



LEADERSHIP LIBRARY

Grades: 5-8



Special Olympics
Unified Champion
Schools®

OVERVIEW

SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOLS® PROGRAMMING

The Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® program intentionally promotes meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting school environments. There are 3 interconnected components:

Special Olympics Unified Sports®: A fully inclusive sports or fitness program with an approximately equal number of students with and without intellectual disabilities.

Whole School Engagement: Awareness and education activities that promote inclusion and reach the majority of the school population.

Inclusive Youth Leadership: Students with and without intellectual disabilities working together to lead and plan advocacy, awareness, and inclusive activities throughout the school year.

This library focuses on inclusive youth leadership and providing insight on skills, perspectives, and experiences students need to act as inclusive leaders.

TERMINOLOGY

Partner

A student without an intellectual disability.

Athlete

A student with an intellectual disability.

Unified Pair

A partnership between an athlete and a partner.

OVERVIEW

WHY USE THE LEADERSHIP LIBRARY?

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop published an essay in 1990 explaining the importance of providing young readers with diverse books that reflect the world in which we live. In this essay, he used the phrase "...'Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors' to explain how children see themselves in books and how they can also learn about the lives of others through literature" (Potter et al., 2019).

This message is even more relevant today as our world becomes increasingly diverse. The books in the Leadership Library can offer students the chance to **learn inclusive values and leadership qualities through the lens of unique characters**. Middle school is the prime time to **introduce these concepts to students with and without disabilities**.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

Books are grouped by **themes**. Each **theme connects to an leadership skill** students must have in order to develop inclusive mindsets and become **inclusive leaders**.

Each book includes:

- Social Emotional Learning (**SEL**) skills
- a **summary** paragraph
- a list of **vocabulary** words
- 3 **discussion** questions
- 2 leadership **activities**
- 1 bonus **resource**

OVERVIEW

HOW SHOULD I USE THIS LIBRARY?

Select a book.

1. **Identify** a theme.
2. **Review** the book summary and the inclusive leadership connection. Use the icons below to identify other important information.



Grade level



SEL Skill



Warning

Read the book with your students.

While reading, **introduce vocabulary** and **facilitate discussions** with the 3 provided questions. Have students talk about or write out their thoughts.

TIP **Reinforce** the leadership skill and inclusive moments by highlighting different thoughts, actions, and events throughout the book.

Complete a leadership activity.

After reading, continue reinforcement of the inclusive leadership skill by having students apply what they've learned through 1 of the provided leadership activities.

WHEN CAN I USE THIS LIBRARY?

- Unified Readers Club
- Advisory period
- English Language Arts
- Small group independent studies or social groups
- Half days, extra class time, or sub plans

OVERVIEW

WHERE CAN I FIND BOOKS?

I encourage you to:

1. **Reach** out to your Media Specialist to see if they're able to help gather classroom or club copies. Consider having 1 copy to use as a read aloud resource.
2. **Connect** with your state Program for resource support.
3. **Connect** with your local book store, library, or other community partnerships for assistance.
4. **Apply** for a grant through your district or organization.

TIP Research eBook and audio book options. They're not just for students who need auditory support, but can act as an engagement tool.



TEAMWORK

THE PERFECT GAME

Fred Bowen



5th - 8th
grade



Social Courage
Perspective-taking



R-word

Summary

Issac is obsessed with trying to pitch a perfect game. As a result, he struggles with being a team player. His coach invites him to the Unified basketball practice with hopes he will let go of his obsession and rediscover the joy of playing a sport. He is skeptical at first, but he slowly builds a bond with one particular athlete and his perspective begins to shift.



Vocabulary

Intellectual Disability: A disability leading to limitations in cognitive, social, language, and self-care skills.

Fragile X Syndrome: A genetic condition causing intellectual disability, social and behavior challenges, anxiety, and more.

Unified Sports® team: People with and without intellectual disabilities playing on the same team.



Discussion Questions

How is the Unified sports practice different from a traditional sporting practice?

How does Issac first react to this experience? Can you relate?

Describe how Issac works with Kevin and the rest of the team throughout the book.

How does he make sure everyone is meaningfully involved at practice and the game?

Issac learns that great players are remembered for being leaders, not for their personal success.

How did being a part of the Unified team help him become a better team player?

TEAMWORK



Scan for Special Olympics Indiana's Curriculum, EPIC, to pair with this novel.

Leadership Connection

Everyone has something they can offer to make a team stronger. This can be a physical skill, a mindset, or something in between!

The Perfect Game opens the eyes of traditional leaders and athletes to show the benefits and importance of working with diverse teammates.

Leadership Activities

1

Educate Your Athletes

Members of your team or PE class may think those with disabilities can't play sports. Show them what athletes with disabilities can do!

- Let Unified pairs lead stretches and warm-ups together.
- Have an athlete lead a fitness station.
- Ask Unified pairs to teach a new skill or introduce an activity.
- Have athletes and partners play on the same team. Be mindful of skill level so everyone can participate in a meaningful way.
- Watch [Unified Talks](#) to learn how to work with a teammate.

2

Plan a Unified Tournament

Work with the PE teacher to put on a Unified Sports Tournament. Involve students to showcase strengths. Have Unified pairs:

- practice and play together on teams.
- organize brackets and rules.
- create posters or game signs.
- monitor the flow of the games by reffing or keeping score.
- ensure players are safe by handing out water.
- lead post-game reflections and stretches.

BELONGING

WONDER

R.J. Palacio



5th - 7th
grade



Social Courage
Perspective-taking
Human Dignity



Bullying behavior

Summary

Auggie was born with a facial difference that has always prevented him from going to a mainstream school. However, this year he's attending Beecher Prep, and he wants nothing more than to be treated as an ordinary kid. Throughout the year, Auggie faces conflicts, but forms meaningful friendships and in the end, students at Beecher Prep learn empathy, compassion, and appreciation for all.



Vocabulary

Audiology Exam: A test that measures a person's hearing.

Cleft Palate: A split in the mouth separating the oral and nasal cavities.

Empathy: To understand and share feelings with another person.

Precept: A rule of personal conduct. It helps with decision making.

Treacher Collins Syndrome: A genetic disorder that disfigures the face.



Discussion Questions

Why was it difficult for Auggie to first feel a sense of belonging at school? Explain.

Did Auggie feel a sense of belonging at the end of the book? Why or why not?

Popularity and friendship are common themes in the novel and in middle school.

How are they similar and different? How can 1 lead to a greater sense of belonging?

What actions did the characters take to make Auggie feel like he was included or not included?

Can you copy any of these behaviors in your school?

BELONGING



Scan for the
Wonder Unified
Classroom lesson

Leadership Connection

It's important for inclusive leaders to learn how to create environments where everyone feels like they belong.

Wonder will help students see the power of simple inclusive actions and how including others in experiences can create a welcoming school.

Leadership Activities

1

Create a New Student Welcoming Committee

Have a Unified pair(s) welcome new students to your school. Some responsibilities can include:

- giving a tour of the school
- inviting to sit together at lunch
- sharing the school values
- walking through the schedule and meeting teachers
- creating a welcome letter

2

Educate Students on Disabilities

Students without disabilities may exclude others due to fear and lack of understanding. Have Unified pair(s) raise awareness around different disabilities. Some ideas include:

- dedicating 1 day a month to a disability, support, or device
- visiting advisory classes to lead presentations
- sharing facts or tips during morning announcements
- playing and discussing **Unified Talks: What is IDD?**
- completing activities from **Unified Classroom**

EMPOWERMENT

REAL Carol Cujec



6th-8th
grade



Social Courage
Perspective-taking
Courageous Action



R-word
Cyber-bullying
Bullying

Summary

Charity is a 13-year-old with autism. She hasn't spoken a day in her life. People think she can't learn or hear, and she doesn't have feelings. In reality, she has a perfect memory, strong math skills, and a heart filled with empathy. When she has the chance to go to a public school she faces social and academic challenges. But with the help of supportive teachers and empowering classmates, she overcomes her fears and finds a way to have a voice for others with disabilities.



Vocabulary

Augmentative and Alternative Communication Device (AAC): A tablet that helps someone with a speech language impairment communicate.

Autism: A neurological and developmental spectrum disorder that affects how people socialize, communicate, learn, and behave.

Down syndrome: A genetic disorder creating a distinct facial appearance and intellectual and developmental delays.



Discussion Questions

"Maybe I'm not so different than [those] heroes...I could fight... for kids like me" (p. 84).

How does Grace use her voice to help students at Borden Academy? Do you think she's courageous?

Jaz tells others they should "dare to be included" (p. 84).

Why can it feel hard to be included or to include others?

How can we change this?

How do Grace, Mason, and Stuart display social courage throughout the book?

Which character do you relate to the most?

EMPOWERMENT



Scan to watch
Unified Talks:
Advocating
for Others

Leadership Connection

“It doesn’t matter if a test says they’re smart. It matters they’re human. Believe all kids can learn. Everyone deserves to be included” (p. 291).

Inclusive leaders believe everyone deserves respect. They take action, even if it’s uncomfortable, to make their spaces more accepting.

The characters with and without ID in *Real* demonstrate these skills in social and academic settings.

Leadership Activities

1

Connect With and Speak Up for Others

Empower Unified pair(s) to work on skills that will help students advocate for their peers. Have students:

- watch **Unified Talks** to learn advocacy and leadership skills.
- write announcements with facts, tips, and empowering messages.
- play **Inclusion Tiles** to understand different inclusive experiences.
- host a disability table during **Spread the Word** week.
- visit other advisories, clubs, or lunch tables to connect with new peers.
- start a welcoming lunch table with daily conversation topics or games.

2

Put Together a Whole School Event

Have a Unified pair(s) in your class or club arrange an event to bring the school together to celebrate inclusion. Use advisory or club time to plan.

- Look at sport schedules and arrange a Fans in the Stands event.
- Add a pep rally or fitness challenge to spirit or inclusion week.
- Arrange a Unified Sports game during lunch periods.
- Have a door or bulletin board decorating contest with influential leaders, including those with disabilities.
- Put on a **Spread the Word event**. Reflect with this **lesson**.

APPRECIATION

GOOD DIFFERENT

Meg Eden Kuyatt



4th - 7th
grade



Perspective-taking
Self-awareness
Social awareness



Physical
altercation

Summary

Selah, a neurodivergent girl, spends her days masking her behaviors and feelings so she can try and fit in at school. She becomes exhausted spending her energy on following rules. One day, she loses control and risks being kicked out of school. It's during this time she begins to discover her true identity and appreciate her differences. She then begins working on proving to people everyone has differences and that's what makes the world a better place.



Vocabulary

Masking: Hiding behaviors and blending in to meet social expectations.

Neurodivergent: A person whose brain process information that is not typical to others. It can refer to someone on the autism spectrum.

Sensory Tools: A tool to help with focus and emotional regulation.

Stimulated: Increasing levels of excitement in a positive or uncomfortable way.



Discussion Questions

Selah says "I'm not weird. We're all different. We all just need a little help and that's OK" (p. 138).

What's your good different?

"Why are things that help me against the rules?" (p. 154).

What are things you use or need that help you during your day? How would you feel if you couldn't use them, or if you were judged?

She realizes people "think something's wrong" because "they don't ask, they're afraid" (p. 233).

Is fear a reason people avoid or judge those who are different? How can we change this?

APPRECIATION



Scan to watch
Unified Talks:
Perspectives

Leadership Connection

In order to appreciate someone and their unique strengths, leaders must practice perspective-taking and learn about others' experiences.

Characters in *Good Different* model how perspective-taking can lead to appreciating yourself, and others, and how it can create inclusive spaces.

Leadership Activities

1

Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces in the School

Have Unified pair(s) enhance activities and create more inclusive spaces by offering tools to help all students feel respected and included.

- Add calming spaces to the classroom, school, and events.
- Provide tools like colored bracelets or stickers, earplugs, peer buddies, and sensory tools, at school events.
- Ask classmates what they need or would like to see in their school. Use **this exercise** to get started.

2

Celebrate the "Good Different" of Staff and Students

Have a Unified pair(s) start initiatives to celebrate the unique strengths of all students in the school.

- Spend advisory or club time decorating bulletin boards and doors with poems, images, and affirmations during inclusion week. Check out the **Mural of Positive Environment activity** to get started.
- Hand out notes or **emoji cards** to show appreciation to classmates.
- Ask about strengths and preferences before working together. Be sure to listen and show respect!
- Reflect on group strengths after a project or game through written reflection or feedback.
- Repeat **positive affirmations** to feel confident and empowered!

IDENTITY

FISH IN A TREE

Lynda Mullaly Hunt



5th-7th
grade



Perspective-Taking
Respect
Courageous Action



Teasing
behavior

Summary

Ally is a 6th grader with a secret: she has dyslexia. Since her family moves a lot, she's been able to trick teachers into thinking she can read, but just doesn't want to. She spends a lot of time with the principal and is often teased by classmates. When a new teacher recognizes her unique strengths, she starts to ask for and accept help. During this time, she befriends 2 other students who are often judged, and together they learn that not all great minds think alike.



Vocabulary

Dyslexia: A learning difficulty that impacts the ability to read and spell.

Injustice: An unfair treatment.

Uncouth: Lacking good manners and grace.



Discussion Questions

Ally has a hard time reading, but doesn't ask for help.

Have you ever struggled in school? What have you done in that situation? Did you feel embarrassed or scared to speak up?

"Most teachers seem to like...students to be all the same—perfect and quiet. Mr. Daniels seems to like that we're different" (p. 77).

How does it feel when teachers and classmates respect your identity?

Ally, Albert, and Keisha have unique strengths. Their abilities help them learn new skills, form friendships, and become leaders.

What are your strengths? How do you use them?

IDENTITY



Scan for a Get to Know Me activity

Leadership Connection

“Everyone’s smart in different ways. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it’ll spend its whole life thinking that it’s stupid” (p. 197).

Fish in a Tree will help students learn everyone has strengths and weaknesses, even if we can’t see them. It shows that students of varying abilities can hold leadership positions, form friendships, and learn new skills.

Leadership Activities

1

Discover and Celebrate Student Identities

Have students share their identities throughout the school year so they are constantly learning from and about others. Be sure to first check with students’ comfort levels!

- Host a **Slides Party** 1 time quarter.
- Complete a version of the **“I Am” poem** in English class or a self-portrait in art class.
- Learn about **strengths and weaknesses** before a project or game.
- Encourage connection with these **interactive exercises**.

2

Learn about People with Disabilities

Have Unified pair(s) learn about intersectionality and what people with disabilities can do. They can spread awareness during advisory, club time, in school newsletters, and more. Start with:

- watching **Unified Talks** and completing **this lesson** to learn about intersectionality and multiple identities.
- playing **Unified Talks: What is IDD?** and completing **the lesson**.
- discovering what athletes with ID can do with **this lesson**.
- completing **this lesson** to recognize how people use different strengths and styles to work together.



Special Olympics
**Unified Champion
Schools®**

www.generationunified.org

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