

A Community of Learners: Creating and Reviewing Children's Books

Courses: Psychology 163: Children with Disabilities and Their Families and Education 118/English 118: Children's Literature

Objectives: The students will:

- work within a group to produce a children's book that teaches about difference or disability (Psy 163)
- contribute to a book that is factually accurate, visually pleasing, and linguistically appropriate for the age group (Psy 163)
- apply criteria for evaluating good children's books (ED 118/Eng 118)
- work within a group to review children's books produced by peers (ED 118/Eng 118)

Assignment (from Psychology 163 Course Outline):

Group Book

Each week we will read a children's book in class. This assignment requires that each group produce a children's book that has disability or difference as its theme. The book should include pictures, drawings, Clip-Art or illustrations as well as a story. You will need to ensure that the information you convey is accurate and current.

Group Participation Expectations (from Psychology 163 Course Outline):

Class and Group Participation

It is essential that you participate in the class and group discussions. You need to share the unique mixture of knowledge and experience that you bring to the class. This is no longer a world of rugged individualists. The ability to participate on a team is essential in any field, but especially so in education and human services. Participating in class and in group will give you valuable experience in group participation and teamwork. One half of your participation score will be from your participation in group assignments.

Activity: By the second week of class, students self-select into groups of 5-7 people. They remain in these groups throughout the semester. There are a number of small group activities in class and outside of class throughout the semester to allow the students the opportunity to develop as a group. Students within the groups rate each other's participation on out-of-class group projects on a 0-5 scale (0= Did not participate in any group activity to 5 = participated in all aspects of group activities).

Each week children's books on disability or difference are read aloud in order to provide appropriate examples. Students also have access to the books written by previous classes. Finally, a collection of children's books is maintained in the college library.

At a community college, students often have work and family obligations that limit the time they have for gathering as a group outside of class. Whenever possible time is provided in class for students to work on their books.

Throughout the semester, students in the Children's Literature course learn appropriate strategies for evaluating children's books. The professor includes information on evaluating books that focus on children with disability or teaching children about disability.

Annually, the professor of the Children's Literature course requests suggested titles of books related to disability to be acquired by the college library.

On the date the books are due in the Children with Disabilities and Their Families class, one member of each group reads their creation to the class. Typically, the students are very reinforcing of their classmates and applaud their work.

Students in the Children's Literature class review each of the books produced in the Children with Disabilities and Their Families class. The class is divided into groups that then read and discuss each book. Utilizing the strategies they are learning, the class votes on which book best meets the criteria of a good children's book. The professor also evaluates each book and chooses which is best.

The books are then evaluated by the Learning Disabilities Specialist (who is also an English professor), and by the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities. Authors of the "winning" book receive a prize and the applause of their colleagues!



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