

**OPEN INCLUSION OR SHAMEFUL SECRET: A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS WITH FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS (FASD) AND CHARACTERS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASD) IN A NORTH AMERICAN SAMPLE OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS**

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*Using a framework of critical literacy, and acknowledging the characteristics of Radical Change, the authors explore 75 North American youth fiction novels which depict characters with disabilities. Books were identified from a variety of sources (i.e., awards lists, book reviews, other research, and word-of-mouth), to represent a random sample that would work within the research timeframe. From the sample, characters who were described as having Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) (n=2) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (n=14) were analyzed to determine trends and patterns in the character descriptions, settings, and plot lines. There appears to be an underrepresentation of characters with FASD in North American youth fiction in comparison to the representation of characters with ASD, a similar group in society in terms of incidence. An annotated bibliography includes the 15 titles portraying characters with FASD or ASD within the larger sample.*

Portrayals of characters with disabilities, in fiction for young people, have been evolving in accordance with characteristics of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999). Radical Change has been affecting textual evolution through diverse forms and formats, changing boundaries, and changing perspectives. New perspectives appear as *the subjugated, unheard voices that are emerging in contemporary literature are not related to ethnicity alone but speak out on previously unrecognized aspects of gender, sexual orientation, occupation, socio-economic level, and ability/disability* (Dresang, p. 26). Referring specifically to books about characters with disabilities, Dresang (1999) notes that: *Collectively these books allow young people to experience a wide variety of mental and physical challenges, to draw conclusions of their own, and to begin to comprehend the diversity that exists among previously marginalized people* (p. 135).

Keith's (2001) research on classic fiction has uncovered past patterns related to books about characters with disabilities, including the trend that characters with disabilities are either 'cured or killed' within the course of the story, a tendency that suggests authors have not been able to envision a happy future for someone with special needs. Keith indicates that the lessons readers have been learning from classic fiction include the following common themes: there is nothing positive about being disabled; disability is a punishment for bad behaviour; and, people who have disabilities can never be accepted by society. Keith also notes that between 1920 and 1955, polio and blindness tended to outweigh other disabilities characterized in classic fiction by virtue of their prevalence in society.

Critical literacy, supported by a paradigm of critical theory that addresses individual as well as societal transformation, offers a provocative approach towards curriculum (Brenna, 2010). Critical literacy works well with reader-response theories that address the importance of socio-cultural context with regards to meaning-making (Rosenblatt, 2005). Further research is needed to illuminate classroom resources that include characterizations of various forms of ability in addition to data on classroom structures that support critical literacy. This paper addresses themes found within contemporary North American children's books portraying characters with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), setting a discussion of these books within a context that extends the lens to arts and culture as representative of societal understandings and stereotypes.

In addition to recommendations for educators, it is important that current studies suggest implications for further research regarding portrayals of disability in literature. The relationship between historical landscapes and their subsequent literary exchange is fertile ground for explorations of work in context. An examination of how changes in societal construction of disability have evolved over time, in relation to various textual forms, is rich with potential. Within the context of critical literacy, consideration of the social importance of an awareness of societal change is also suggested as territory for examination.

#### *Incidence and Prevalence Rates of FASD and ASD*

As we consider the experiences of people with FASD and ASD in North American society, we turn to definitions of the possible scope of the disorders, in addition to incidence and prevalence rates, as ways of engaging in an understanding of individuals with FASD and ASD. In addition, an identification of incidence rates allows us to explore local landscapes and suggest connections between place and artistic representation.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined by impairments in social skills, difficulties in communication, and the presence of stereotyped or repetitive behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The term ASD includes autism, pervasive developmental disorders (PDD), Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and Asperger's syndrome. These various autism diagnoses are linked by social and communicative features as well as the presence of abnormally focused interests or activities (Oullette-Kuntz et al., 2006). While a number of studies have attempted to determine prevalence rates of ASD, identification is difficult as diagnosis is based on clinical behavioural observations (Grether, 2006). Changes in the definition of an ASD diagnosis and lack of agreed upon standardized instruments further complicate the issue of determining rates of occurrence (Grether). Despite difficulties obtaining valid diagnostic data, three comprehensive American studies suggest that ASD incidence rates involve 6-7 cases in 1000 births (Grether).

Over the last few decades, ASD's increasing popularity in diagnosis can be partially attributed to: the inclusion of many varying but similar definitions within the spectrum thus increasing the potential for diagnosis; the addition of diagnostic criteria to the DSM-IV; increased public awareness; increased availability of therapeutic services; and the possibility that rates are actually increasing as a result of environmental factors (Grether, 2006). The increase in diagnoses of autism suggest potential relationships regarding changes in literature, namely that more characters will be developed presenting autism as a distinguishing feature; that an understanding of the nature of autism will be more prevalent in the most contemporary of the titles surveyed; and that aspects of current presentations of ASD in literature will lend themselves to critical literacy discussions in terms of patterns and trends.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) refers to the range of characteristics and disabilities that can occur from prenatal alcohol exposure (Green, 2007). Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term used to collectively refer to the wide range of effects caused by the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy (Chudley et al., 2005; Ryan, Bonnett, & Gass, 2006; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). These effects differ in each individual but often include forms of physical, mental, behavioural, and learning disabilities which persist into adulthood and therefore have varying impacts across the lifespan (Chudley et al.). The term FASD is not a diagnostic term but instead refers to the spectrum of disorders that are caused by the maternal consumption of alcohol (Chudley et al.). Three diagnostic categories exist within the umbrella term: fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), partial fetal alcohol syndrome (partial FAS), and alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND), each category displays its own set of associated characteristics (Chudley et al.).

Prenatal alcohol consumption is known to adversely affect the unborn child, resulting in a gamut of lifelong developmental disabilities and hardships (Connor & Streissguth, 1996). The range of effects caused by prenatal alcohol exposure varies among individuals, but it is generally characterized by primary disabilities in the following areas: executive functioning skills that affect planning and abstract thinking (Connor, Sampson, Bookstein, Barr, & Streissguth, 2000); cognitive capacity (Olson, Feldman, Streissguth, Sampson, & Bookstein, 1998); memory and behaviour (Streissguth, 2007); social skills (McGee, Fryer, Bjorkquist, Mattson, & Riley, 2008); and impulse control (Connor et al., 2000; Streissguth, 2007).

Individuals with FASD also exhibit secondary disabilities, which occur after birth and are direct manifestations of primary disabilities. These can include, but are not limited to, mental health problems, inappropriate sexual behaviours, disrupted school experience, and trouble with the law (Government of Canada, 2007; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Secondary difficulties hinder the ability of individuals with FASD to behave in socially acceptable ways, and therefore discourage the successful formation of positive peer relationships (Kelly, Day, & Streissguth, 2000; Thomas, Kelly, Mattson, & Riley, 1998). Since children and adolescents with FASD may not comprehend basic social skills, they are at risk for being socially rejected by peers and developing maladaptive behaviour patterns (McGee, Bjorkquist, Price, Mattson, & Riley, 2009). An outcome of ingrained maladaptive behaviour patterns may be increased involvement in illegal activity, and youth with FASD are presently overrepresented in the juvenile justice systems around the world (Fast, Conry, & Lock, 1999).

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder not only affects the individual, but also the family, community, and all of society (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Parents of children with FASD often struggle with their offsprings' numerous behaviour problems, and find it extremely challenging to keep their children involved in social activities, as well as collaborate with school personnel (Brown & Bednar, 2004). It is projected that 9 out of every 1,000 Canadian babies are born with FASD each year (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003) and in high-risk communities (i.e. Aboriginal populations, rural areas, and isolated northern communities) the rates may be as high as one in five (Health Canada, 2001). In terms of the current prevalence of FASD diagnoses, one might expect literary representations in kind, as well as differentiation between FASD as an umbrella term and its related diagnostic features. Patterns and trends within titles portraying characters with FASD could be contextualized within a critical literacy framework, just as we previously discussed the potential for books about characters with ASD to lend themselves to such usage. When examining the North American incidence of ASD (6-7 in 1000) and FASD (9 in 1000), we note the higher proportion of the latter, making it likely that more individuals with FASD will participate in the school system as well as in society. In spite of being a population with a higher incidence rate, there appears to be less research available regarding FASD in comparison to ASD, at least so it would seem from our general literature review.

Interestingly, in our examination of a set of 75 North American novels for young people, few titles appear that include characters with FASD, while many characters appear with ASD traits. We ponder the reasons for this discrepancy, and suggest that further research is required to explore its roots. Has artistic attention been focused on creating characters with ASD (more closely associated with Caucasian, upper-middle class families) rather than FASD (closely associated with vulnerable and marginalized populations)? Could this discrepancy have a market value component? Have particular gifted individuals with ASD—Temple Grandin, among others—offered support for an ideology that purports the positive contributions individuals with ASD may offer society (O'Neil, 2008), while we as a society have yet to publically celebrate the gifts of particular people with FASD? For whatever reasons, society's attention to FASD is noticeably limited. The following discussion serves to highlight this discrepancy by comparing and contrasting North American children's novels that portray characters with FASD and ASD.

### **Method**

This study examined a combined sample of 75 North American children's novels, comprised of 50 works written in Canada and described in a previous study (Brenna, 2010) and 25 works written in the United States. From the Canadian sample of 50 books, we located one book portraying a character with FASD and four books presenting characters identified with autism. Widening the sample to include 25 American novels for young people, we focused on a second book depicting a character where the possibility of FASD is referenced fleetingly, as well as 9 more books offering characters with autism. The basis for our discussion of novels portraying FASD and ASD is thus a sample of 15 books, with a total of 16 characters under scrutiny as one of the books involves a set of twins with autism.

Our book-selection methods involved searching titles from awards' lists, exploring book reviews where 'disability' was a key word, perusing research conducted by other sources (Greenwell, 2003; Prater & Dyches, 2008), and word-of-mouth. We estimate our sample of 75 books to be generally representative of contemporary North American children's books in the field but certainly not an all-inclusive list. From the sample, characters who were described as having Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) (n=2) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (n=14) were analyzed toward considerations of trends and patterns across a number of pertinent categories.

An adaptation of Berg's (2009) content analysis allowed us to identify elements across this sample of 15 novels, including characterization (age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, self-image, family composition, special gifts), setting, time period, search for a cure, whether the character died in the course of the story, whether the disability is related to the story's plot, age range of the audience, point of view, format, and time frame of the story. A qualitative lens offered the opportunity to complete content analysis charts through which to consider patterns and trends in the collected data, and allowed us to observe the themes at work within this study sample of texts. While interesting patterns emerged, it is important to note that these observations must be contextualized within the study sample, and are not necessarily a predictor of all books in the field.

### *Findings*

Our sample suggests that there are many more books depicting ASD than there are books depicting FASD. While 13 books represented characters with ASD within the sample of 75 North American titles, including three American titles where the references to autism are merely implicit, only two titles emerged that portray characters with FASD, and in the one American title included in this total, the references to FASD are fleeting and tentative. In the single American title that alludes to FASD—Gantos' (2003) *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*—the storyline centres on a ten-year-old boy diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Joey's mother admits to having consumed alcohol during pregnancy, although she warns Joey not to take the connection any further. The two other novels in Gantos' series do not even imply FASD and no mention is made within either of them regarding prenatal alcohol consumption by Joey's mother.

A consideration of audience age provided the following findings. In the Canadian portion of the sample, three titles are for intermediate readers ages 11 and up while two titles are for young adult audiences ages 14 and up. No titles are intended as junior fiction for ages eight and up. In the American portion of the sample, six titles are for intermediate readers and three titles are for young adults with one title for all ages and no titles specifically for junior readers.

The characters with ASD varied across age and gender, but did have some marked similarities. The age range spanned from 5-20. In almost all of the novels, the characters were of nondescript ethnic origin, suggesting a 'white, middle-class' background, while one character's family was briefly described as Greek-Canadian. Both characters with FASD were male, and while 3 characters with autism were female, 11 characters with autism (including a set of twins) were male. This proportion of female characters to male characters in terms of autism correlates with statistics indicating a higher incidence of autism in males (Grether, 2006).

In the American titles, the characters with ASD came from many areas of the United States, but were generally contextualized in small, rural communities. In the Canadian titles, Canadian place names (both rural and urban) were mentioned. Each of the characters in the American texts came from intact, two parent, heterosexual homes, while two of the four Canadian texts dealing with ASD characterized single mothers. The single Canadian text dealing with FASD, as well as the American text dealing with FASD, characterized single mothers, as well. The lone character in the American FASD sample was depicted in a home with multiple and dysfunctional caregivers.

There were also some unique features to the way particular disabilities were addressed among the books in the study sample. In the majority of the American texts, for example, a theme of the books often included the 'hope for a cure' to ASD, leading to disappointment when this hope was not realized. This is contrasted by two particular storylines, one where the character with autism was depicted in adulthood, and the other where the character that has autism was depicted as a child detective whose autism helped him solve mysteries. Largely, in the American sample, discussion around a child's ASD was negative, suggesting that ASD is entirely undesirable, although these text also included a recognition of positive attributes 'despite' the ASD. None of the texts in the Canadian sample addressed the idea of a cure. In the Canadian sample, while there were challenges for the characters with ASD, these characters were depicted positively throughout their texts, from first-person and/or third-person perspectives.

In the American texts, Keith's (2001) suggestion that the lessons readers have been learning from classic fiction in terms of seeing 'nothing positive about disability' seems to be upheld on a number of occasions. In the five Canadian texts, however, searching for a 'cure' was not part of the storyline, and positive and negative character traits seemed to be relatively balanced. In the North American sample, there appeared

evidence to suggest that contemporary texts contrast with Keith's (2001) statements about how classic texts depict disability as punishment for bad behaviour, as well as offer pictures of permanent societal rejection. In no case was disability portrayed as something the character 'deserved' based on past actions, and the characters were contextualized within communities rather than as social isolates.

Point of view also contributed to the 'problem' nature of children with ASD within the American texts. Four characters were primarily described from the perspective of a family member who was troubled by the presence of ASD. Four books came from a third person narrator perspective, and only one was written from the perspective of a character with ASD. All of the personal accounts (both the first-person and the family member's perspectives) presented frustration with the problem of ASD, while the third person stories tended towards a more strength-based perspective. In the sample of Canadian texts, the 'problem' nature of ASD was not the focus of the characterization. Four characters were described from the third person perspective of sibling narrators, and one character related her own story through the use of a first-person journal.

ASD was recognized and named in 10 of the 13 North American books we explored within the sample of 75 books. FASD was only explicitly dealt with in one of the two books we located that discussed or implied FASD, and in the book where FASD was merely implied, it seemed shrouded in secrecy. In the two sequels to this title, there was no further mention of the possibility of FASD, and the boy's behaviour was simply referred to as 'attention problems.' With the grandiose and over the top portrayals of the symptoms of ASD in the American sample, the FASD condition was, in comparison, subdued, hidden, and taboo.

In contrast with the negative depiction of the mother in the single American title that seemed to portray a character with FASD, within the Canadian sample, the home of the lone character with FASD was described in positive terms. Although the character lived with a single mother after his father abandoned the family, the parenting was consistent and caring, and readers have the sense of a stable, if economically disadvantaged, environment for this boy.

### **Discussion**

While ASD and FASD have similar rates of incidence in society, ASD seems more socially acceptable within the context of our sample of 75 novels, both in its actual presence, as well as in the general balance of positive and negative characteristics with which it is depicted. In the American sample, however, characters with ASD tended towards a more negative portrayal, compared to the few books in the Canadian sample. Our rationale for these trends can only be conjecture. Perhaps the suggestion that ASD is perceived as more common in highly educated and middle to upper class homes has led to a more frequent presence of ASD in children's literature (Grether, 2006). Perhaps a greater movement towards inclusion of children with autism in particular schools has had some effect on more positive portrayals in children's literature.

In comparison to the greater inclusion of characters with ASD in the children's novels of our sample, people with FASD seem to be underrepresented in children's literature. Perhaps there is an intrinsic message within the exclusion of characters with FASD, implying that FASD is preventable and therefore there is a degree of blame and shame associated with it. This blame and shame may prevent authors from wishing to deal with the subject of FASD within children's and young adult stories. This stigma is not present for characters with ASD, perhaps making them more 'palatable' as subject material. Such discrepancy between the inclusion of FASD and ASD in books is unfortunate, as people with FASD need to see their personal issues represented in books just as strongly as any other group, and readers need to experience diversity in texts as this diversity offers the opportunity for 'windows' as well as 'mirrors' (Galda, 1998).

In the Joey Pigza novels, the sense of embarrassment and shame regarding the allusion to FASD is the most pressing reflection of how FASD may be perceived by the general population. While ASD is prominent in pop culture, FASD is stigmatized, despite the similar prevalence rates. While ASD is becoming a 'cause' through celebrity awareness campaigns and charity endeavours, FASD is still the unmentionable and shameful secret that remains hidden. Perhaps this is where the next major trend will need to appear in terms of Radical Change characteristics as unheard voices evolve further into print. Within such an evolution, we expect to see differentiation between characters portrayed with FASD or

ASD, where diversity within each of these marginalized groups may begin to appear more strongly through their depictions in children's literature.

Our research was conducted to examine patterns and trends in a sample of North American children's novels portraying characters with disabilities. The main goal of the research was to study and identify appropriate resources for inclusive classrooms through consideration of patterns and trends within this sample of titles and make specific recommendations for further research. The data appears to contain a concerning trend in the underrepresentation of characters with FASD, compared to a greater representation of books with characters who have ASD. Given the interesting lack of correlation between the novels and the incidence and prevalence rates of both ASD and FASD, this trend in the data juxtaposes Autism and FASD as something worth pursuing further in a wider sample.

The most striking trend in our sample of 15 books that included characters with FASD and ASD was the abundance of titles with ASD characters compared to FASD characters. Generally, characters were presented with non-descript ethnic origins. Characters with ASD generally came from stable, two-parent heterosexual homes, while characters with FASD came from single-mother homes. As far as storytelling perspectives, narratives from family members tended to describe the negative characteristics of the disabilities, while third-person narratives tended towards a more strength-based focus. When ASD symptomology was described within the thirteen target novels, it was generally grandiose; within the two target novels concerning FASD, this spectrum disorder was presented subtly, almost secretly. While there was often a search for a cure with ASD, FASD as a condition was unaddressed and even explained away as 'attention problems.'

The comparison of the number of books about characters with FASD to the number of books about characters with ASD inspired many questions. We wonder whether this trend is worldwide in terms of the underrepresentation of FASD in critical conversation.

FASD is often associated with secrecy and shame, quite possibly due to its preventable nature. We wonder if this shame is the reason for its marginalization in children's literature, and possibly the reason for a marginalization of people with FASD in general. The trends with the incidence of ASD largely affecting more affluent families, compared to FASD incidence being linked to issues of poverty and addiction, may be an additional reason for this marginalization. Schools have the capacity to inspire change towards social justice through the inclusion of books, stories, and lived experiences of those with FASD. We believe that children with FASD need to be represented in school resources, just as all children benefit from positive role models and an affirmation of personal strengths, resilience, and hope.

Further research is necessary to actively seek out the number of books that depict characters with FASD, in addition to research on societal supports for individuals with FASD in relation to the supports given to individuals with ASD. There needs to be advocacy for delineations of diversity within literature, and such advocacy should highlight the strengths of individuals with FASD (i.e., capacities for caring and emotional responsiveness). This sample of novels demonstrates that unlike classic fiction where disabilities were characterized in connection to their prominence in society (Keith, 2001), it appears that incidence and prevalence rates are no longer an important factor in decisions about characterization. Rather, it is the relationship society has with a particular disability, be it either social acceptance or stigma, that seems to be influencing depictions of characters with disabilities.

Encouragement may be needed for authors who write for ages eight to ten, as no junior novels dealing with characters who have FASD or ASD were evident in the sample of books in this study. In addition, considerably more male than female characters with FASD or ASD appeared in the sample, indicating that perhaps gender is playing a role in the characterization of particular spectrum diagnoses. As there is research to suggest that more males than females are currently diagnosed with autism, it appears that the social construction of characters in this regard is evidence based (Grether, 2006).

In terms of supporting inclusive classrooms, a focus on differences rather than a strict focus on deficits is integral for respectful and supportive educational practices. Further research is needed as we compare the treatment of FASD and ASD in socio-cultural artefacts, including children's fiction, seeking to understand the manner in which disability is defined and affected by social contexts. O'Neill (2008) reminds us that rather than looking for deficits, society should be identifying differences: differences in social interactions, differences in intelligence, differences in communication, and differences in coping.

As research increases regarding FASD in North America, it is predicted that more on this topic will appear in creative and artistic work, including children's fiction. We hope that further acknowledgements evolve regarding the range of people's abilities within individual profiles of characters with FASD and ASD. With heightened attention, an increase of community supports can be predicted. The community can then reflect aspects of lived lives currently invisible in North American children's literature, promoting the respect offered by open inclusion rather than the stigma surrounding *shameful secrets*.

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### Annotated Bibliography of Books for Children and Young Adults

*Books about characters with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD):*

**Brenna, B. (2007). *The Moon Children*. Markham, ON: Red Deer Press.**

*The Moon Children* is a Canadian realistic fiction novel for ages 9 – 12 about a friendship between Billy, a boy with a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and Natasha, an adopted girl from Romania. The story's setting in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, contextualizes a community talent show where Billy plans to enter his amazing yoyo routine. He and his dad have practiced the tricks, but his father, an alcoholic, has disappeared and may not return for contest—and Billy's not convinced he can perform without his dad.

**Gantos, J. (1998). *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.**

*Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* is the first novel in a series that follows young Joey Pigza through his struggle to find himself within a turbulent mix of family, school, and personal challenges. The story centers around Joey trying to learn to control his behaviour, while dealing with his mother's desire to return to his life after leaving him with his grandmother, and his new temporary placement in a special education classroom. Will his mom be able to prove that she is ready to be a parent? Will Joey be able to feel in control of his own body? Can Joey prove that he is *not a bad kid*?

*NB: This book is a first in the Joey Pigza series, which includes What Would Joey Do, and I Am Not Joey Pigza, which were reviewed for this article; however, the first book is the only in the series which eludes to possible FASD.*

*Books about characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):*

**Aker, D. (2007) *The space between*. Toronto: HarperCollins.**

*The Space Between* is a Canadian realistic fiction novel for young adults. Jace—a grade 12 kid from Halifax—is in Mexico celebrating his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday when events unfold that are completely unexpected. Instead of losing his virginity, as was his original plan, he develops a perplexing friendship with a guy whom he later discovers is gay, and then watches the girl of his dreams head home to her boyfriend. Exploring what it means to be 'different,' Jace is better equipped to understand his elder brother's suicide and he eventually allows himself the chance to grieve over Stefan's death. At the same time, Jace values even more deeply his relationship with Luke, his 9 year old brother with autism.

**Baskin, N.R. (2010). *Anything but Typical*. Toronto, ON: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing**

*Anything But Typical* is a realistic fiction novel for young adults told from the perspective of Jason Blake, a 12-year-old boy with Autism. Nothing has ever been easy for Jason, as he struggles to live in a world with *neurotypicals*. However, he has always had a strong connection with words which has resulted in a love of writing. Through this love of writing, Jason develops an online bond with PhoneixBird, another writer who posts stories on the same website. As the bond strengthens Jason begins to feel as though PhoneixBird (Rebecca) could become his first real friend, but he fears she will only see the autism should they meet. Can Jason find the courage to trust Rebecca's ability to see his true self? Can Rebecca look past Jason's autism to see the true and genuine friendship that is developing around them? Can Jason find his path in a neurotypical world?



**Brenna, B. (2005). *Wild Orchid*. Markham, ON: Red Deer Press.**

*Wild Orchid* is a Canadian realistic fiction novel for young adults. Taylor Jane Simon, an eighteen-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome, is reluctantly spending the summer with her mother in Prince Albert National Park. Due to Taylor's ingenuity and perseverance, the summer has its ups as well as its downs. Taylor gets her first job. She sees her first live theatre—*The Birthday Party*--a unique look at social interaction by Nobel prize winning playwright Harold Pinter. And she addresses a personal goal—acquiring a boyfriend. Readers explore universal themes related to coming-of-age in this first-person account from the perspective of Taylor's journal.

**Burns, L.J. & Metz, M. (2005a). *The Case of the Nana-napper*. New York, NY: Razorbill.**

*The Case of the Nana-napper* is the second novel in the series following Orville Wright and Agatha Wong as they attempt to solve the mystery of Agatha's Nana's sudden disappearance. Nana Wong simply would not have left town without letting someone know where she was going, nor would she have left her door open. Agatha's cunning nature and Orville's photographic memory and keen eye for detail make this pair perfect for solving the case. Was Nana Wong kidnapped? Who is the strange man in Nana Wong's photographs? Could he possibly be the kidnapper?

**Burns, L.J. & Metz, M. (2005b). *The Case of the Slippery Soap Star*. New York, NY: Razorbill.**

*The Case of the Slippery Soap Star* is the third novel in the series following Orville Wright and Agatha Wong as they attempt to prove false the accusation that Orville's mother stole the jewellery from the charity fundraiser. Who is the real culprit? Why is famous soap star Trey Beck picking the pockets of his fans? Are the two cases connected?

**Burns, L.J. & Metz, M. (2005c). *The Case of the Trail Mix-Up*. New York, NY: Razorbill.**

*The Case of the Trail Mix-up* is the third novel in the series following Orville Wright and Agatha Wong as they attempt to solve the mystery of Stu Frysley's disappearance. Stu, a school bully who has tormented Orville for years because of his Asperger's Syndrome, disappeared during a school trip. Everyone is panicking, and the search parties begin the hunt, but something is not quite right to Orville and Agatha. Where has Stu gone? Can our dynamic detectives solve the mystery before it's too late?

**Choldenko, G. (2004). *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.**

*Al Capone Does My Shirts* is a realistic fiction novel for young adults which follows Moose Flanagan's struggle to adjust to life on Alcatraz island when his father accepts a position as a prison guard and maintenance man. The family has moved to be closer to the Esther P. Marinoff School in yet another attempt to cure Natalie Flanagan of her very strange behaviour. Moose, on the verge of adolescence, struggles to find himself while balancing his love for his sister, his frustration with being the neglected child, and fitting in at his new home, which just happens to be right next door to the infamous Al Capone during his stay at Alcatraz in 1935.

**Choldenko, G. (2009). *Al Capone Shines my Shoes*. New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers.**

*Al Capone Shines My Shoes* is the sequel to *Al Capone Does My Shirts* which carries on with the story shortly after Natalie Flanagan has been accepted into the Esther P. Marinoff School. Natalie is making incredible gains in her ability to communicate and attend to other people in the world. There is only one problem – Moose sent a note asking Al Capone to help get Natalie into the school, and now he has received a note saying *your turn*. Is the note really from Al Capone? Can Moose find away to repay his debt without getting anyone in trouble?

**Duane, D. (2002). *A Wizard Alone*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc.**

*A Wizard Alone* is the sixth novel in the fantasy fiction series *Young Wizards*. Kit, a young wizard, is tasked to discover why a very gifted wizard in training has gone missing during his Ordeal. Kit quickly discovers that Darryl, the wizard undergoing the Ordeal, has autism and is being viciously tormented by the Lone One. The Lone One has Darryl trapped in his inner world, and does not appear to be willing to quit his attack until he has possessed Darryl. Why is the Lone One after Darryl? How can Kit help to save Darryl without interfering with the Ordeal? Can Darryl survive?

**Ellis, D. (1999). *Looking for X*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.**

Eleven-year-old Khyber embarks on a desperate search for a friend through first-person narration that illuminates her intelligence and resiliency in an urban Toronto life that looks bleak from the outside but from the inside has a fine balance of edginess, warmth, and adventure. Khyber's strong, matter-of-fact

voice allows the scenes depicting her relationship with autistic twin brothers and the episodes with X, a homeless person, to operate without sentimentality. One of the main conflicts in the novel is that Khyber's mother has decided to nominate David and Daniel for a group home, a plan to which Khyber is resistant.

**Kincaid, G. (2008). *A Dog Named Christmas*. New York, NY: Doubleday Publishing.**

*A Dog Named Christmas* is a young adult fiction novel chronicling the Christmas where Todd McCray, a young man with developmental disabilities reflecting autism, decides to champion the cause of finding homes for dogs who are in the shelter over Christmas. Told from the perspective of his father, a series of flashbacks take the reader through past experiences of hurt, joy, and hope, which explain the family's reluctance to keep their new found dog.

**Lord, C. (2008). *Rules*. New York, NY: Scholastic Paperbacks.**

*Rules* is an intermediate fiction account of 12-year-old Catherine's experiences living with a brother with autism. In her coming of age account she recounts her desire to make new friends with the neighbour girl next door, being pestered by the boy across the street, being frustrated with her parents, and dealing with her brother David who feels that wearing pants is optional. In order to help her brother learn social norms, she creates a list of rules for David, some serious, others humorous. While at an appointment for her brother, she meets another boy with a disability in the waiting room, and to further complicate things she begins to experience new feelings for this local teen.

**MacDonald, A. L.(2009). *Seeing red*. Toronto: Kids Can Press.**

Fourteen-year-old Frankie discovers he can dream the future, his only claim to fame, and yet, agonizingly, he cannot prevent disaster. Caught in confusing circumstances, Frankie presents feelings common to young people striving to control unpredictable and unexpected situations. Descriptions of Joey, a kid with autism whom Frankie babysits and eventually chaperones during a riding therapy class, are rendered with care, as are depictions of other characters with special needs who shift in and out of the therapeutic riding context. Through the course of the novel, Frankie explores his fears, including his fear of horses, as well as a developing friendship.