. Malika has a straight face and wide eyes, indicating discomfort and confusion but not angry at Zendaya. BY may capture the unfamiliar situation Malika experienced in processing multiple stimuli at once. A few students spoke of peers attempting to scare them with spiders when referring to a scene where a school bully puts a

spider in Zendaya's backpack. BY, a third-grade student who experienced this at daycare, knew that this "wasn't nice." Students often used sad, mad, and scared to describe unwanted interactions.

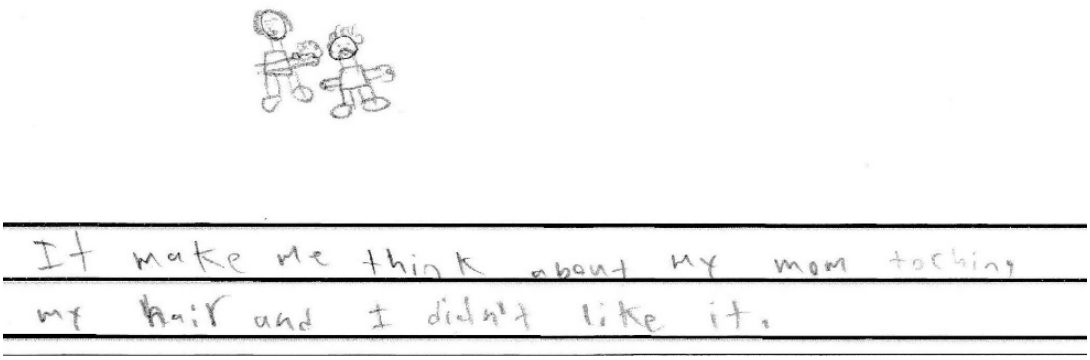


Figure 3. AA's drawing of his mother trying to brush his hair.

Figure 4. BY's drawing of drawing of Zendaya trying to touch Malika's hair.

Several students, including AA's drawing in Figure 4 above, captured the power difference between children and adults and the lack of control over decisions affecting their

lives. Some students responded to the scene where adults in the book refused to let Malika and Zendaya purchase specific clothing with their own experiences of not choosing clothing they wanted to buy or wear. TA, in sixth grade, said she was "sad because my mom gets my sister what she wants [and not her]." WA, another sixth-grade student, said her family told her to pick "pretty" clothing and that her choices were "for boys." In her illustration, shown in Figure 5, WA drew a girl holding up shorts and a t-shirt that is a car on it and an adult telling her to "pick something nice [and] not that." In the background, there is a clothing section with a "girls" sign and drawings of dresses and shoes. WA told me in a verbal discussion that her family let her pick one outfit she wanted and that the rest of the outfits are required to be "nice" clothing as dictated by her family's perceived gender social norms. These descriptions put value-judgements on which clothing WA is expected to prefer and perceive as "nice." WA appeared aware of stereotypically acceptable clothing for her gender and that adults in her life were pressuring her to wear clothing that matched this stereotype. The original scene in *The Book of Can't and Don't* refers to Malika and Zendaya wanting culturally specific and sensory-friendly clothing. The adults' wish for the girls was to blend into a Western school environment and suggest clothing they think most third-grade children would wear. In her written response to this scene, WA wrote, "they will make fun of your princess shirt," referring to the adults trying to get Zendaya to pick clothing that her peers would perceive as age appropriate. The scene in the book addressed age and cultural stereotypes of acceptable clothing instead of gender. However, WA could apply this scene to a perceived emotionally equivalent experience in her own life. TA could relate to the power differential between children and adults regarding decision-making even though the issue was the refusal to buy items versus criticism of her choices due to perceptions of social acceptability.

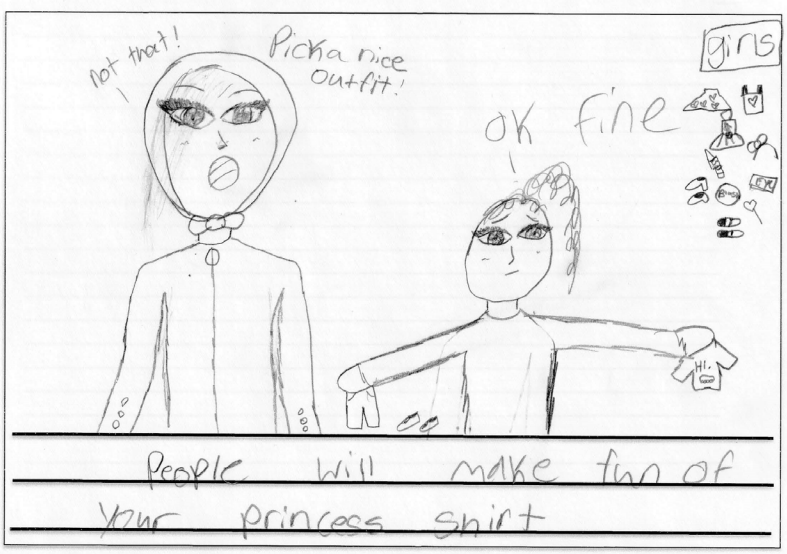


Figure 5. WA's drawing of clothing shopping with her family.

Many students discussed peer competition. For instance, feelings surrounding poor academic performance or experiencing peer jealousy over high academic achievement were common. Figure 6 consists of a drawing by AA, a fifth-sixth grade student who drew "me getting a bad mark on a spelling test and getting mad." AA's illustration shows him sitting at a desk where AA and the desk take a small corner of the space provided, with most of the space left blank. The most prominent aspect of this picture is the distinctive five percent drawn on this test, indicating a low grade. AA feels small and ashamed, with the low grade being an exposed and embarrassing aspect of his thoughts. In Figure 7, TY, another student in fifth-sixth grade, writes about winning a spelling bee and being ostracized by her peers versus congratulated. She related to Zendaya getting a perfect score on a spelling test and being viewed by her classmates as bragging versus being proud of her.

Support from family members and peers may help buffer negative emotions among students. Students recognized that parents often comfort scared children. JA, a third-grade student, stated that "when [Malika] gets scared, then she has to call [her adoptive mother]." In addition to parents, peers, including in virtual settings, were crucial in helping students navigate unfamiliar or otherwise stressful situations. For instance, RT, a fifth-sixth grade student, responded to the scene where Malika and Zendaya entered their new school and were nervous with a story about being worried about joining a new video game world. However, RT was happy the people playing this online game helped him and made him feel welcome. Figure 8 shows RT's drawing where he depicts his real-world self in a tiny corner of the picture holding a game controller. Most of the picture space consists of his virtual world self in an online world. His drawing shows two avatars standing together carrying virtual weapons and supplies. A third avatar stands by a gold hunt sign with an open-mouthed expression on his face, appearing afraid or uncomfortable. I expect RT has drawn his virtual self as fearful of a new situation and two other avatars coming along to help him as described in his accompanying verbal description. Although RT experienced a virtual setting versus a real-world classroom with other children, he related to the importance of peer support and reassurance in a new social situation.

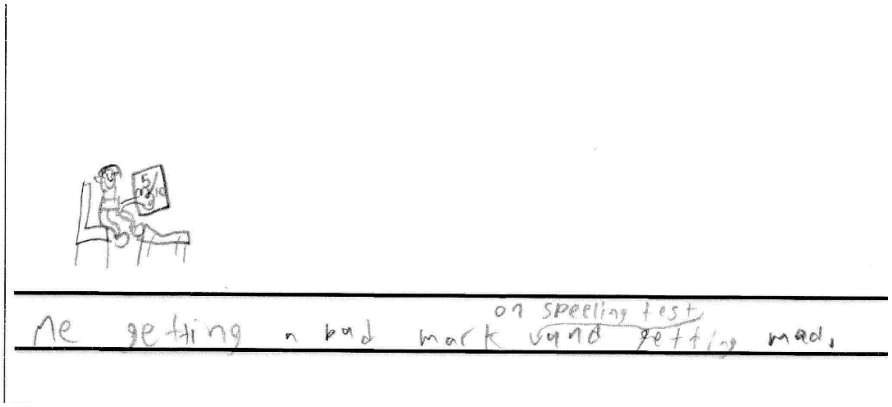


Figure 6. AA's drawing of failing a test.

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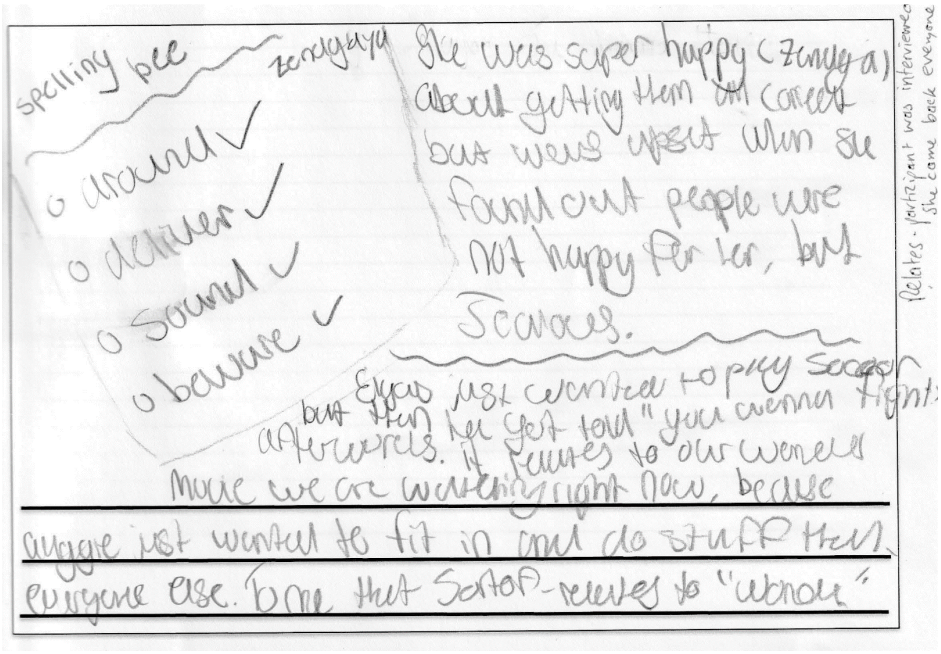

Figure 7. TY's doodle describing anxiety and peer competition.

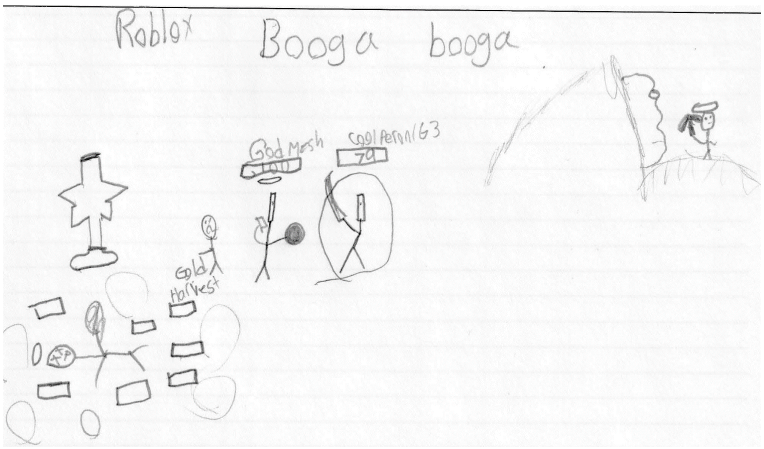

Figure 8. RT depicts people helping him find items in a virtual environment.

There were notable differences when comparing third and sixth-grade students' references to negative emotions. Third-grade students were more likely to speak in the present tense about nighttime fears such as fear of ghosts, bad dreams, and being afraid of sleeping alone. Figure 9 contains RA's drawing, which shows a boy standing in a room with a wide-open mouth, saying that he fears the dark. His hair is tousled, and the sheets on his bed look unmade and hanging down as if he has jumped out of bed in fear and left it unmade. His eyes and eyebrows show the fear on his face. His written description states that "ghosts are real. Most older students who referred to these themes spoke of being afraid when younger. fifth-sixth grade students were more likely to fear the uncertainty of new situations and socially motivated fears such as peer rejection or embarrassment.

Figure 10 contains a drawing by RY, a student in fifth-sixth grade who said it was "scary to go to someone's party when you don't know people." RY'S drawing did not indicate character discomfort via facial expressions. It is interesting to note that RY is autistic. Malika and Zendaya were smiling in the drawing, despite RY's description of uncertainty. However, the prominent clock on the wall indicated either awaiting something uncertain and unwanted or staying in an unpleasant situation and wishing for it to be over. In this drawing, the clock and its reference to time spent in unwanted situations or awaiting them reveal more than the characters' faces. Older students had more insight into the rationale behind their feelings and how to prevent certain negative emotions than younger students.

RT, a fifth-sixth grade student who watched scary movies late at night, stated, "I don't like where my mind takes me," referring to what happened when he watched these movies. The television in RT's drawing shown in Figure 11 has the words "ghost movie" written across the screen, and the moon appears to look in the window in a threatening way, indicating late night

and lack of daytime safety. A second person is in the room with him and lying on the couch but asleep, and he is viewing the movie alone. RT holds his hands near his face. He has a scared expression on his face with a wide-open mouth. Some older students had insight into why the characters may act a certain way and their actions or people they knew. For example, AH, a student in fifth-sixth grade, stated that "Ryan was embarrassed of [his] spelling…maybe the reason he starts bullying the girls."

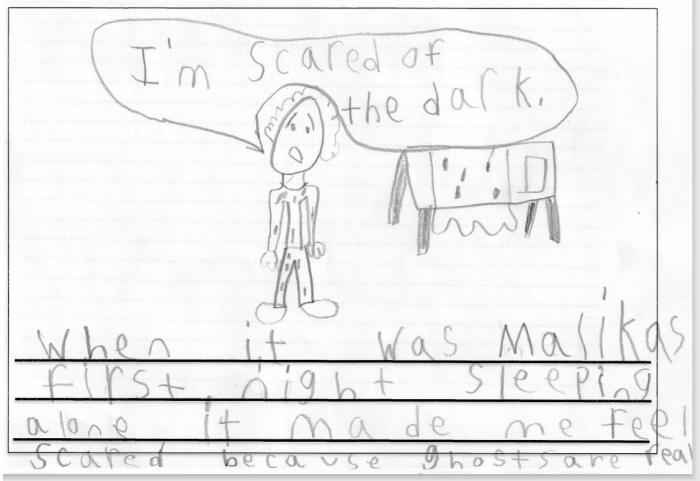

Figure 9. RA's drawing of nighttime fears.

Figure 10. RY's drawing of birthday parties.

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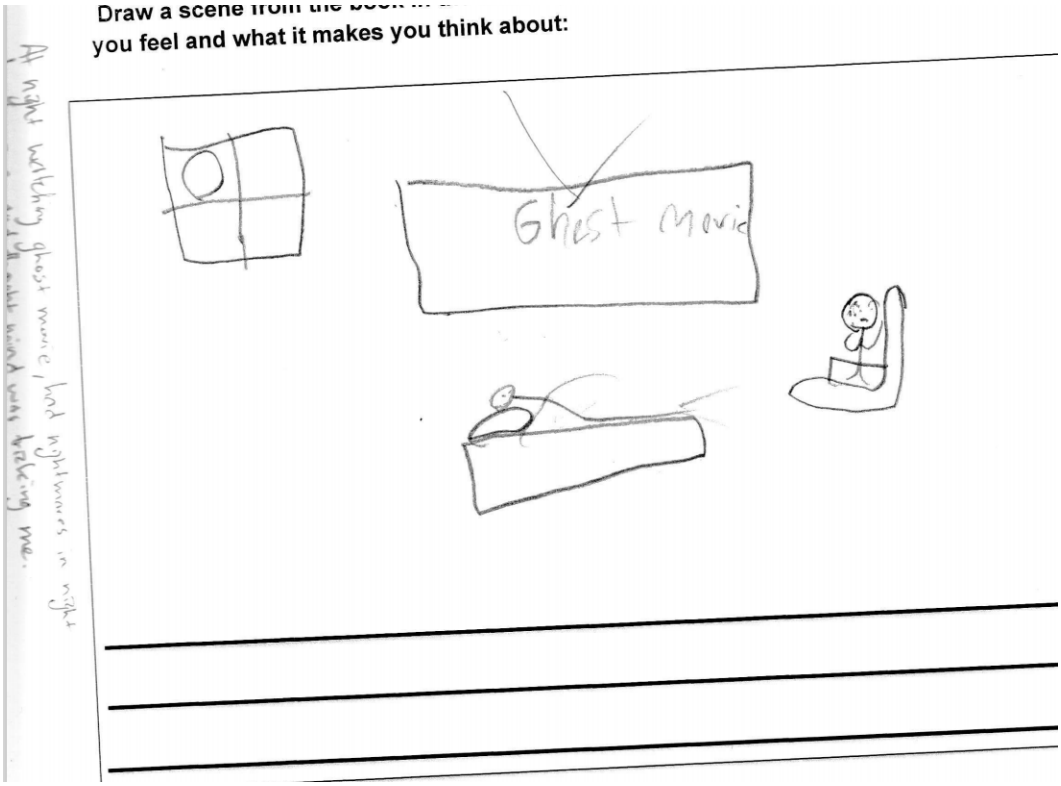

Figure 11. RT's drawing of where his mind takes him when he watches ghost movies.

Children experience a perceived lack of control of situations within their lives, and adults are in a position of power over them. In addition, childhood involves social conflict with peers and navigating life experiences for the first time. The students related to characters experiencing similar emotions to themselves, such as SE, a fifth-sixth grade student being "Happy because someone else is scared of dogs."

Table 2

Negative Emotion Expression

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Third Grade (28 total)	5	5	6	4
Sixth Grade (55 total)	9	12	11	8

Table 2 compares the number of the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). responses that depict themes of expressing negative emotions across grade and week. A greater proportion of fifth-sixth-grade students produced *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses reflecting negative emotions. The expression of negative emotions appears to be slightly less in week four when the book ends.

Expression of Positive Emotions

I designated this code as an umbrella term to describe emotions that humans typically perceive as pleasant. Receiving emotional support from adult caregivers or peers was the highest frequency positive emotion code. A few students referred to scenes in the book where Malika began to trust her adoptive mother and initiate affection. RO, a fifth-sixth-grade student, stated that the scene where Malika hugged her adoptive mother for the first time reminded her of hugging her mother. SE, a student in third grade, told a research assistant when interviewed that "the word Mom" makes her happy and that "[she] like[s] hearing about those things." Figure 12 contains RO's drawing of Malika, and her adoptive mother depicts Malika with a heart on her

shirt saying the word “Mom.” Her adoptive mother, Ms. Eva, smiled with wide eyes. These responses suggest that students could be happy for the characters in the book and feel bad for them when they experience distressing situations. Some students received emotional support from peers in addition to adult caregivers. RT, a fifth-sixth grade student, speaks of joining a virtual world and being anxious and people in the online game helping him learn (see Figure 8). He enters the situation nervously and feels good after receiving a welcome and help from virtual peers. RA, a student in third grade, told the research assistant of helping a friend who was hurt by taking her to the office and said it reminded her of Malika helping Zendaya when the spider scared her. Many situations involving emotional support had negative emotions, such as uncertainty about being bullied. In these cases, caregivers giving emotional support to children generated positive emotions.

Figure 12. RO’s drawing of “the word “Mom.”

Some responses focused on individual or shared pleasurable activities without emphasizing receiving or giving support. For example, a 6th-grade student, AR, enjoyed the scene at the end of the book where the characters were “playing with water guns [and] everyone was having fun.” and “[doesn’t] like when people aren’t having fun.” Figure 13 shows AR’s interpretation of the squirt gunfight. Two girls are standing together and pointing squirt guns at each other. The characters have prominent vertical lines for their eyes. There is a house

alongside the two girls. When RY read about Malika receiving a new bedroom after arriving home, she told the research assistant she "liked her room" and wanted to draw Malika's new room. HA, a fifth-sixth grade black student who enjoyed reading as a hobby, thought the book's first-person perspective reminded her of a book she read and enjoyed that the author wrote in a diary format about a "slave girl." In addition, HA enjoyed the scene with the sleepover and wrote she enjoys sleepovers with her cousins because "[she] like[s] to sleep."

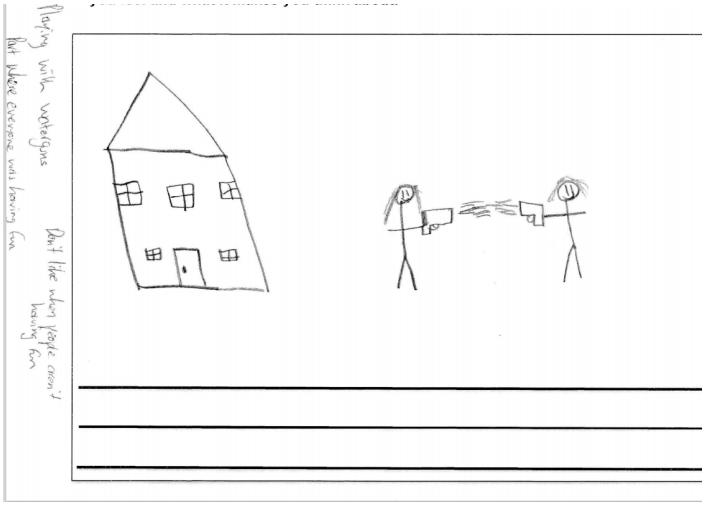

Figure 13. AR's drawing of the squirt gun fight in *The Book of Can't and Don't*.

One scene in the book created a shared humorous experience for the third-grade class. In the book, Malika and Zendaya think Malika's adoptive mother's attempt at cooking Haitian-style rice and beans is burnt and smells bad. The third-grade teacher shared a personal experience with her students about eating rice spoilt and stank to make her students laugh. This humorous story created an opportunity for the students and the teacher to laugh about the stinky rice. A small number of students produced drawings of rancid rice and retold the story told to them by their

teacher. In addition, it set an example for students of finding humour when an unwanted situation occurs, which can assist students in self-regulation. Figure 14 contains a third-grade student, NO, showing unpleasant smells wafting from food and three people with disgusted expressions on their faces as they attempt to eat rice bowls.

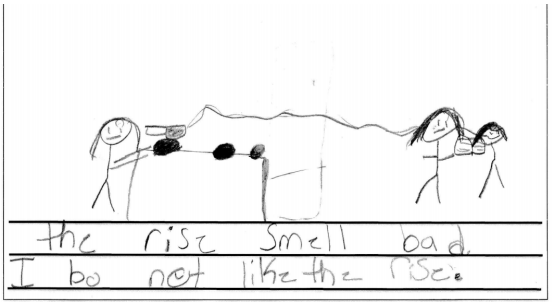

Figure 14. NO's drawing of humour towards the foul-smelling rice.

Table 3

Positive Emotions Expression

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Third Grade (28 total)	2	0	0	3
Sixth Grade (55 total)	3	1	1	1

Table 3 compares the frequency of *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses associated with positive emotions across grade and week. The frequency of *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses associated with positive emotions were less than those assigned to negative emotions. In addition, there were more unique codes generated for negative emotions than for positive emotions. The greater frequency of negative emotion codes

suggests students discussed negative emotions more often during the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). activity and in more depth than positive ones. Positive emotion codes included emotional support, personal hobbies, shared fun, and experiencing humor.

Experiences of Individual Differences

I chose this label for themes in which students noticed individual differences between themselves, peers, or a family member experienced. Examples include racial or cultural differences, disabilities, gender-non-conforming, academic underachievement, or over-achievement. There were surprisingly fewer responses assigned to this theme than other themes. Most of these responses were from fifth-sixth grade students. Nearly all the answers referred to differences that students experienced had a friend or family member who had this experience.

GV is a student in sixth grade who experienced bullying. His *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) response can be seen in Figure 15. I wondered if he was autistic when he stated that "Zendaya was made fun of for being autistic" and that this "happened to me when I was in second and third grade." Figure 16 contains a response by TY, another fifth-sixth grade student who lives with anxiety, wonders if "maybe Malika has anxiety" and if "maybe Zendaya feels Malika is comfortable around her for a reason she doesn't know." TY gives examples of scenes in the novel she had experienced, such as her fear of getting vaccinations when the fifth-sixth grade students had shots at school and how "she was upset she [won a spelling contest] and found out people were not happy. For her, but jealous."

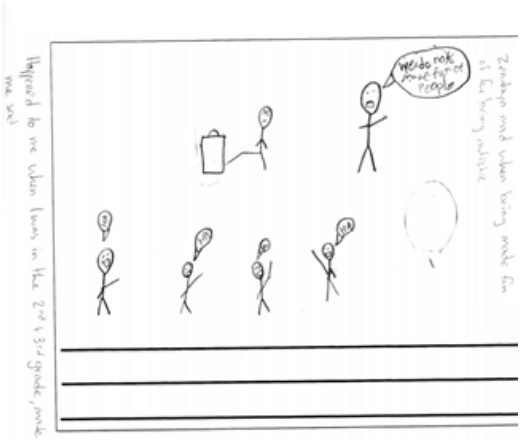

Figure 15. GV's drawing of "being made fun of."

Figure 16. TY's representation of anxiety

TY related to Zendaya's classmates being jealous instead of happy when she scored high on a spelling test as she experienced this herself. Students who perceived themselves as underachieving related to Malika's feelings of failure and inadequacy understood why she was not proud of Zendaya's test score. Figure 17 shows a *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) a response by IM, a student in 6th grade who wrote that "this reminds me of when I don't pass a test, and my brother gets 100%." Competition between peers and siblings does not only

apply to academic situations. For example, students saw aspects of themselves in the scenes about the students in the book having differing abilities and sizes in playground soccer that sometimes resulted in exclusion. A fifth-sixth grade student, JT's brother, told him he was too little to play soccer and recalled sitting outside and watching his brother play.

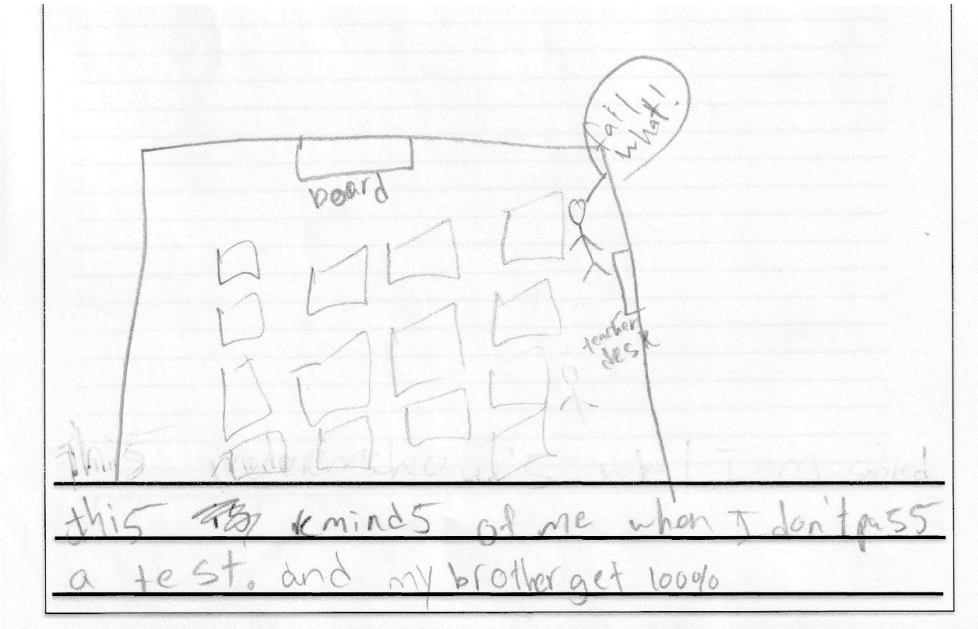

Figure 17. IM's drawing of drawing of test failure.

As mentioned above, under the negative emotion theme subheading, there were instances where students felt they were the only ones with a particular preference, fear, or other individual difference relative to their peers. As shown in Figure 18, SE, a student in fifth-sixth grade, is happy to hear about another child who fears dogs like she once did. WA is aware of stereotypical norms about boys' and girls' clothing and that her clothing preferences do not meet her family's expectations about how a girl is supposed to dress. Zendaya's clothing choices defied age stereotypes by preferring to dress in clothing popular with younger children, and Malika's choices would have been regular clothing for Haiti versus Canada.

Figure 18. SE's drawing of disclosing fear of dogs.

Feelings of difference did not always have negative connotations. For example, BY, a student from India, shared that mango was considered the "capital fruit of India." She told a story about their cultural significance in her birth country. HA, a Black sixth-grade student, enjoyed reading a story about a Black child and said it reminded her of another book she wanted that the author wrote in diary format. The teacher interviews indicated that some students were from Haiti and Syria.

Table 4

Experiences of Individual Differences

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Third Grade (28)	1	1	1	0
Sixth Grade (55)	3	4	4	1

Table 4 compares the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses with individual differences by grade and week themes. References to individual differences decreased in week four. However, fifth-sixth grade students referred to differences more than third-grade students even when considering the differences in sample sizes.

Experiences of Social Problem Solving

I generated this theme to describe situations where students overcome a personal internal barrier (e.g., fear) or resolve a social conflict with other people. Most responses surrounding this theme were instances of students being afraid to disclose something for fear of a bad outcome. However, both sixth grade and third-grade students could relate to the feeling of relief upon realizing an expected bad outcome did not happen upon disclosure. According to BY, a third-grade student, it "feels good to let it out." JT, a student in fifth-sixth grade, told my research assistant and me that disclosing something stressful or talking things out will "feel good because whenever you have a burden and let it go, it's nice. SE, a fifth-sixth grade student, gives a specific example of being afraid of dogs as a young child and being afraid to tell her mother she was scared. She said that her mother comforted her when she told her mother, and she felt better.

As shown in Figure 19, RA, a third-grade student, drew a caption of Malika from the novel standing by Kalib the dog with the words "Your [sic] not that bad after all." DY, a sixth-

grade student, recalled the frustration of learning to write as a young child and her mother helping her learn. Although this was stressful for her as a young child, she could look back on the situation as a preteen and recognize that her mom was an excellent teacher and DY had improved as a writer because of the teaching.

Figure 2.

Second Drawing by RA, a Third-Grade Student

Figure 19. RA's drawing of Malika overcoming her fear of dogs.

Being able to talk about a situation and overcome fears and then have insight into the process and undergoing personal growth afterwards is apparent in these student discussions surrounding this theme. These instances are not limited to disclosing stressful situations and adults helping children. For example, a fifth-sixth grade student, RT, mentioned accessing age-inappropriate content in movies and video games and sometimes being afraid of fictional characters. RT stated that "he thought Slenderman was real, but he was fake" and realized when evaluating himself that watching horror movies at night may not be a good idea when he wrote in week four that "I don't like where my mind takes me" when referring to watching scary movies. This insight demonstrated his emotional regulation rather than being helped by an adult role model. TY, a sixth-grade student, disclosed living with an anxiety disorder. Her responses

displayed insight into the emotional growth of Malika and Zendaya and how their struggles applied to her own life. “Malika is becoming braver,” she wrote. “[She was] petting [the dog] instead of hiding” and “not all dogs are mean” and “She is getting more comfortable now, and I think it’s gonna make her happier.” The description written by TY in Figure 20 suggests that she understood both the process of incremental personal growth from fear of dogs to feeling safe around them and going from feeling uncomfortable in a situation to comfortable. In Figure 21, BY’s drawing of the sleepover scene shows Kalib, the dog sleeping on a mat beside the bed. This drawing indicates that Malika, who initially feared dogs, is okay with Kalib in the room beside her but still prefers distance from the dog. Malika and Zendaya, the main characters, are depicted sitting on a princess bed beside each other and smiling. They are stretched out, and Malika has bare feet, indicating comfort and relaxation.

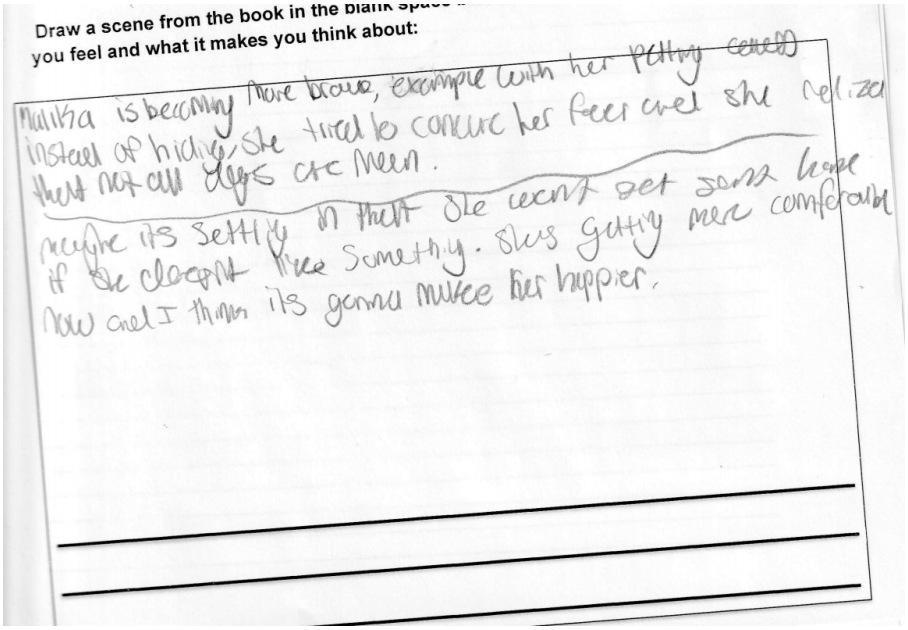

Figure 20. TY’s description of the novel conclusion.

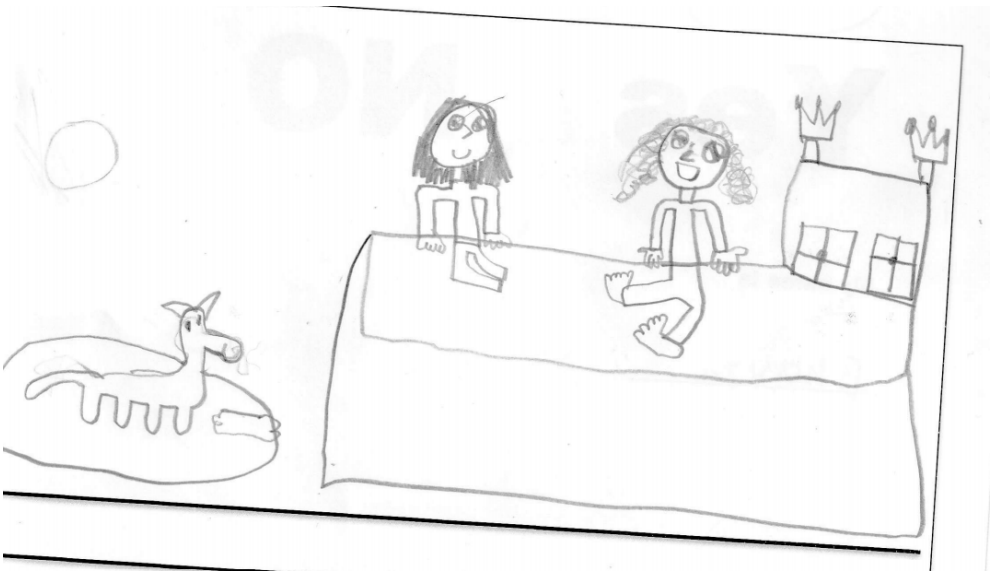

Figure 21. BY's drawing of the sleepover.

Although students in both third and sixth grade could understand the sense of relief when overcoming an obstacle, students in the fifth-sixth class grade could reflect on these experiences on a higher level emotionally. Older students could understand present versus past self. For example, DY once found writing difficult. Now it comes easy to her. RT used to think a fictional character was "real," and now he knows that "Slenderman is fake." RT and TY refer to emotional states and changes in addition to situational fears. RT understands the negative emotional impact of watching scary movies and knows he should not be watching these movies late at night.

Table 5

Experiences of Social Problem Solving

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Third Grade (28)	0	0	0	2
Sixth Grade (55)	0	0	2	3

Table 5 compares the number of the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). responses that explore resolution of internal and social conflict across grade and week. This theme did not appear at all until the third week. Students in sixth grade discussed this earlier (week three versus four) and greater frequency and complexity than third-grade students.

Evaluation of Findings and Summary

Children related to the characters in *The Book of Can't and Don't* and saw components of themselves in the book's characters. Younger children had some differences in emotional function compared to older children. For instance, table six shows that third-grade students described separation anxiety from caregivers. The closing chapter of this paper will discuss the findings compared to relevant literature.

Table 6

Developmental Differences in Anxiety-Type

N=83	Separation	Uncertain
Third Grade (28)	4	1
Sixth Grade (55)	2	9
Total	6	10

Chapter 6: Discussion

Overview

This section begins by revisiting the research questions and purpose of the study. First, I describe the intention behind developing *The Book of Can't and Don't*. Then, I provide an overview of the themes generated by the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) activities which followed classroom reading and discussion of *The Book of Can't and Don't*. Next, I utilize these findings to engage in a dialogue with extant literature on creative bibliotherapy and developmental theory to explore the implications of these findings. Following this exploration, I revisit my researcher's foresight and the hermeneutic process throughout this study. Finally, after this deconstruction, I reflect upon the limitations of this study and implications for further research.

Review of Study Purpose

As mentioned earlier in this paper, I attempted to answer the following research question with this study: What is the lived experience of students in an Edmonton-area urban school with a high population of immigrant, refugee, and neurodivergent students engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* as learners? I intentionally developed *The Book of Can't and Don't* to explore student social and emotional learning in situations where intersectionality of disability and culture is present. This study is one of the first to examine the intersection of disability and multiculturalism using creative bibliotherapy. This study aimed to overcome some limitations of previous bibliotherapy research (e.g., Mares & Acosta, 2008) by creating multiple opportunities for interactive discussion for students. Data from the weekly *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) tasks captured descriptions of students' emotional experiences over four weeks. Teachers read aloud two chapters per week of the book to students and facilitated class

discussions after each reading. At the end of the four weeks in each classroom, teacher interviews provided insight into the context of the classrooms and discussions during the readings. I selected an IPA approach to data analysis to understand students' lived experiences, including self-perceptions and emotions, while engaging with the story.

The following section explores my findings in the context of existing literature on social and emotional learning, creative bibliotherapy, and intersectionality. This discussion provides insight into the potential for intersectionality-focused creative bibliotherapy to facilitate social and emotional learning in inclusive elementary classroom settings. In this process, I identify data trends that support or contradict the small body of extant literature and novel findings that make unique contributions to the current literature.

Discussion of Findings

Four themes emerged from the analysis of student data. The themes were as follows: 1) Expression of Negative Emotions 2) Expression of Positive Emotions 3) Experiences of Feeling Different and Noticing Differences in Others and 4) Experiences of Social Problem Solving. Students appeared enthusiastic about the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) activity and were eager to describe their drawings.

The novel as a Mechanism for the Expression and Validation of Emotions

The shared experience of interacting with the novel as a class prompted student reflection about the expression of emotion. For instance, many students described instances where they perceived themselves as having similar emotions or empathy for characters in *The Book of Can't and Don't*. There was minimal student focus or references to how the characters differed from the student readers; in contrast, students displayed shared empathy and perceived similarity to the characters. As mentioned previously in this paper, social and emotional competence is a

precursor to academic and social success in a school environment (Denham & Basset, 2018). Opportunities to develop emotional proficiency allow children to have simultaneous emotional control and mental resources for social and cognitive tasks required at school (Blair, 2002). A Model by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2019) states that effective social interaction requires planned behaviour to achieve social goals. For instance, children describing their emotional states to caregivers enable them to support children in regulating their emotions. In the current study, the fifth-sixth-grade teacher, JS, noted that some students in her class had difficulties describing their emotions versus acting out behaviours.

> **JS:** That is one thing I'm working on with this class is. For many of them, getting them to tap into their own emotions and verbalizing them can be difficult. More often than not, I see those sorts of things as misbehaviours.

In addition to mentioning the barriers to emotional expression for some students, JS described a student, RT, being prompted by the book to verbally describe his feelings about a traumatic event to the teacher. Other students in the class experienced significant disruptions to their living arrangements (e.g., foster care). Nevertheless, the discussions created a space where everyone felt secure sharing their experiences.

> **JS:** I did have one student speak to me privately because he wasn't comfortable in front of the classroom, but he came from [country affected by war], and he talked to me about [witnessing the violent death of a relative in the war], so I felt like he could relate to what was going on in Haiti there perhaps. That also gave us a chance to talk about what happened in Haiti and how

> the people were displaced during that time. No one in this classroom is adopted, as far as I know, so that didn't ring true. However, a few of the children are in foster homes, so they could relate in that sense of joining a family and becoming the new sibling) and difficulty with relationships. Having a mom but then another sort of stuff. For a foster child, that's the same kind of feeling.

Validation of negative emotions may help children become more aware of their own emotions and develop empathy for other children (Lambie & Sadek, 2021). Caregivers, including teachers, who deny children from processing negative emotions remove learning opportunities to develop metacognition and practice self-regulation skills (Denham et al., 1994). However, in addition to validating negative emotions, it is essential for parents not to encourage rumination and dysregulated emotional expression. Uninhibited expression of negative emotions that violates display rules can cause difficulties for children at school versus increasing emotional competence (Castro et al., 2018). Thus, the novel provided a mechanism for students to describe negative emotions in an age-appropriate context.

Developmental Differences Between Third Grade and Sixth-Grade Participants

Although only older students considered personal identity beyond shared traits with peers, even third-grade students could find common cultural interests with classmates. In addition, these students could share feelings on immigration. These students did not have to be immigrating from the same country or facing the same social crisis to find common emotions in experiencing disruptive change. Similarly, FJ, the teacher in the third-grade classroom, was able to share her experiences with the students growing up as a cultural minority, which helped

establish trust. FJ stated that “these kinds of discussions…I think build family community in our classroom.” This concept of classroom family creates a situation where students are more comfortable with authenticity and less bound by display rules.

Unwritten rules governing appropriate emotional expression and regulation are referred to as display rules by Saarni (1997). These rules become increasingly complex as children mature from toddlers to adolescents. For instance, young children may require assistance from adult caregivers when they experience a minor fall. A school-aged child will stand up and resume playing without crying or acting injured despite experiencing little discomfort (López-Pérez et al., 2016).

The findings of the current study support existing literature on developmental differences between younger and older children's inability to self-regulate their emotions. For example, third-grade students describe nighttime fears more often than sixth-grade students. Older children are expected to display intense emotions more subtly and require less help from adult caregivers with emotion regulation (López-Pérez et al., 2016). For instance, RT referred to how he used to think a fictional character, Slenderman, “was real” and was afraid of him, but he later learned that Slenderman “was fake.” In addition, RT recognized that he had unwanted thoughts when he watched horror movies. He had the verbal skills and cognitive capabilities to distance himself from his fears without adult assistance. Older children are better at internally regulating their emotions and are expected not to require verbal prompts or assistance for self-regulation except in extreme situations, such as the instance of RT describing witnessing a violent event to his teacher

In addition to improved self-regulation, school-aged children become increasingly proficient in understanding the unique preferences of communication partners and adapting

interaction styles to match others (Denham, & Bassett, 2018; Gnepp, 1989). The ability to understand the intent and perspectives of others increases gradually between ages three and eleven (Hasegawa, 2021; Pons & Harris, 2004). In the present study, one of the students in the grade five-six class concluded that a character in the book, Ryan, who was viewed by the main characters as a bully, teased the girls because he was embarrassed about his low academic skills. None of the students in third grade discussed reasons children may be hostile towards their peers beyond stating that these individuals were "mean" or "not nice."

In the present study, the teacher of the younger children recognized the developmental need for interactive scaffolding. However, the third-grade teacher gave more detailed descriptions of these interactions than the fifth-sixth grade teacher in the teacher interviews. Initially, I thought it was a difference in teacher personality or interview techniques. However, upon reflection and rereading the interview transcripts, I expect that younger students would require more time for discussion and more teacher guidance than older students, so the third-grade teacher would have more examples of interactive teaching to provide for an interview. In addition, students in the split fifth-sixth grade class may have been more likely than younger children to independently process material or discuss topics with peers versus ask questions or engage in discussion with adult caregivers (e.g., Denham & Bassett, 2018).

The Novel as a Mechanism for Social Problem-Solving

Problem Solving with Peers

Data from teacher interviews and *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses revealed that the novel provided a platform for discussing social problem solving among student peer groups. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1959) describes

middle childhood as a developmental stage, industry versus inferiority. According to Erikson (1959), children of school-age base their self-concept on their perceived abilities compared to their peers. Students who view themselves as having inadequate abilities compared to their peers experience emotional stress (Erikson, 1959). Most students in third grade would be at this stage. However, some students in fifth-sixth grade are beginning to consider broader aspects of self-concept that are not related to peers.

For Erikson (1959), adolescence is a developmental stage of *identity versus role confusion.* Students at this age begin to consider aspects such as cultural identity, disability status, and unique worldviews. Students unhappy with their perceived identity will face social and emotional barriers to quality of life (Erikson, 1959). For instance, JS stated that some girls in her grade five-six class still enjoyed playing with dolls, and some classmates viewed these girls as too old for dolls and would tease them. These students have a decision to make about choosing to conform with peers or continuing to enjoy an activity they enjoy.

As mentioned above, children continue to become more proficient at understanding the perspectives of others during their school-aged years (Hasegawa, 2021; Pons & Harris, 2004). JS attempted to instill empathy in her students for classmates who have diverse interests, looks, or cultural practices by discussing with her students. A quote from her exit interview which illustrates her promoting diversity and empathy is below. In addition, students were able to see aspects of themselves and their classmates in the characters of *The Book of Can't and Don't*.

> **JS:** We have two fairly new students to our school, so I guess that feeling of being the new kid on the block and what that might look like. A couple of girls in the class like to play with dolls, and other children will make fun of them to relate to that as well. Perhaps not being

> your typical, white-skinned child in a class and were to feel if someone were to point out your kinky hair, for example. We base some discussions around the diversity within a classroom and coming from another country, perhaps.

According to Rose and Asher (1999), learning to resolve peer conflicts surrounding competition and conflicts of interest is essential for middle childhood development. It allows children to establish and maintain friendships. In the exit interview with FJ, she describes the process of using the book to facilitate social problem-solving in her third-grade classroom.

> **FJ:** We have this every day in class. They were able to take responsibility for their misunderstandings because they could see how these two, [Malika and Zendaya] …they had the solution for [the characters]. So often, they didn't have the solution for themselves, and this book helped them to either take responsibility or come to an understanding that it doesn't necessarily have to stay at a misunderstanding. They can be resolved.

Denham and Bassett (2018) state that school-aged children aim for their peers to view them as competent and socially desirable. This can result in social anxiety and fear of rejection in peer interactions. Interviews with teachers of both classrooms revealed that students competed with their peers and feared peer rejection. Below, FJ describes using *The Book of Can't and Don't* to reduce competition among students and encourage collaboration. In addition, FJ uses the interactive discussion and questioning that Denham and Basset (2018) recommended facilitating social problem solving among her students. As mentioned above, most of these

children face psychosocial conflicts consistent with Erikson's (1959) Industry versus Inferiority stage.

> **FJ:** In chapter five, the topic is people who can do better. Some students aren't doing so well, and we have a huge grouping of soccer students in my class. Some of them think they are better than others, and some of mine don't play soccer very much, so in gym, it actually becomes a conflict because the ones that are good at it want to hog the ball. So, we had a discussion after that where they started to share a pass. The ones that usually stood at the outskirts of the soccer then started to play and then could build their skills. Hence, it ended up being that the good players could only touch the ball after four other people had touched, had kicked, or done something with the ball, so everybody got to be included.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, FJ engaged in more scaffolding than JS. For example, she guided her third-grade students towards solutions (e.g., setting rules for ball use) in addition to teaching empathy. This need for more scaffolding with younger children is supported by existing literature because older children require less adult caregiver assistance than younger children (Denham & Bassett, 2018).

Problem Solving with Adult Caregivers

Draw and write (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses and teacher interviews indicate that the book facilitated class discussions about problem-solving with adult caregivers. Students reflected on experiences of social problem solving with caregivers both in interview responses and in the *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) tasks. Social problem solving between school-aged children and adult caregivers requires effective social communication skills. For

instance, children need to describe emotions as described earlier in the chapter verbally. Here FJ describes how she used the example from *The Book of Can't and Don't* where Malika feared disclosing her fear of dogs to her new family would get her "sent back" to facilitate student discussions about seeking support and overcoming fears. This example illustrates the need for an accurate verbal description of emotions and adult validation of child emotions.

> **FJ:** With adults guiding her to get to the birthday party, she found out that the fear wasn't as bad as she thought. And all the students could come up with a time when they were so afraid of what Mom would say, what their brother would say. So, in the end, when it was an adult person, they were talking to, it wasn't so terrible, and so they could identify with how Malika was feeling and that from the start of the book, she should have just said that she was afraid.

As noted in the teacher interviews and student drawings, some children described fear of disclosing information to adult caregivers. However, students who made successful disclosures of negative emotions to adult caregivers often spoke of the sense of relief of overcoming a burden or that things they initially feared were not as bad as expected.

Novel for Promoting Pro-Intersectionality Classroom Values

Most social and emotional learning research focuses on typically developing children or a homogenous group of students with a specific medical condition (e.g., autism). Many of the students in this study were members of non-normative populations. The school was in a low socioeconomic status neighbourhood with a high immigrant and refugee population. Several

students had life experiences of disability or trauma. Some students belonged to more than one minority group (e.g., one student was autistic and an immigrant). The findings indicated that school-aged children do not reflect upon intersectionality in the same way that adults do. Student references to racial, cultural, and ability differences were mostly limited to instances where students perceived emotionally equivalent individual experiences with the book characters. This study provides insight into social interactions in a mixed population where students' emotional experiences reflect the intersectionality of multiple minority groups and backgrounds.

Recognition of Strengths of Diverse Classmates

The data suggests that class discussions about individual differences may help students develop empathy and respect for peers with neurological or cultural differences. For instance, *The Book of Can't and Don't* facilitated students recognizing the strengths of a peer with a disability in the third-grade class. After discussing the scene where Zendaya, an autistic child in *The Book of Can't and Don't*, helped classmates with spelling, students in this class began to consult a non-verbal classmate skilled in drawing for art ideas. In addition, students developed empathy for classmates with different academic abilities. In this interview quote from the third-grade teacher, she describes using *The Book of Can't and Don't* to facilitate recognition, empathy, and respect for diverse peers.

> **FJ:** With the summary for chapter seven, there was quite an explosion of responses, and it probably took over fifteen minutes to just, just discuss people that can write very well, get 100-percents on their spelling tests compared to the ones that barely got, not even 25-percent and to have Zendaya so strong in a skill to help other students. I have equally a student with autism spectrum who draws so many students go to her for guidance on how to add to their pictures, how-to, and she just takes over, she just takes the paper and adds

her thoughts for what she thinks should be on the picture and the students are appreciative. I'm not sure if my students recognize as much as she should be for just her own gifts. The students knew she is wonderful as an artist, and they knew to draw on her expertise.

Minority Self-Identification in an Intersectional Classroom

Data suggested that students only discussed concepts of minority-group status and intersectionality related to their firsthand experiences. Both FJ and JS provided interview responses that suggested most of their students related the experiences of *The Book of Can't and Don't* to their life experiences. Older children referred to concepts of race and disability more often than younger children. In the teacher interviews, FJ, who teaches third-grade students, mentions personal identity factors less than JS, who teaches a split fifth-sixth grade class. Literature suggests that sixth-grade students are more concerned with minority self-identification than students in the third grade. However, students in third grade could relate to the experience of arriving in Canada and share their "adventures to Canada" with several of their peers.

FJ: Especially for many of the English language learners or the low readers, they enjoyed having a story read to them. I feel that uh some of the children, specifically children who are refugees, related with the character in the story, as well as I have a student on the autism spectrum, so I think she really related to the book as well.

FJ: So, from the start in chapter one, the summary talks about a little girl arriving in Canada, which half of this class has experienced. Immediately, they were captivated, and the storytelling of all of their adventures to Canada really brought home this story.

Most students who explored race and disability in their *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses were members of these minority groups and in sixth grade. For instance, AR, a sixth-grade student, related to the experience of being 'made fun of" for being autistic because "it happened to me." TY, a student who lived with anxiety disorder, compared how the fears experienced by Malika and Zendaya were like the fears that she lived with (e.g., fear of immunizations, fear of trying new foods). SE said that reading *The Book of Can't and Don't* make her happy because it told a story of someone else who was afraid of dogs like her. She felt she was no longer the only one afraid of dogs, which validated her emotions as normal. WA related to the characters not liking clothing their family tried to pick out for them due to her family's judgement of her clothing choices.

A small number of students described their differences positively. For instance, BY, a student from India, described her nation's capital fruit. This detailed description of cultural significance signified BY's sense of group cohesion with people belonging to her home country of India. A racially black girl, HA enjoyed having a black character in the story, and it reminded her of a book written from the perspective of a black girl who was a heroine. HA identified with people of her race once being slaves and how many escaped to freedom.

It appeared that having other students in the class who shared identity was important, especially for the younger students to feel comfortable discussing their minority identities. For instance, in the interview quoted below, FJ, the third-grade teacher, stated that most students

could find common traditions among classmates from the same cultural backgrounds as themselves. In addition, she shared vulnerability with her students by sharing that she felt she was the only individual of her ethnicity in her class as a child. Literature supports the need for children to have a peer group they perceive to be like themselves versus feeling different from their peers (Denham & Bassett, 2018).

> **FJ:** I shared that this was a new school for me. I didn't know anybody here, no teachers, no students…and that really spring boarded into lots of discussions about the students' first day of school…they wanted to find their friends…they were afraid when they couldn't find their friends. So, the new ones just stood at the sides…they didn't say anything, so they were afraid.

> **FJ:** As in when we look at chapter four…how our different backgrounds come into place, I did share with my students how I was the only one who was Asian in my school from grades one to grades nine and the students here always have had children of their own race with them so they didn't feel so picked out, picked out of the crowd but they still experienced how adults treated different races which I experienced the same.

> **FJ:** So, that history, "this is what we do in our family," was spoken so confidently that they knew this is what their tradition does, and almost every student supported each other that were from the same culture. Yes, they all did that.

It appears that for students in third grade, identifying with a minority group is useful if peers belong to that group. Thus, the goal of minority identification is peer orientation and finding peers like themselves. This need for similarity to peers is evident in Erikson's (1959) industry versus inferiority stage and current reviews such as Denham (2019)'s review of social and emotional competence in childhood. Students in the fifth-sixth grade begin to form identities independent from their peers, as suggested by Erikson (1959) and the identity versus role confusion stage. Older children still desire to find similar peers. However, their emerging awareness of individual identity separate from their family and peer group helps form their self-concept with older children.

Reflecting On the Hermeneutic Process of Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier in this paper, I bring some worldviews to this study that inform my hermeneutic process. For instance, I am a researcher in educational psychology with an understanding of theories surrounding neurodiversity and multiculturalism. In addition, I have the lived experience of being autistic. My difficulties understanding the display rules of neurotypical Canadian society have made me relate to some of the challenges faced by cultural minorities. Like the students, I wish to have peers like me. However, I do not form my identity by assimilating with a peer group.

Regardless of similarities and differences, a classroom where students feel accepted by teachers and peers improves students' quality of life. In addition, students who are not experiencing emotional distress from rejection or loneliness have more mental resources to dedicate to learning (Blair, 2002). Creating a classroom that facilitates belongingness requires effort from teachers. Literature supports a positive correlation between school staff attitudes and

student self-reports of friendships and a sense of belonging among students with disabilities. Crouch, Keys, and McMahon (2017) studied 133 adolescent students with disabilities who transitioned from disability-specific schools to inclusive classrooms. Data was collected by administering questionnaires to teachers, students, and other school staff and included perceived disabled students' sense of belonging and positive and negative interactions with school staff and peers. Students who reported positive interactions with school staff and peers self-reported a higher sense of belonging.

In my personal experience, both in my early school years to my university years, I found that teachers who modelled positive attitudes towards me contributed to my perceived sense of belonging in classrooms. For instance, as an undergraduate student, I would repeatedly raise my hand to ask questions or add a comment about something I knew related to the material if the classes were about a topic of special interest. Of course, instructors needed to set clear boundaries on how much discussion could take place in class, so there was time for coverage of the rest of the material. However, in classes where instructors showed an interest in my enthusiasm for the subject matter, my peers interacted with me as a bright student and asked me questions. Conversely, in classes where instructors appeared irritated and saw me as disruptive versus contributing to the class, some students refused to speak to me outside of class.

The *Book of Can't and Don't* and the *Guide for Teachers* may promote inclusive values. The Guide for Teachers summarizes each of the book's eight chapters and provides guiding questions to facilitate class discussions between teachers and students. For instance, this is one of the prompts following the book's first chapter. It encourages discussion between students and teachers about cultural differences in expected conversation skills:

In Canada, it is a conversation style in most communities to look at people when talking to you. However, eye contact styles vary across cultures. For example, it is considered rude to look elders in the eyes in some African and Indigenous cultures. In addition, Zendaya has autism and finds it uncomfortable and distracting to look at people and listen to them simultaneously.

The classroom teachers viewed concepts of intersectionality in a comparable way to how I view these ideas. She created analogies between her own life, the students, and the characters in *The Book of Can't and Don't* to facilitate shared empathy among her classroom community. In the interview quoted below, FJ describes one of the firsthand experiences she shared with her students.

> **FJ:** And if you didn't understand the language, how I would say the white community thought I was less smart, but in reality, I just didn't have the language. I couldn't say it right. I couldn't say "orange," but I could say it in Chinese.

Initially, I expected more responses that created explicit analogies between disability and culture. However, the existing literature on child development and my findings influenced me to revise my existing preconceptions. Extant literature suggests that peer groups have strict social norms and display rules where conformity is necessary for membership. For instance, Rutland (2015) found that children and adolescents are rated unfavourably by peers for failing to emulate group choice of whether to wear an optional uniform for a social event. Students rate non-group members who violate these norms less negatively than members of their school group (Rutland, 2015).

As explored throughout this section, the responses in which students discussed disability or race were mostly focused on students personally relating to the characters or their peers. Adults have a different lived experience of exploring intersectionality than school-aged children. The data and existing literature suggest that children focus more on assimilating with peers and less on exploring individual differences than adults.

Potential Implications for Educators and Researchers

Creative bibliotherapy requires interactive activities and discussion opportunities to effectively teach social and emotional learning in children (e.g., Mares & Acosta, 2008). This study provides qualitative evidence that multiple opportunities to discuss and respond to a story may help reduce misinterpretations such as those found in (Kanarowski 2012). As described in further detail in the literature review, children who hear a story or watch a movie once without interactive discussion may not be able to generalize their interpretations to situations beyond the story (e.g., Mares and Acosta (2008).), Mares and Acosta (2008)

In addition to creating an interactive activity to solidify understanding, arts-informed activities and storytelling may create an avenue for shared group vulnerability and cohesiveness (Cole & Knowles, 2008). This safe environment may be especially useful with marginalized populations with distrust of authority and each other. One such example of research using stories for this purpose was Killick and Bowcott (2015), which utilized issues relevant to youth in a psychiatric ward to create a safe platform for shared group discussion and understanding. Arts-informed research and creative bibliotherapy are discussed in further detail in the literature review and methodology chapters.

Limitations

This study has some limitations which must be considered when interpreting the data. First, this study has a small sample size of twenty-six students. Thus, the data from this study does not represent all classrooms containing school-aged children. Schools were not randomly selected due to requirement of consent from school principals and teachers. Finally, teachers who consented to the study had advanced education (Master's degrees) and were ethnic minorities. This is not representative of all Edmonton-area teachers.

Some students in each classroom could not have their voices represented in the data due to communication barriers faced by themselves or their parents or guardians. For instance, several parents were learning English and unable to read or understand the consent forms, even when teachers attempted to explain the study verbally to these parents. Some students did not understand the child assent forms and produced an invalid response such as circling both YES and NO. I could not include these students' data because these students did not indicate they had given assent.

I hoped to collect data from at least one more school of a similar demographic. However, the COVID19 pandemic resulted in all schools in Alberta closing and moving classes online. Schools eventually returned to in-person learning but prohibited classroom visitors for COVID safety concerns. In addition, the pandemic resulted in major life disruptions for students who already faced barriers to school participation. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if loss of in-person connections impacted the maintenance of any potential benefits from the study.

I understand what it is like not to understand the social climate of the dominant culture. However, I recognize that I do not understand the experience of being a racial or ethnic minority. In addition, I have never relocated to another country where I could not speak the language.

Finally, I grew up in a stable country and family and never experienced war or other major life disruptions like many students in this study. Therefore, it is important to recognize I cannot speak for minority groups other than the autistic community. Still, this work can create a discussion platform that amplifies minority voices in classroom settings.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study is one of the first to combine the intersectionality of disability and culture in a children's story. In addition, most of the existing bibliotherapy research consists of a short story being read to children followed by a single activity (e.g., Kanarowski, 2012). This research examines the impact of a bibliotherapy intervention over four weeks with multiple opportunities for active learning. Finally, the research contributes to social and emotional development research via accounts of students engaging with the book for social and emotional learning in classroom settings.

There are several potential directions for future research using *The Book of Can't and Don't* in elementary classrooms. Emerging abilities in middle childhood give children the capacity to establish shared social motives with individuals with different worldviews than themselves (Denham & Bassett, 2018). Advanced perspective taking abilities are present more in older students. Without teacher scaffolding, as evidenced in the teacher exit interviews, younger students tended to not consider the reasons behind peers' behaviours. For example, third grade students often referred to students who behaved in objectionable ways as "the mean kids." Responses from some students in the split fifth-sixth grade class displayed awareness of reasons behind negative behaviors (e.g., an understanding that someone may bully classmates due to low confidence from poor grades). It would be useful to examine the impact of The Book of Can't and Don't on students in several elementary school grades with similar student demographics to

the current study. This would enable me as a researcher to explore whether developmental trends in data continue to support existing literature.

Only a small number of children in the current study discussed of analogies between autism, multiculturalism, and other individual differences. More prompts in the Guide for Teachers may improve student awareness of disability and culture. For instance, creating more perspective-focused questions with intersectionality-specific themes might solidify these concepts more for younger students. However, it is more important that students empathize and understand each other than to verbally label differences in each other. Shared empathy may be created via "universal experiences." Therefore, this book may work best by creating shared empathy and highlighting "universal experiences" versus focusing on differences. JS, the third-grade teacher, discusses this below.

> **JS:** Well, actually I did have the other teacher you're working with ask me if I felt it was a valuable experience, no criticisms, she just was wondering my thoughts on it, and I told her I felt it was a worthwhile endeavour and that given our student population, our demographics, how diverse our classrooms are, that the narrative it would ring true for many students…even though you stated this was probably meant for younger children it still addresses issues I have in this classroom with older children. These are universal themes.

Finally, the double empathy problem (e.g., Milton, 2012) must be considered when exploring intersectional social interactions. Autistic people have difficulty interpretating neurotypical emotions. Similarly, neurotypical people fare poorly at interpreting the emotions of autistic people. Individuals who face barriers to full participation in society may form social

bonds over aspects of thinking and communicating that is compatible. These common bonds may be formed regardless of whether these differences originate from neurodiversity or culture. These common emotional experiences may help mitigate the double empathy problem.

It was apparent that several of the students who participated in this study faced barriers to participation in the study. As mentioned in the above section, some parents could not read or understand the consent form. In addition, one of the students has minimal verbal skills which presented a barrier to full study participation despite a keen interest and skill in drawing pictures.

Further research could examine how to adapt consent forms and explanations to allow for informed consent for with parents who speak minimal English or have low literacy skills. In addition, versions of *The Book of Can't and Don't*, such as a simple English version, picture story format, or audio book could be developed to adapt the workshop for students with minimal English proficiency or verbal skills. With some of the language barriers removed, some of these students may be capable of benefitting from the story and activities.

Research suggests that emotional discussions with parents in early childhood help children develop social and emotional competence (Bailey, 2012). Therefore, it might be useful to conduct a study where *The Book of Can't and Don't* and the accompanying Guide for Teachers are used as an avenue for social and emotional discussions between parents and children in home settings. Piloting this book in family settings would be of interest because parents are crucial contributors to the social and emotional development of young children (e.g., Denham, 2019).

Future research could compare student responses in the original study to *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995) responses in subsequent years. For instance, the number of North American students experiencing major life disruptions has increased since I collected data in

2019 and 2020. These disruptions range from children who lost relatives in the pandemic to Afghan refugee children entering Canada (e.g., Fegert et al., 2020). If this study was conducted today, there might be differences in student responses that reflect current events that were not a major world influence at the time of data collection (e.g., children affected by the pandemic). As evident in the data, Children applied events in the story to their own life experiences. For example, RT related the events of the 2010 Haitian earthquake and hurricanes mentioned in *The Book of Can't and Don't* to his firsthand experiences of the war in Syria.

As mentioned in the limitations section, the long-term impact of any classroom intervention is difficult to predict. Nevertheless, longitudinal studies may aid in understanding how the social and emotional meaning of the story and activities changes over time. For instance, during the study, both classes who engaged in the reading and *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow 1995). activities developed a sense of community. However, it is unknown if these changes were enduring when the study ended, especially with these two classrooms pivoting to online learning two months after the conclusion of data collection.

Finally, future quantitative studies may help determine if this book effectively treats emotional and behaviour problems or increases emotional awareness in diverse classrooms. This study explores the experience of student participation but does not provide evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship between the use of the book and social change. A mixed-methods study (Creswell & Plano, 2017) would allow insight into the emotional impact for teachers and students and the potential use of *The Book of Can't and Don't* as a targeted intervention.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the lived experience of school-aged children engaging with *The Book of Can't and Don't* and explore the book's social and emotional meaning and

response. I created a chapter book that explores the intersection of disability and culture. Teachers read the book over four weeks with their students at a rate of two chapters a week. After each reading, teachers led a class discussion. Weekly *Draw and Write* (Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995) activities provided students with interactive learning opportunities. The resulting qualitative data provided insight into the children's responses to the book. Teacher exit interviews allowed enhanced understanding into the context of the classroom environment.

The characters of *The Book of Can't and Don't* were relatable to school-aged children. Students described similarities between their firsthand experiences and those of the characters. Most responses described emotional experiences or social problem-solving. A small number of responses were from children who perceived themselves as an out-group member compared with their classmates due to being a member of a minority group (e.g., disability, disliking foods all their peers like). Reading about characters who felt different helped validate these students' feelings as normal.

Teachers used the book as a platform for their students' social and emotional learning activities. Both students and teachers were actively engaged in the book and activities. Most children enjoyed the story and *Draw and Write* activity. The qualitatively coded *Draw and Write* activity suggests that children consider emotions, social problem solving, and intersectionality in the context of themselves and interactions with their peers and families. These findings support existing literature on child social and emotional development (e.g., Denham, 2019). Older children are expected to be more independent than younger children and begin to rely on self-regulation and peers instead of parents for emotional support (Denham & Bassett, 2018). This expected reliance on self-regulation and peer support in older children helps to explain some of the differences in responses between third and sixth-grade students.

Social competence is important for physical and mental health in childhood and across the lifespan (Denham & Basset, 2018; Mahoney et al., 2018). Social and emotional learning activities such as *The Book of Can't and Don't* are important for neurotypical students born in North American, neurodivergent students, and students who belong to other minority groups. This shared understanding between neurodivergent and neurotypical classmates will help buffer the double empathy problem (Mitchell, Sheppherd, & Cassidy, 2021). Mitigating this problem may create less need to mask authentic selves to receive peer acceptance (Botha & Frost, 2020; Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2020).

I am hopeful that *The Book of Can't and Don't* and the findings from this study will: a) facilitate discussion in classrooms on social and emotional learning and intersectionality b) create opportunities for validation and acceptance of students with individual differences c) create a sense of community in classroom settings by putting students and teachers into the mindset for shared understanding through shared vulnerabilities via arts-informed activities (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

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Appendix A

Children's Assent Form

Do you want to do an activity about the book? You may draw or write or both.

Yes NO

My name is _____

Appendix B

The Book of Can't and Don't

A Story to Celebrate Diverse Learners

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This research project is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for completion of a PhD dissertation.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

I put my hand in my pocket and touched the Haitian doll the workers gave me when I lost my first Mama. I was three then, and I am eight now. My family was new and so was my last name. I used to be Malika Anabelle Jean-Baptiste. Now I am Malika Anabelle Zeplin because Miss Eva adopted me. She let me keep my first name. My name and the doll were all I had left of my old life.

I met Miss Eva a year ago when she visited me at the orphanage in Haiti. She came to take me home this time instead of leaving me like the last time. The plane ride was long and scary, and I had to keep my seatbelt on. I knew she could send me back to the orphanage if I made her mad. I called her Miss Eva because she was not Mama and here you were supposed to say Miss and not Madame

I followed Miss Eva because there was nobody I knew to follow. I missed my friends in Haiti and my teacher Madame Moreau. A tear rolled down my face and I kicked a small rock with my shoe. It hurt my toe.

Miss Eva put her hand on my shoulder. “It’s okay to feel sad and angry. It’s a new place for you.”

I nodded but I did not answer her.

Here was different. There was no cold rain in Haiti. The rain here was cold and stung my face. A landed on my cheek and my jumper was getting wet. I brushed the rain off my face, but it kept landing on my jumper. This was not like the rain in Haiti that was warm and wet.

“It will be warmer tomorrow, Malika,” said Miss Eva. “The sun will be out.” It would not be as warm as Haiti, and I would still be cold. Miss Eva took off her shirt and wrapped it around me, but I was still not warm.

We kept walking. A car drove in front of Miss Eva and me and it beeped its horn. I jumped. I was indoors most of the time in Haiti or in the orphanage yard, not out in traffic. My ears hurt and I put my hands over them. This new place was scary and loud.

Miss Eva held out her hand to me and smiled. I took one of my hands off my ears and she took it and held it. I wanted to squirm away because I did not know her well, but I was scared so I grabbed her hand and squeezed it tight instead. “I know you are scared but it will be okay. Let’s meet the rest of your new family, Malika,” she said.

"Are they good?" I asked. I hoped my English sounded right. School in Haiti was taught in English, but I spoke Creole better even though I only knew how to write in English and only a little. I wanted my new family to think I was smart and for them to like me. I missed my home in Haiti, but I wanted my new family.

"They are nice, Mali," she said. Everyone would pretend to be nice until I made them mad. Then they would send me back. I needed to not make them mad.

We walked into the airport. There were chairs by the wall and lots of people sat in the chairs. I wondered which people were my family. Miss Eva walked me over to a man and a woman and a girl sitting on chairs. "Meet your Aunt Erin, Uncle Zane, and cousin Zendaya." Said Miss Eva. "Zendaya will be eight later this month."

Zendaya had light brown hair and white skin and was holding a princess doll with long hair down to its toes. Everyone but me was white. I had dark skin and my hair was curly and not straight like their hair or the doll's hair. When she stood up, Zendaya's head came up higher than mine. I was small in Haiti too. Something in the airport made a beeping noise. Zendaya put her hands on her ears.

"Hello Zendaya," I said. Zendaya took her hands off her ears and put them in her lap.

"I don't like planes taking off and I don't like things beeping," she said

"I do not like noise," I said.

Zendaya reached out and touched my curly hair. It did not hurt but it made me mad because it was my hair and not hers. "That hair is so pretty," she said, giggling. My curls stuck up everywhere. Miss Eva did not know how to braid.

I moved my head away from her, "Why did you touch my hair?" I asked. I did not like this girl touching my hair. She was a stranger to me too, like everyone else here.

"I think it's pretty," said Zendaya. She moved her hand towards my hair again but pulled it back.

"Thank you," I said. "But do not touch it." I stepped back.

Aunt Erin turned her head around and looked at us. "Keep your hands to yourself, Zendaya," she said.

"Sorry," said Zendaya. She sat down in a chair and played with her princess doll on her lap.

"Zen remember to look at me when I am talking to you, sweetie. It shows you have listening eyes," said Aunt Erin. She smiled at Zendaya and pointed to her own eyes.

“Okay Mom,” said Zendaya. She shrugged her shoulders and looked at Aunt Erin.

I looked away from Aunt Erin. "I do not want to look at Auntie,” I said. “It is rude in Haiti to look at grownups in the eyes.

“I don’t like to look at people either,” said Zendaya.

I smiled and touched Zendaya’s hand. Maybe she was like me in some ways. “Do you have to look at grownups here?” I asked.

“There are so many things you have to do here but there are even more things that you can’t do.” said Zendaya. She picked up a princess doll from one of the chairs and held it in her lap. “I can’t bring my dolls to third grade. I’m too old.”

Zendaya bounced her doll on her lap and its hair danced too. I hugged my Haitian doll. Zendaya’s eyes danced everywhere. I wondered what country they got Zendaya from.

Did you come from other country?” I asked, “You are different than the grownups.”

“I get in trouble a lot. I feel like an alien.” Zendaya lifted her foot into her lap and played with her shoe buckle.

“Espas etranje,” I said. “That is Creole for alien. I am from Haiti, and you are from other planet.”

We threw our heads back and laughed. Then we touched hands, but we did not look at each other in the eyes.

I stroked my doll's hair and remembered my first Mama. My eyes were wet again even though it was a long time ago.

Zendaya made her princess doll dance on the back of a chair.

"See my doll." said Zendaya. "I love princesses. I have more at home.

"I have this doll." I held up my Haitian doll for her to see. "I had a bear once too. A boy took it," I said.

"I want to see a Princess Story in 3D," said Zendaya.

"Remember Zendaya," said Auntie Erin. "Listen to what Malika says. You have to say something back and make her feel welcome."

Zendaya sighed. "Yes Mom," she said. "Sorry a boy took your bear, Malika."

"Back to school on Tuesday," said Miss Eva. She touched her purse strap on her lap. "Both of you girls will be going."

"I hope I like school here," I said. I liked school in Haiti. My teacher, Madame Moreau gave me books to take back to the bunk room and read. Once she gave me a book on zoo animals. I kept it for three days before giving it back to her. Sometimes she let me watch animal videos on her phone. I liked all animals but dogs because they bite.

"You probably won't. School has mean kids." Zendaya talked faster. She began to flap her hands. "There is one thing you will like about here, Malika. You can meet my dog tomorrow at my house. His name is Kalib. You will like him. He is a good part of your new home.

He will have his own party hat at my birthday on the 22nd. I made him one already."

I squirmed in my seat and clenched my hands. To me, both dogs and the new school were scary parts of this new town. When I was six, a street dog bit my leg. It would not stop bleeding. I hid until nighttime. Then they found me. The doctor at the orphanage gave me stitches. They stung and I closed my eyes and screamed. It woke the other girls who were sleeping

I did not answer Zendaya. The dog was here first. If I told my family, I was afraid of dogs, I might get sent back to Haiti.

I wanted to keep Miss Eva and my new last name. I did not want to lose her like my first Mama. Papa took me to the orphanage after Mama died. He said he could not take care of me. I must have made him mad. I needed to keep this from happening again

Chapter 2

The drive home was long. It was sunset when we pulled into the driveway of the new house. At least we were not going to Zendaya's house where the dog lived. Thinking about the dog again made me bite my lip. I climbed out of the car and followed everyone else.

Zendaya skipped ahead of me into the house, waving her hands. She was different from the other people here, but different from me too. I did not believe that she really came from another planet. There must have been some other reason why she was different.

The house was bigger than the orphanage. It made the orphanage look tiny. The orphanage had 30 children in it and this house was just for me and Miss Eva. Expensive things were everywhere. I was afraid if I touched any of them that they would break and put my hands in my pockets.

Miss Eva wanted to make rice and beans for me for supper so that supper would be like it was in Haiti for me. While the grownups cooked, Zendaya sat on the couch with me in the living room. In the orphanage, there were wood benches and chairs. They were hard and made your bottom hurt if you sat too long on them. This couch was soft and made of something that Miss Eva called leather. I sat down slow because did not want to ruin it. Zendaya sat beside me and leaned in and whispered to me, “Aunt Eva is the worst cook ever. Her rice stinks.”

I sniffed the air and giggled. It did not smell like the rice in Haiti. It smelled burnt. The meals were small in Haiti, and I always wanted more. I would go to sleep with my stomach growling some nights. But the ladies there knew how to cook rice and beans.

I leaned in and whispered back. “Is it okay to say the rice smells bad?” I asked.

“There are so many things you can’t do here,” said Zendaya. “You can only think about them.” She reached into the pink bag on her lap and pulled out a notepad and pen. “Let’s write a book about what you can’t do here,” she said.

"We can sit on the floor and work on it and the cat will come and cuddle us."

"I would like to," I said. "You write first. I do not spell good." In school in Haiti, I found the work hard. My letters came out messy and too big. I could not remember my sums when doing work with numbers. It was fun writing with Zendaya because there were no grownups wanting me to do a good job.

Zendaya wrote on the notepad. She chewed the end of the pen as she made her lines. Then she handed the page to me. I held the paper up to my face and she helped me read her lines. Then I wrote my words, taking my time to make my letters. They were too big and sloppy. I think most of the words were spelled wrong. I handed the notepad back to Zendaya and she fixed my words without saying anything. Even Madame Moreau would have corrected me and made me do them again. She used to call me a careless child even though she was a nice lady.

The Book of Can't and Don't: Day 1

By Zendaya and Malika

1. You can't look at your dolls when grownups talk to you. Look at other people when they talk to you, or they will think you're rude. By Zendaya
2. Don't touch other people and keep your hands to yourself. By Zendaya.
3. Do not touch my hair. By Malika.
4. It is not Haiti here. By Malika.

A grey striped cat rubbed against me and Zendaya. I liked cats. One lived at the orphanage to catch mice. The ladies would feed it milk. They were not scary like dogs. I put my hand out to pet the cat. She was soft, and her fur tickled my fingers.

“That’s Zizi,” said Miss Eva.

“I like her,” I said. She was soft. She made a rumbling sound when I touched her.

At supper, Zendaya stared at the stinky rice plate. She poked it with her fork. I pushed the rice with my fork too. I wished it would go away.

“This is not Haiti rice,” I said. “It is too hard.”

“Give it a try,” said Miss Eva.

I pushed my plate away. “Please no.” I spoke. I knew this was something I was not supposed to do around adults even in Haiti. I was supposed to eat what was put in front of me, but the rice was stuck together and had black edges. It did not look like Haiti rice. I hoped I would not get sent back or make the grownups mad.

“It does stink,” said Zendaya.

I laughed but put my hand over my mouth to stop it. The corners of Miss Eva’s mouth turned down. She scraped the plates into the garbage and sighed.

“If you don’t want something girls, all you have to do is say ‘no thank you’ and I can get you something else. It’s okay though.” I think she looked sad that I did not like her food, but she was trying to be nice. I had to show I liked her cooking, or she would send me back.

“I am sorry,” I said.

Miss Eva wrapped her arms around me and pulled me into a tight hug. Then she kissed the top of my head. “It’s okay, Mali,” she said. I clenched my hands and made my body tight. I did not know her well enough to be hugged by her.

Miss Eva let go and walked across the room. “This has been a long day,” she said, “I tried to make this dinner special for Malika, but it didn’t work out. Let’s all have dessert instead.”

“Sounds like a plan,” said Aunt Erin.

The chocolate cake came from a store. Miss Eva did not make it. Zendaya took a forkful of chocolate cake. I never had chocolate cake before, but I put a forkful into my mouth too. It tasted sweet. Too sweet. I took another bite before pushing it away. “No thank you,” I said.

My stomach growled. I was hungry, but the food was strange, and I could not make myself eat it. I wanted to open the fridge and look in it to see if there was better food, but the room was full of grownups.

Miss Eva took my plate and rinsed it off in the sink. She did not say anything. Then she reached into the fridge and poured me a glass of milk. She carried it over to me. I gobbled it down.

"You can have more if you like," she said. "It might be easier for you to have than some of our food that is strange to you."

Zendaya put her plate in the sink and skipped into the living room, waving her hands. She was doing her alien language again. We sat on the couch together. She pulled out the notepad again from her pink bag. "Let's go do our book again," she said.

"Yes," I said. My stomach growled again. I wished I could open the fridge and get some good food. I tried to think about our book.

The Book of Can't and Don't: Day 1 Part 2

1. Don't tell people that the rice they make stinks. By Zendaya
2. Do not laugh when Zendaya says the rice stinks. By Malika
3. Do not make people sad and say I am sorry when you make people sad. By Malika.

The rest of the family came in the living room. Mama sat in the chair and Aunt Erin and Uncle Zane sat on the other couch. Aunt Erin put her arm over Uncle Zane's neck and Uncle Zane smiled.

“I wish it was summer forever,” said Zendaya. She leaned back on the couch and yawned. “Last year boys at school put my dolls in the toilets. I hope when kids come to my house for my birthday, they don’t do that.”

“You are getting old to bring toys to school,” said Aunt Erin, sipping her coffee. “But you will find other things in common with your new classmates.”

I yawned and rubbed my eyes. It was a long ride on the plane and an even longer day. My eyes started to close but I made myself open them again.

“I hope people come to my birthday,” said Zendaya.

“The weather will be warm again tomorrow. The rain will stop tonight,” said Mama as she looked out the window.

“I miss the school in Haiti.” I spoke. My eyes were wet, and I wiped my face with my hand. “Madame Moreau used to let me read her books and watch animal videos on her cell phone when we could get a network signal at the orphanage. I knew when the net went out that Madame Moreau would show me the rest of the movie tomorrow. I would see her tomorrow and the other children.”

“Leaving things behind is hard.” said Mama, “You girls are going to have to stick together.” I did not know what stick together meant. I did not want to stick to Zendaya and be stuck to her.

“I am scared to go back to school,” said Zendaya. She chewed on a finger.

"I am scared too," I said. I did not say anything about the dog. That had to stay a secret, even from Zendaya.

Chapter 3

I went to bed right after Zendaya and Aunt Erin left. My new room was much bigger than the room with the bunks in Haiti and I was alone. I hated being alone. I had never slept alone in my life before. I missed Haiti and wanted to go back but I did not want to lose my new family. I knew I had a big secret to keep if I wanted to keep them. They could not know about the dog.

I slipped into my new pajamas and climbed into bed and fell asleep fast. I dreamed I was back in my bunk in Haiti. Then I was outside in Haiti and a dog came from out of nowhere. It was black with red eyes and sharp, pointy teeth. It chased me down the road. I screamed but no sound came out.

I woke up fast and opened my eyes. My arms were sticking out and my sheets were wet with sweat.

I was in my new room and alone and could not hear the other children in their bunks.

I hugged my Haitian doll. I did not remember much of my first Mama. She used to braid my hair and carry me down the stairs. A tear rolled down my cheek, but I wiped it away. If they knew about the dog, I would have nobody again.

I woke up three more times before the sun came though my window and made the room light. Miss Eva opened the door of my room. “Good morning, Mali,” she said.

Miss Eva had a glass of pink milk on the table for me. She said that it had whipped cream and a cherry on top. I did not want to eat it. It looked funny. I still wore my jumper from yesterday and I wanted to fall asleep in the chair. I did not want this pink milk.

My stomach growled but I pushed the milk away.

“Miss Eva smiled at me. “I will get you some fresh fruit instead.” She opened the fridge and brought over strawberries. I ate them fast because I did not want her to take them away.

“Remember if you are hungry,” said Miss Eva, “all you need to do is ask me and I will get you food. You don’t have to be afraid to ask or to be hungry.”

I yawned and rubbed my eyes. I was still afraid to ask Miss Eva too much and make her mad.

After breakfast, I lay on the living room couch and fell asleep again. I dreamed about dogs. Some of the dogs were in Haiti and some were here. All of them wanted to bite me.

I woke up shaking and jumped to my feet. My mouth was open like I was going to scream again.

Miss Eva stood beside me. “Are you okay?” she asked. She put her hand on my shoulder.

“I had a bad dream,” I said.

She pulled me into a hug. She was still a stranger, and I was still not ready for a hug, but it felt safe. I made my body tight, but I hugged her back. “You will have bad dreams for a while. Things are new and scary for you. This afternoon we’re going to go out and shop for new clothes for school. Zendaya and Aunt Erin are coming too.”

The mall was bigger than anything in Haiti. There were fountains full of coins, stores with bright lit signs, and people everywhere. A woman pushing a stroller walked in front of us, blocking our way. Her baby let out a scream. I dropped the Haitian doll I was carrying. Zendaya covered her ears again. I reached down to pick up my doll and covered one ear with my other hand.

The grownups found a kids’ clothing store and we all walked in. Zendaya pointed to a shirt with a princess on it “I want that shirt,” she said.

“It’s not your size, Zen.” Said Aunt Erin. She held up a plain pink shirt and a pair of blue jeans.

"This is a lot like what most of the girls your age wear. Let's get a few of these and try them on."

"The shirt is boring," said Zendaya, "and the buttons on the jeans dig me in the tummy. I don't want them." Zendaya kicked the clothing rack with her foot and the corners of her mouth turned down.

"Zen, please stop that," said Aunt Erin. "Don't you want to look like the other girls in your class?"

"No," said Zendaya. She scowled at Aunt Erin.

I did not like the outfits Miss Eva and Aunt Erin picked either. The jeans were scratchy, and the shirts were ugly. I walked to the back of the store and found a green dress with flowers. It was like the dresses I wore in Haiti. I knew it would look nice for my new school. "I want this," I said.

"That's more for dressing up than for school," said Miss Eva. "You need clothing you can play in."

"We wore dresses in Haiti," I said.

"Okay Malika," said Mama, "You can pick one dress, but we are also going to pick a couple play outfits like jeans and t-shirts. At school, you will be playing on the playground."

"Zen," said Aunt Erin, "You can pick one princess shirt, but it would be good to pick some outfits like your friends wear too."

In the changing room, I squirmed into my new jeans. Miss Eva needed to help me with the button because my dresses in Haiti did not have them. The jeans scratched my skin. I wanted to rip them off.

"The tag is scratchy on this shirt," said Zendaya from the other changing room.

"We can cut it off," said Aunt Erin. "Then it will be more comfortable for you."

On the way home in the car, Zendaya whispered in my ear "Those clothes were really ugly except for the princess shirt. Mom thinks people will be nicer to me if I dress like the other kids."

I stuck out my tongue. Zendaya giggled.

When we got home, I curled up on the couch again and closed my eyes. Miss Eva walked up to me. "I will be there to help you again if you have a bad dream. I will be there always." She stroked my back.

I hoped she would still be there if she found out I was afraid of dogs. Kalib was here first.

Chapter 4

On Tuesday morning, Miss Eva walked me around the corner to the school and helped me find room 109. I tried to only think about school and not about the dog at Zendaya's house. A new school was scary enough. I hoped they would let me read books by myself and not make me read out loud. Then I could look at the pictures and not have to read all the words. I hoped they would not make me do worksheets over again if I made mistakes.

A tall lady with glasses and short straight hair stood in the doorway. She pushed up her glasses and smiled at me. "I'm Mrs. Baker," she said. "You must be Malika."

"Good morning, Madame Baker," I said. Then I remembered that you do not call people Madame here. My face burned, and I wanted to run out of the class. "I mean Mrs. Baker," I said.

"That's okay," said Mrs. Baker.

Zendaya was in my class too. I found the desk behind her and sat down. There were lots of different looking children in the class.

There were tan children with dark eyes. There were children with curly hair and children with straight hair. Every child was taller than me and I felt like a small child in a room full of grownups. There was even one other black girl who sat in the back. Her hair was in braids with colored beads like mine was in Haiti. Miss Eva did not know how to braid so my hair hung down and stuck up. I stroked one of my curls and made it bounce. I could do that myself even though I did not like anybody else touching it.

All the kids talked. I wanted to put my hands over my ears again, but I did not. A paper airplane flew across the room and hit a wall, making a loud click. I stayed quiet. In Haiti, everyone had to be quiet in school. Madame Moreau used to rap desks with a ruler when children talked. Mrs. Baker did not have a ruler by her desk.

Mrs. Baker walked to the front of the room. “Good morning class and welcome to the third grade. We are going to get started in a few minutes.” She lifted her glasses with her finger. “We have three new faces here. I am going to let them introduce themselves. All three of them can walk up to the board and stand in front of it.”

I got up and followed Zendaya and a boy to the board. We stood in front of it and stared at each other.

Mrs. Baker pointed to the boy.

“First off, I think we have Elyas. He came here from Syria in the spring. Today is his first day of school.”

Elyas. had tan skin and carried a soccer ball. He spun the soccer ball in his hands as he walked. I was not the only one new here.

"I came here with mother and brother. Father is still in Syria. I like it here. Thank you," said Elyas.

"Does anybody have any questions for Elyas?" asked Mrs. Baker.

A girl in the front raised her hand.

"Yes," said Mrs. Baker.

"What games did you play in Syria?"

"I like football," he said. "They call it soccer here." His English was not as good as mine. He left out words in sentences. I would not be the only one with bad English.

"Very nice," said Mrs. Baker. Everybody in the class clapped for Elyas. Maybe they would clap for me too.

Mrs. Baker pointed to me. It was my turn to go next.

My hands had sweat on them, and my throat felt dry, but I spoke. At least I did not have to read something to the class.

"My name is Malika Zeplin," I said "I used to be Malika Jean-Baptiste. My Mama died when I was little, and my Papa could not take care of me. I grew up in an orphanage. They call them crèches in Haiti. I like reading books and I like listening to people play drum music and watching them dance. Sometimes people would play them at the orphanage." I cleared my throat. "I am all finished now" I said.

The other black girl raised her hand. "Yes, Jama," said Mrs. Baker."

"I lived in Africa until I was five and we spoke Swahili. What language did you speak in Haiti?"

"I spoke Creole," I said, "but school was in English, so I only know how to read and write in English. They wanted to get us ready for finding families."

The class clapped, and I walked back to my seat. I sighed when I sat down. I was glad not to be in front of the class anymore. I hoped the class would clap for Zendaya.

"We have one more student," said Mrs. Baker. "Zendaya moved here from across town and is new to the school. She wants to introduce herself."

Zendaya walked to the front of the class. "My name is Zendaya," she said. "I was born here, but I have autism. I have my own language too. When I'm happy I flap my hands like this." She waved one of her hands in the air.

I knew that she was not an alien now. She has something with a big name called autism. I did not know what autism was, but she had a reason for being different.

Some children laughed. Nobody clapped. The other children saw her as different too and they did not like that. I wanted to take Zendaya's hand and tell her it was okay, but I stood behind her and watched the class laugh. I did not want to get in trouble at my new school or be laughed at by the other children. Elyas looked at Zendaya but did not say or do anything either.

Zendaya was still smiling. I do not think she saw the children laughing. "I like princesses," said Zendaya. "I have lots of princess dolls. My birthday party is on September 22nd. I'm going to invite all the girls in the class to play princesses with me."

Everybody in the class laughed but me and Elyas. I still did not know what autism was, but I knew the class was mean.

Zendaya stopped talking and stood still. The look on her face changed from a smile to a frown. She must have saw the other kids were laughing at her. She stomped back to her seat, kicking the garbage can. It fell on the floor. The kids laughed harder. Elyas stared at her, and his eyes got big as if he did not know why she was doing this. When she got back to her desk, she put her head down.

"Quiet!" said Mrs. Baker. The laughter stopped. "We do not make fun of other students in third grade. It is rude."

"Yes Mrs. Baker," said the class. Some students sighed. Others whispered and giggled.

"Everyone may take their seats now," said Mrs. Baker "and I only want to hear nice welcomes for the new students today." I walked back to my desk and sat down.

Zendaya lifted her head and looked back at me. Her eyes were still red from crying. She reached into her pink bag and pulled out the notepad for our book. She wrote something on it and then gave it to me.

The Book of Can't and Don't: day 2

1.Don't talk about what you like. Try and talk about stuff other kids like. By Zendaya

She handed the notepad back to me and I wrote a line and handed it back to her to fix my spelling. It was supposed to say:

2.Do not laugh at other kids. By Malika.

After she put the notepad away, the bell rang for recess. Zendaya turned around again. "Do you want to come to my house after school? You can meet my dog."

"I have to go to the doctor for needles," I said. I did not want to go to the doctor. The only time I had a needle in Haiti was with the stitches after the dog bit.

Today Miss Eva said I would have lots of needles. Needles were better than dogs though. I had a reason not to go to Zendaya's house.

Chapter 5

Mama said the shots at the doctor would protect me from getting sick and the blood tests would tell if I needed vitamins. Miss Eva held my hand and told me it would be okay. It would only hurt for a second. The needles were quick, but I wished I could stay in my new room and not go to school or to the doctor or to meet the dog. I cried but I told myself it was better than being bit by a dog. When I got home, I fell asleep on the couch and then when it was time for bed later, I was awake and could not sleep.

I hated sleeping alone at night. It was much easier in the daytime on the couch. My room in Haiti was full of other kids. My arm still hurt from the shots. I turned over to my other side, so my sore arm would be up. When I fell asleep, I dreamed of doctors with big needles, going into my skin like dog teeth. The doctor turned into a dog and chased me out of the building. I smelled smoke and there was a fire.

I could not find Miss Eva and I wanted her because she was all I had now. I woke up shivering. My sheets were in a ball on the floor.

I remembered that Miss Eva said I could call for her if I needed her. “Help!!” I shouted out into the dark room. My voice seemed to disappear into the dark and she did not come. I shouted again, louder this time.

I screamed for her three more times before my bedroom door squeaked open. “I’m here Mali,” said Miss Eva. “Are you okay?”

“I had a bad dream again,” I said. I did not tell her what it was about because I knew I was supposed to like Zendaya’s dog.

“We are safe here Mali,” said Miss Eva. She rubbed my back. “I am right next door in my room. If you need me, you can get me. It is early. Try and go back to sleep. I will take you to school later, okay?”

“Miss Eva,” I said. “Zendaya told the class she has something called autism and that she likes dolls. They laughed at her. The other kids are mean.”

“Mali,” said Miss Eva. “Sometimes when people talk about something others don’t understand, people will laugh.”

“They were still mean,” I said.

Miss Eva pulled up my blankets and kissed my forehead. “Malika please go back to sleep for a little bit. We will talk more about this tomorrow, okay?”

“Okay,” I said.

When I woke up the next time, the sun shone in my room. It was morning.

I got out of bed and pulled my new shirt and short frilly skirt out of the drawer. Miss Eva said it would be stylish. I did not know what stylish meant. My skin prickled but I would look like the other children in my class. Then nobody would laugh at me.

I wondered what I would say to Zendaya if she asked me to come over after school today. Maybe she would believe it if I said I needed more needles.

The day at school began with Mrs. Baker handing out spelling tests. I did not like spelling. She walked to the front of the class, moved her glasses up with her finger, and said, "The first word of the day is 'choice.' I will give a sentence 'It was Billy's choice not to listen to the teacher.'"

I picked up my pencil. I did not know which letter to start the word with. I made an 's' and crossed it out. She called out two more words before I finished with the first one. The pencil was sweaty from my hand. I wanted to put the test in the garbage.

When the test was finished, I had only written three words down and I think they were wrong. I wanted to run out of the class and rip up my test, but I walked up to the front of the class and handed it to Mrs. Baker like I was supposed to. I knew she would call Miss Eva and tell her I was a careless child.

At recess, Zendaya ran up to me on the playground. She was skipping and waving her hands. She had a toothy smile on her face. "Guess what Malika!" she said.

"What?" I asked. I was not happy like her. I wanted to leave school and run home and tell Miss Eva I was not smart enough for school.

"The spelling test was so easy. I think I got every word right. I am so good at spelling. I learned to read when I was four."

I wanted to run away from her and tell her to be quiet, but I stayed there. "It was not easy," I said. I looked at the ground. "The words were hard for me."

"It was easy for me," said Zendaya, "I'm smart at spelling. Mom said I'm a natural."

I walked away from Zendaya. A group of children were playing soccer on the other side of the playground. I went over to them and looked up at them. "Can I play soccer too?" I asked. They were taller than me. Everyone was.

A boy jumped front of me. "You want to play soccer too? You are so short."

"I think I can do good," I shivered. He was big and scary, and my head came up to his chest. If he wanted to, he could knock me over with his big hands. "I am short, but I can try and play," I said.

"You think you can do good. You are short, but you can try and play." He was copying me. He made funny movements with his face and hands. My face burned. This made me mad. I wanted to yell at him, but I was too scared. I stepped back.

Elyas, the boy from Syria walked across the playground and stood in front of the tall boy. "Let me play," he said. His voice was loud and made me step backwards.

The boy grabbed Elyas' arm. "Why are you standing this close to me? Looking for a fight?" He spoke.

"No," said Elyas. Elyas looked down.

A teacher walked across the playground and stood by the tall scary boy. “

Ryan, you don’t want to start the new school year with a suspension for fighting.”

“Sorry Mrs. A.,” said Ryan. He picked up his soccer ball and walked away. The teacher sipped her coffee.

“I not looking for fight with Ryan,” said Elyas. “We talk loud in Syria.”

Maybe he was like me and Zendaya and knew what it was like to be different and not know how to do things right. “Here it is different. I get in trouble sometimes too,” I said.

“So, do I,” said Zendaya. I smiled at her. I was glad she was not talking about dogs or spelling tests.

“If you’re not looking for a fight, best to walk away from somebody looking for one,” said the teacher. She was still standing over us. “If you’re around somebody looking for a fight, you might end up in trouble or in a fight.”

“We will not fight,” I said.

“Good to hear,” said Miss A. She stepped back from us and sipped her coffee again.

“We are writing a book.” I said, pointing to Zendaya. “It is called The Book of Can’t and Don’t. We will show you, Elyas.”

We sat on the playground wall and showed Elyas our notebook. When we finished reading it, Elyas smiled. “I like this,” he said.

“You can help us make day three,” said Zendaya.

The Book of Can’t and Don’t: Day 3

1. Do not talk loud or people will want fight by Elyas.
2. Do not stand too close to people by Elyas.

All three of us laughed. I looked across the playground. Ryan and another boy were fighting. I did not want to go near him again. I did not want a fight. Nobody wanted a fight but Ryan. He liked fights.

The bell rang. As we walked into the school, Zendaya asked the horrible question again, “Do you want to come to my house after school and meet my dog?”

I wanted to run away from her and not answer her but then she would think I did not like her. “I have to get more needles,” I said.

“You’re just mad at me because I’m a good speller. I thought you forgot about the test. We were writing our book at recess.” Zendaya ran into the school. We did not talk for the rest of the day. My secret was making me lose my new cousin as a friend. I could not tell her, or I might lose my whole new family.

Chapter 6

It was even harder to sleep the next night. I dreamed that Zendaya found out I was afraid of dogs and told the family. They said I had to go because the dog was here first. In the dream, they sent me to live outside, and a big dog was chasing me. I woke up breathing fast from running in my sleep.

"Help!" I called into the darkness.

The door of my room opened again, and Miss Eva stood by my bed. "Sleeping in a new place will be hard for a while," she said. She rubbed my back. "Try and get some sleep and I'll wake you up in two hours for school."

"Miss Eva," I asked as she tucked the blankets up over me.

"How do I ask somebody to play on the playground?" I thought that was a safe question because it was not about dogs.

"Watch the game first. Try to understand it. When there is a break in the game, walk up to the other kids. Look them in the eye, smile, and say 'Mind if I play? Sometimes you will be lucky, and they will say yes. Sometimes they will say no, and you need to find some other kids to join." said Miss Eva.

"They told me I could not play soccer and that I was too short," I said.

"Sometimes, you can join a game by helping other kids rather than just walking in and taking over. In soccer, you could wait for a ball to roll out of the field, and you could bring it back and they might invite you to play."

"The other kids sometimes laugh at me and always laugh at Zendaya. If I ask, they might just laugh at me."

"Mali, when kids are being mean they sometimes find it funny to see another person upset. They like seeing the look on your face and what you will say and do when you're upset. Hide your sad or mad face. Walk away or say something that makes it sound like you don't care. It's early now. I'm going to get a bit more sleep."

"Okay, I hope they let me play tomorrow and they stop saying mean things."

That morning in class, I fell asleep twice. Mrs. Baker had to shake me awake both times. The second time she woke me, she poked my back with her finger. "Malika, I gave you your test back."

A spelling test was sitting on my desk. It said two out of twenty on it and something about coming for help. I could not read all her words.

I wanted to leave school and walk home but I knew I would get in trouble. I hoped Mama would not think I was stupid and send me back because she wanted a smarter kid.

At recess, I was glad to stand on the playground. Standing kept me awake. My arm was still sore from the shots two days ago. I yawned and rubbed my eyes. I did not look for Zendaya.

I walked over to a girl standing on the edge of the soccer field. She had brown hair in a ponytail and a blue sweater. She smiled at me instead of blocking me like the boy yesterday, so she must have been a nice girl.

“Mind if I play?” I asked.

“Sure, stand in outfield with me. By the way, my name’s Ashlyn,” said the girl, brushing a piece of her hair off her face.

“I am Malika,” I said.

I stood in outfield and watched the boys kick the ball around. The ball only came to outfield once and Ashlyn was faster at kicking it than me.

“Good kick Ashlyn,” I said.

“Thank you, Malika,” said Ashlyn.

I wondered where Zendaya was. It did not take me long to find her when I looked across the playground Zendaya sat on the wall where we read our book with Elyas yesterday. A group of boys walked over to Zendaya. They grabbed her princess backpack from her, put something in it, and threw it on the ground. Then they ran away.

Zendaya reached down for her backpack. Her mouth opened in a scream, and she dropped it.

I left the soccer game and walked over to her.

"Are you okay?" I asked. I felt bad about ignoring her yesterday. I just did not want to meet her scary dog.

"The bullies put a spider in my backpack. It's a big one with lots of legs. I'm scared to pick it up." Zendaya grabbed my hand and squeezed it.

"I am not afraid of spiders," I said, "I used to watch them outside in Haiti. There was a man on the videos Madame Moreau played on her phone who worked in a zoo and caught crocodiles and insects. I want to be like him when I grow up and work in a zoo. My teacher used to let me read her zoo book. I was the only kid in the orphanage who was not afraid, and I always put the spiders and lizards that got into the orphanage outside and let them go free. All the other girls would scream and climb on the beds."

I walked over to the backpack, unzipped it, and let the spider crawl across the pavement. It hid under a large rock, so we could not see it anymore. I think it was as afraid of us as I was of dogs.

I gave the backpack back to Zendaya, "See it has no spider in it now. It is good. Miss Eva said if you do not look mad or sad when they are mean to you that they will stop. She said they want to see you your face when you are sad or mad."

"Thank you, Malika," said Zendaya. "You're the best." She was still my friend.

Zendaya pulled the notebook from her backpack.

The Book of Can't and Don': Survival Guide: Day 4

1. Do not just start playing with other kids. Say "Mind if I play?" and look at people if you want to play. By Malika.

2. Don’t let people pick on your friends. Help your friend if somebody is picking on them. By Zendaya.

She did not ask me about going to her house again until lunch time.

“I can not come,” I said. “Miss Eva wants me home.”

Zendaya got up from the lunch table and walked over to the garbage can. She pulled her spelling test out of her pocket and ripped it into pieces with her hands. Then she threw the pieces in the garbage. Everyone laughed. They liked seeing her mad face. Miss Eva was right.

“I got a hundred, but everybody hates me,” she said. I wish I was bad in spelling. I am going to spell words wrong on the next test. Then people will like me.” We did not talk for the rest of the day again.

When I got home from school, I did not show Miss Eva the spelling test or tell her anything about my fight with Zendaya. At bedtime, I could not sleep. When I fell asleep, I dreamed I lost Miss Eva in an earthquake like my first Mama. I woke up crying.

I got out of bed and walked downstairs to find Miss Eva. It was a warm fall night and Miss Eva was in the backyard. I walked down the back steps in my pajamas.

Miss Eva looked up from a small fire. “Can’t sleep again, Malika? You can come out and sit with me for a bit. I’m burning some leaves.” Miss Eva patted the chair beside her.

“Miss Eva,” I said. “I miss my first Mama and Papa. I like you, but I miss them too.” This was not the whole reason I was scared but it was the only part that was safe to tell her.

Miss Eva pulled me into a hug. This time I did not make my body tight or try to get away. Her hug felt safe. I put my arms around her neck and hugged her back, “You know it is okay to love all of us.

You can miss them, but I can be your second Mama. You can love two Mamas."

"I am scared. I will lose you too." I hugged her tighter. I did not want to let go.

"I want to be around until I'm very old, Malika," said Miss Eva.

"Why do you not have a husband? I have no Papa. Zendaya has a Papa."

"All families are different, Malika. You have a Mama, an aunt and Uncle, and a cousin and grandparents out East who you will meet at Christmas time. There are lots of different kinds of families and all that matters is that they love each other." Mama hugged me tighter.

I did not mind having a Papa if I got to keep my new family.

"I failed a spelling test," I said. "If I am not smart, would you send me back?" I could tell her about the test but not about the dog or the fight with Zendaya.

"Malika," said Miss Eva "Mrs. Baker called this morning about the spelling test. She said you looked upset when you saw your mark. It was only a pretest where they test skills, and you will have lots of time to practice for the final test. I love you just as you are, and you won't be going back."

"I love you Mama," I said. It was the first time I said it to her and the first time I called her Mama and not Miss Eva. I wanted to keep her.

Mama wiped a tear from her eyes and pulled me closer in her hug, "I love you too," said Mama. "Are you okay to go back to bed now?"

"Yes, I am. Goodnight, Mama." I walked back inside and up the stairs to bed. I could tell my new Mama some things now, but it was still not safe to tell about the dog or about my fight with Zendaya. They were here first and if they knew, I would have to go.

Chapter 7

The next morning, Zendaya walked up to me in class. At least she was not mad like yesterday, and I kept my terrible secret. “I’m sorry about the spelling test,” she said. “My Mom said to me I was being a bad winner and I was bragging and making other people feel bad.”

“It is okay,” I said. “I just do not want to talk about the spelling test anymore.” I did not tell her not to talk about the dog.

Zendaya pulled out her notebook again. “I wrote one more thing,” she said. She showed it to me.

The Book of Can’t and Don’t: Day 5

1. Don’t be a bad winner or people will hate you. By Zendaya.
2. I did not want to tell her I was more upset about the dog than the spelling test

Mrs. Baker walked up to Zendaya. “Can I talk to you for a minute in the hall?” she asked.

“Am I in trouble?” asked Zendaya. The class laughed.

“Not at all,” said Mrs. Baker.

She followed her teacher into the hall. A few minutes later, she walked back in the class. She was smiling and skipping. “Malika, I get to help everyone fix their tests this morning. Miss Baker said I am a good winner if I do that and don’t brag.”

“You are good at that,” I said. I remembered her fixing my words in our book.

Later that morning, I sat at the back of the room with Zendaya and a bunch of other children. Ryan sat at the table too. I did not think he would have trouble with anything. He was too brave. I looked over at his test to see how many he got right. He only got four right. Some of his letters were backwards or upside down. Maybe I was not the only one who had trouble with spelling tests.

“I am going to help everybody fix their words,” said Zendaya.

“I don’t want anyone to see mine,” said Ryan. He covered his test with his hand.

“It’s okay,” said Zendaya, “You tried your best.”

Ryan took his hand off his test and handed it to Zendaya.

Zendaya helped everyone in the group fix their spelling tests. She did not tell anybody they were stupid if they asked questions. She was a good teacher. Maybe she would be a teacher someday when she grew up.

One of the girls in the group said, “You are smart, Zendaya.”

“Thank you,” said Zendaya.

“My name is Olivia,” said the girl. I hate reading and spelling. Do you like Gaba monsters? I collect the cards and you can battle them.” She held up one and showed it to us. The card had a creature that looked like a dragon on it. “This is Dragu and it’s a rare card.”

“It is pretty,” I said. I liked dragons. It would be fun to have one as a pet. They were not scary like dogs.

“I got some of those cards last Christmas,” said Zendaya. “I sometimes play with them.”

“I would like some,” I said.

“They sell them in every store,” said Olivia. “I buy them all the time.”

The other girl in the group reached into her pencil case. “This is the only set I got. This card is Scorpiet. It’s a scorpion monster and he has the sting throw move.”

“I actually play this,” said Ryan.

Soon, everybody at the table was talking about Gaba monsters instead of spelling. I looked over at Mrs. Baker. She smiled at me and then went back to writing in a book. She did not notice we were not talking about spelling anymore.

“Zendaya, you said you were having a birthday party, when is it?” asked Olivia.

“On the 22nd, at my house,” said Zendaya.

“A girl party? Are you going to play dollies?” asked Ryan.

“Why do you care so much what we do at the party Ryan? Be quiet.” said Olivia. “I can bring my Gaba cards, Zendaya,”

Ryan stopped talking and raised his hand to ask to go to the bathroom. He did not get to see Olivia’s mad face because she did not give him one. Teasing was no fun for him. After he

left the table, another girl at the table whispered in Zendaya's ear. It was loud enough that I heard her.

"I'm Aubrey. I want to come to your party, and I like dolls too, but don't tell Ryan."

"It's on the 22nd," said Zendaya," At my house."

"Thanks Zen," whispered Aubrey.

When the bell rang to end class for the day, Zendaya asked me the terrible question again. "Do you want to come to my house?"

"I can not come," I said. I did not have a reason that was safe to say.

Zendaya ran out of the classroom slamming the door. My secret had to stay a secret even if it meant me and Zendaya would fight every day.

Chapter 8

The next week went by fast. Every day Zendaya would ask me the horrible question and every day I had to say no because of my secret. On the day of Zendaya's birthday, Mama helped me wrap A Princess Movie. She said Zendaya liked to collect boxes of her favorite movies even though you can get movies on a computer or a phone. I did not know how to keep from having to go to her house. The only way I could hid my secret is if I pretended to be sick.

The phone rang. Mama picked it up. "Hello," she said. "Malika it's for you."

"Hello," I said.

"It's Zendaya. Kalib is wearing his party hat and has a grab bag with dog treats. He is going to have fun at the party too."

"I do not feel good," I said. "I need to sleep." I wanted to run upstairs to my room and hide in my bed. I would stay there all day, and everybody would think I was sick.

"Are you still mad about the spelling test?" asked Zendaya. "I said I was sorry."

"No," I said, "I just cannot come. I feel sick."

"You keep making up lies to keep from coming to my house," said Zendaya. She slammed the phone down.

"I do not feel good Mama," I said.

Mama felt my forehead. "You don't have a fever and you look fine to me. Is something wrong?"

I knew I had no choice but to tell my secret. I did not want Zendaya to hate me, but I did not want my new family to send me back because the dog was here first.

"Mama," I asked, "Would you send me back to Haiti if I was afraid of dogs? The dog was here first."

I shook as I waited for her to answer. I was scared of what she might say.

"Of course, not," said Mama. She pulled me into a hug like the other night. I hugged her back, tight. I felt safe with her now. "Remember how I said you're mine no matter what. Let's walk over together. I'll call ahead and tell them to hold Kalib back. They won't mind."

When we got to Zendaya's house, a large dog with pointy ears stood next to Zendaya, Aubrey, and Olivia. He wore a party hat. Zendaya was holding his collar, but he still looked scary. His tongue was out like he was hungry.

"I want to go in the house," I said, "Away from the dog."

"Zendaya," said Aunt Erin, "We should put Kalib out back in his pen. We can find something everybody likes."

"I wanted Kalib at my birthday," said Zendaya. She scowled.

I ran inside. I knew the dog came first. "You can play with the dog, and I will go inside. Have a fun party."

A pink castle cake sat in the middle of the table. I never had a birthday party or a cake before. Today would be all about Zendaya and her dog. Nobody cared about Malika. I sat on the kitchen floor and picked up a rubber dog toy. I threw the dog toy across the room. It squeaked when it hit the wall. Dogs made me mad.

Finally, the kitchen door opened and Zendaya walked in. "Mom said you're scared of dogs. You should have just told me rather than making stuff up. I thought you didn't want to be my friend. Also, Mom says my friends get to pick what to do on a playdate even if it's my birthday and if they don't like it, we don't do it."

"I thought you would think I was stupid like with the spelling test," I said. "I was scared I would have to go back to Haiti because Kalib was here first."

"No way" said Aunt Erin. "Kalib can go out back in his pen when you come over or downstairs in his crate. It's not a big deal."

"I don't think you're stupid," said Zendaya. "Even though you're my cousin, you're my best friend,"

"Really?" I asked. I thought that she thought I was stupid for being a bad speller and being scared of dogs.

"Yes," said Zendaya. I smiled, and we walked back outside.

"Come join us," said Aubrey. "Everybody has stuff they are afraid of."

“I hate spiders,” said Zendaya.

“I hate mice,” said Aubrey.

“I got an idea,” said Olivia. “It’s hot today. We could have a squirt gun fight and pretend we’re battling Gaba monsters.”

“I have squirt guns and Gaba cards,” said Zendaya.

“That sounds like a great idea,” said Aubrey.

“I like playing with water,” I said. In Haiti, the people at the orphanage would take us to the beach once a year. The water was dirty and full of garbage, but it was fun to splash in.

All of us stood on the lawn, spraying each other with squirt guns. Water dripped from my curls, but I did not care.

Elyas drove by on his bike. “I want to play,” he said.

“Sure, grab a squirt gun, I have a whole bucket of them,” said Zendaya. It was something everybody could do.

The phone rang. Zendaya ran inside to answer it. We kept playing with squirt guns. Aubrey sat down in the grass, “I’m getting cold she said.” I shivered too. Zendaya was still not back.

“I wonder what we’ll do next,” said Olivia.

Elyas looked at his watch. “I have to be home. Thanks for letting me play.” He got back on his bike and drive away. Zendaya was still inside.

The door opened, and Aunt Erin walked out with Zendaya.

"I know you were excited that your dad called from work, but you can't walk away from your party," she said to Zendaya.

"My Dad works on the oil rigs," she said. "Sometimes he goes away for weeks. I'm sorry I took so long. Mom said I have to pay attention to my guests. What do want to do next?"

"I want to dry off in the sun," said Olivia. She squeezed the water our of her shirt with her hands. It dripped into the grass.

"What about if we open presents while you girls dry off," said Aunt Erin.

Everybody clapped or said yes.

After the squirt gun fight, I watched Zendaya open her presents. People gave her lots of princess dolls. Everybody knew she liked dolls because she told the whole class on the first day. Maybe on my birthday I would ask for a tarantula like in Madame Moreau's Zoo book and movies. I could put it away when Zendaya came over like she did with Kalib for me.

That night, Zendaya asked me to sleep over. For the first time ever, I could say yes to the question, and it was not a terrible question. That evening, Aunt Erin brought Kalib over to me on a leash. "I will make him sit," she said. "He will listen."

My hand shook but I reached out to pet his head. He licked my hand. Maybe he did not want to bite me. I was still glad he was on a leash. Maybe he was not a bad thing even if most dogs were scary.

Aunt Erin told Kalib to lay down and got me and Zendaya to sit on the floor with him. I sat down beside Zendaya. Kalib closed his eyes and did not move. I patted his head. He sighed and I jumped a little. Then he fell back asleep. Aunt Erin took his leash off. He still did not get up. I did not think he wanted to bite me.

He just wanted to sleep on the floor and for us to pat him.

Later, we sat on Zendaya's bed and talked. "We both learned a lot, didn't we?" said Zendaya.

"Yes, we did," I said. "I like Mamas and cousins and best friends and birthday parties. I do not like spelling and dogs, but I like Kalib I think. I hate needles and bullies."

"Let's finish our book by writing things we can do instead of things we can't do," said Zendaya.

"Okay," I said.

The Book of Can't and Don't: The Can and Do chapter

Water fights with friends are fun. By Malika.

1. Tell people why you are not happy, and people can fix things for you. By Malika.
2. Some dogs do not want to bite you. By Malika.
3. Sometimes people might be scared and not mad. By Zendaya.
4. Cousins can be best friends by Zendaya.

It was easy to fall asleep in Zendaya's room. I was not alone. Instead of having a bad dream, I dreamed of playing with Zendaya tomorrow and not being scared.

Acknowledgements

Illustrations created with Second Life™ software in accordance with official screenshot and machinima policy.

Second Life Screenshot and Machinima Policy (2017) Retrieved from http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Linden_Lab_Official:Snapshot_and_machinima_policy

Appendix C

Teacher's Guide

The Book of Can't and Don't

A Guide for Teachers

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This research project is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for completion of a PhD dissertation.

About This Book

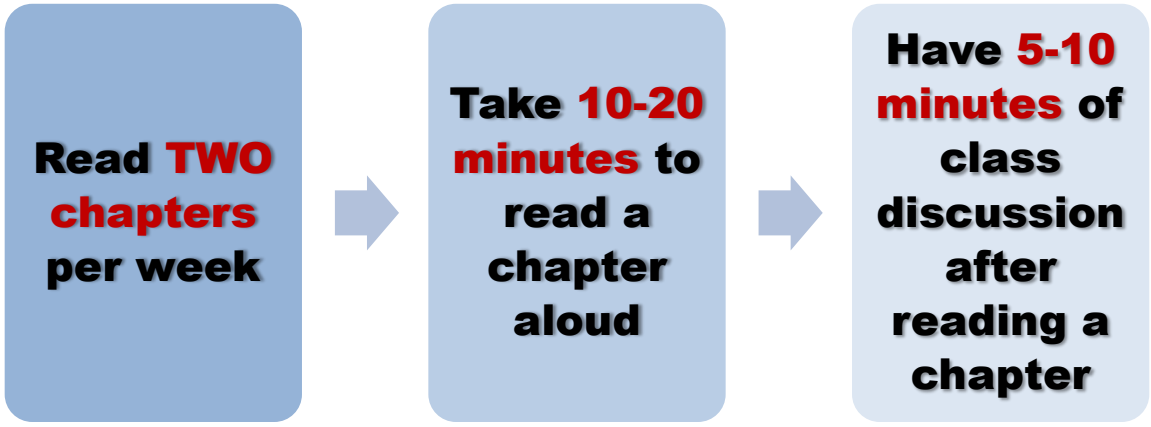
The Book of Can't and Don't encourages classroom discussion between students and teachers about including and welcoming classmates who learn, think, and see the world differently.

- Some examples of different students are:
- Students with disabilities
- Students who come from other countries
- Students who have experienced or are experiencing trauma and loss.

Activity Instructions

This book is intended to be read aloud by the teacher as a whole-class activity:

- **Book will be read over FOUR weeks**



- **Researchers will come into the classroom ONCE A WEEK (four times total) for about AN HOUR to do a DRAW AND WRITE activity with students.**
- **Sample questions and points for discussion are provided for each chapter in this guide.**

Chapter 1

Summary:

Malika was just adopted from Haiti and meets her new family. Her new cousin, Zendaya tries to touch Malika's curly hair and Malika does not like this. Zendaya is a new person and did not ask permission. She soon learns that Zendaya does not like to make eye contact with adults because some people with autism find eye contact uncomfortable. Malika was taught in Haiti making eye contact with adults is rude. The girls find it interesting that they both have trouble with something that is expected of all children in this country. When Malika learns that there will be a dog at her cousin's birthday party in a couple weeks, she fears her new family will return her to Haiti if they find out she is afraid of dogs.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- What are “rules” of conversation and why some students might have trouble following these “rules?”
- It is a rule here in Canada in most communities to look at people when they are talking to you. Zendaya has autism and finds it uncomfortable to look people in the eye when she talks to them. She often looks away. Malika was taught in Haiti that it is rude and disrespectful to look grownups in the eye when they are speaking with children. Other people may think Malika and Zendaya are being rude on purpose when they do not look them in the eye when talking to them.
- What are some different communication rules in different cultures? (Examples provided below, and teachers and students can give their own too)
- People generally talk faster in Eastern Canada than Western Canada.
- Eye contact rules vary (e.g., in some African and Indigenous cultures considered rude to look elders in the eye)
- Is it okay to touch somebody else or their things without their permission?
- Why did Zendaya touch Malika’s hair? Is it nice to touch another person’s hair without asking? What should you do if another student asks you to stop something?
- When do you think somebody should be made to follow a rule? When do you think it is okay for somebody to do something their own way even if it is different?
- Is eye contact necessary in the classroom and why?

- Is it okay for a student to like something that most other students in their class do not like?
- What if somebody wears an outfit that other students think looks silly?
- When should something be kept a secret (e.g., something you are afraid of or something you like that most other students feel different about) and when should it be shared with others?
- Zendaya likes playing with dolls and some other students feel they are too old to play with dolls.
- Were Malika and Zendaya being rude not looking at Aunt Erin when she asked them to? Why? Why not?

Chapter 2

Summary:

The family arrives at Malika's new house for supper and Malika and Zendaya decide to write a book of things you cannot do or must do in the country that they live in. Malika and Zendaya learn how to politely say no to food they dislike.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- How can you tell an adult you do not like something without being rude or hurting feelings?
- Malika is taught to say "no thank you" if she does not want food she is offered. The food in Canada is not cooked the same way as the food in Haiti and everything is new and scary. Zendaya finds trying different types of food difficult with her autism. Tastes are stronger to her than for most students and some foods feel funny in her mouth. She may hate the feeling of rice getting caught in her

teeth or find the taste of beans and rice mixed yucky. Children need to have ways of politely saying no that are respectful.

- How can you tell a friend “No” to something while still being polite?
- Practice ways of saying “no thank you.” or describing feelings. For example, Malika is afraid of dogs and Zendaya loves them. How can she tell her new cousin she finds dogs scary without making her cousin who loves her dog feel sad?

Chapter 3

Summary:

Malika spends her first night alone in her new room and is afraid of sleeping alone. She worries she will be sent back to Haiti for fearing her cousin's dog. The adults take the two girls to a clothing store and they both get clothes for school. Malika likes Haitian style dresses whereas Zendaya likes soft clothing rather than trendy clothing.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- Family and friends should not give up on people.
- Malika's family will not send her back if she is afraid of things or does not like certain things that they do.
- How can we be kind to other people who think differently than we do and show that we care about what they think?
- For example, Zendaya loves dogs and Malika is afraid of dogs.

- Zendaya loves dolls and the other girls in her class feel they are too old for dolls. Zendaya finds clothing that other girls find stylish uncomfortable to wear. Jeans feel scratchy to her.

Chapter 4

Summary:

Malika and Zendaya start their first day in a new school (Zendaya moved across the city over the summer). Malika tells the class about Haiti and a classmate. Elyas tells the class about Syria. The students like hearing Malika and Elyas but laugh when Zendaya talks about her autism, flaps her hands to show she is excited, and invites the class to come to a doll birthday party. Malika does not understand why some differences are cool and some are not to other students. Malika is invited to Zendaya's house after school but is glad she must see the doctor for shots, so she has an excuse not to see Zendaya's scary dog.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- Everyone in the class has different families and things that happen in their lives which makes them who they are.

- For example, soccer is an important part of Syrian culture for boys. Elyas loves soccer and is proud to show off his soccer ball to the class. Malika enjoys speaking in Creole even though she learned English in her schooling in Haiti. Zendaya likes to learn a lot about things she is interested in and tell others about them. That is a trait of autism that can make Zendaya an interesting person to learn new things from.

Chapter 5

Summary:

Malika finds spelling tests hard. Zendaya has a good memory, so she enjoys spelling tests and showing off her reading and spelling skills. She brags to the class about how she found the test easy and loves spelling. She does not understand why people are mad at her instead of proud. Malika is small for her age and clumsy and is told by the other kids she is too short to play soccer. In Syria, people talk louder and stand closer to people than in North America. Other children and teachers think Elyas wants to have a fight when he just wants to play soccer. Malika is still scared to go to Zendaya's house after school because of the dog and makes up an excuse.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- How can we make sure everyone gets to play playground games and that nobody is left out? How can we help students who have trouble with games to join the game and play?

- If somebody is angry and wants to fight, how can we avoid a fight?
- Sometimes people make a mistake and think another student is being rude when they are not being rude on purpose. How can we make sure we are understanding what that student is really saying?
- What is the difference between bragging and being proud od doing something well? What is a good or bad winner in a game? How should we respond when we lose or when a classmate loses? How can we help and encourage other students to join an activity and do their best?

Chapter 6

Summary:

Malika helps Zendaya on the playground when bullies put a spider in her backpack. After school, Malika says no to an invite to Zendaya's house after school again because the dog is still scary to her. Zendaya thinks Malika is jealous of her for doing well on the spelling test. She thinks Malika would like her more if she were bad at spelling and throws her test in the garbage. Malika is afraid that saying she fears the dog will get her sent back to Haiti because the dog was here first. Malika tells Miss Eva about doing poorly on the spelling test and asks if she will be sent back to Haiti. Miss Eva explains that she is here forever, and Malika calls her Mama for the first time. Malika is still afraid to mention her fear of dogs as that might be too hard for her new family to deal with.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- What is a "forever family?"
- What is a "forever friend?"

- Nobody is perfect and sometimes family and friends will get angry or upset with you, but they never stop liking or loving you.
- Miss Eva loves Malika and wants to help her improve in school, but she would never send her back to Haiti for doing poorly in school.
- In some ways our friends are like us and in other ways they are different.
- Malika fears dogs but loves spiders. Zendaya fears spiders but loves dogs. Both girls love making their book and laughing together.

Chapter 7

Summary:

The teacher asks Zendaya to help the students who did not do as well as her on the spelling test. Malika realizes that even the boy who made fun of her on the playground Ryan, has things he is embarrassed of. He has trouble with writing and makes his letters backwards and upside down. Two of the girls agree to come to Zendaya's birthday party. They realize that even though they do not all like dolls, they all like the same type of trading cards. Malika worries about the party because of the dog.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- In some ways our friends are like us and in other ways they are different.
- Zendaya is good at spelling but has trouble knowing what is polite and what is considered rude because social rules are hard for her. Ryan is good at soccer but

finds writing hard. Everyone at the table likes to play the Gaba trading cards game.

Chapter 8

Summary:

Malika pretends to be sick to avoid going to Zendaya's birthday. When Miss Eva does not believe she is sick. Malika finally tells Miss Eva she finds dogs scary. Miss Eva explains that families are forever and that Zendaya's mother will put the dog in its pen for the birthday party. At first, Zendaya is angry that her dog cannot run around the party in a party hat but understands when she is told Malika is afraid of dogs. That night, Malika sleeps over at Zendaya's house and before they go to bed, they finish their survival guide with a list of things people can do in the country that they live in. Malika sleeps well that night and dreams of playing with Zendaya tomorrow rather than about things that scare her.

Sample Discussion Questions:

- How can you make others feel included on a playdate?

- What should you do if somebody is afraid of something at your house or does not like an activity that you love to do?
- How can you find an activity that everyone at the playdate (including the host) likes to do and not just some people?
- For example, at the party the children found games that everyone enjoyed and put the dog away for the party because the dog scared Malika. Everybody enjoyed playing trading cards and playing with squirt guns.

Guide partially inspired by:

Frankel, F. H., & Myatt, R. (2003). Children's friendship training. New York: Brunner-Routled

Appendix D

Teacher Interview Protocol

Introduction: Over the last few weeks, you read a book with your students called The *Book of Can't and Don't.* This interview will ask you a few questions about the book. You do not have toanswer a question if you do not feel comfortable talking about it. You can stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we start?

Tell me some of your thoughts about reading The *Book of Can't and Don't* in your class.

Tell me about any notable feelings or emotions that came to you when you read *The Bookof Can't and Don't w*ith your students?
Tell me about any interesting discussions or student reactions that took place in yourclassroom during the reading of *The Book of Can't and Don't?*
What advice would you give to somebody who says they want to read *The Book of Can'tand Don't* with their students or children?
Example probes to elicit more information from participants on responses.

Can you tell me more about that?

Can you tell me what made you think about_____?

Can you tell me your reason for choosing_____?

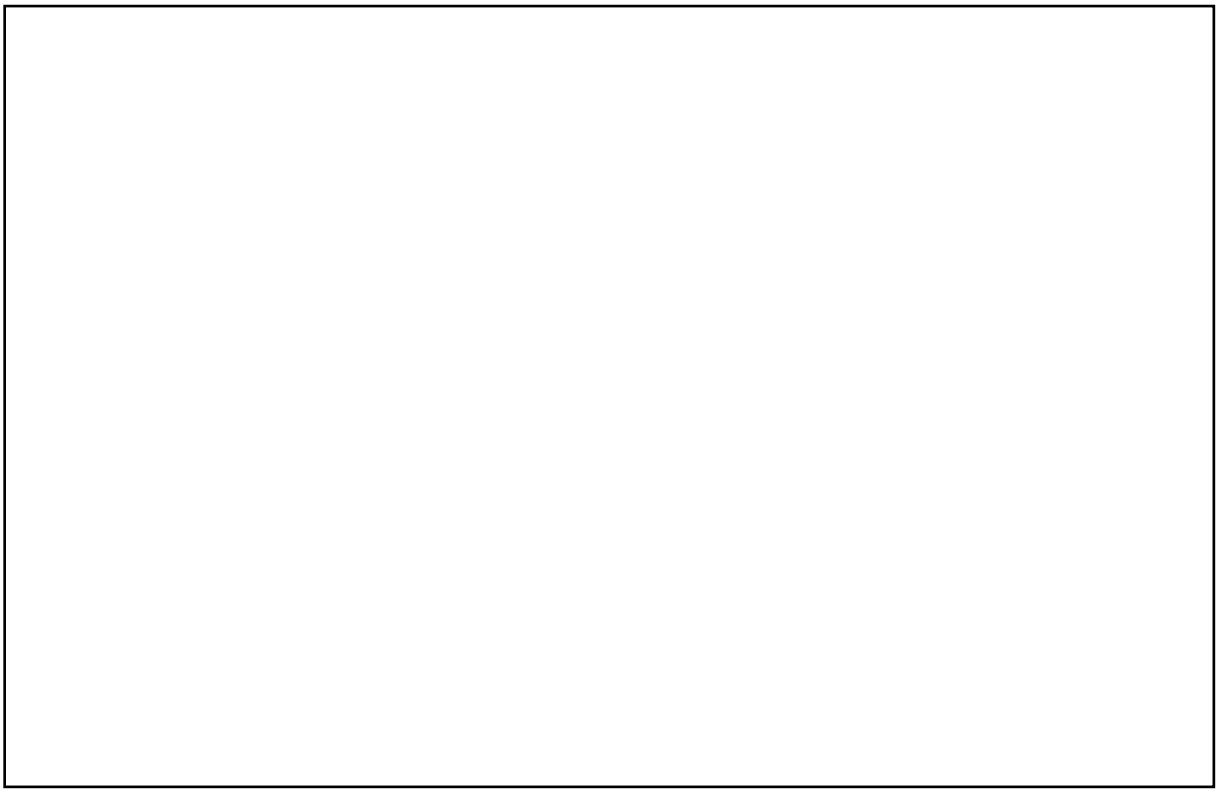
Appendix E

Draw and Write Activity

Adapted from Pridmore and Bendelow (1995)

Instructions for Students (read by teacher):

Remember how we read a book called *The Book of Can't and Don't?* There is a study being done at a university which will help to understand how this book makes people think. \ You can draw anything you want from the book, and you can write your thoughts below the picture if you want.If you need help writing anything the helpers will help you. Just raise your hand and one will come to you. Helpers may ask you questions about your picture, and you can answer them if you like. If you feel at any time, you do not want to draw a picture or talk about the book or there is aquestion you do not want to answer you can stop at any time. If you want to stop doing this do not wish to be asked any more questions you may turn your paper upside down. If you are okay with it, your drawings may be photocopied for the study, but you can take your drawings home when you go home today to keep.
Draw a scene from the book in the square and describe how it makes you feel and what itmakes you think about:



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