



Initial guidance for illustrators – putting disabled children In The Picture

Introduction

There are currently 700,000 disabled children in the UK who have virtually no role models in literature. This is a brief guide for illustrators and designers to encourage the inclusion of young disabled children in picture books. It is not designed to be a rigid template – it is about widening the range of possible characters and situations you can portray. It is part of a range of materials devised to inspire and inform you. These materials link to the developing image bank and other information on the website www.childreninthepicture.org.uk.

It is not only disabled children who benefit from being included in picture books. In fact, the lives of all children will be enriched by disabled children being “in the picture”. It will change adult pre-conceptions and give all children the opportunity to view the world in all its rich diversity from the start.

Of course children also need adult role models and it is always worth considering including disabled adults doing things that all adults do – driving cars, working in offices and schools, being artists, and being parents themselves to name just a few. It is also worth bearing in mind the frequent negative portrayals of disabled people that have historically permeated children’s picture books through fairy tales and rhymes. This may be an opportunity to address this and ensure that illustrations are at least neutral.

Illustrator Tony Ross has some comments to start us off:

“I would remind other illustrators that a child may well be disabled, but he or she is a million other things as well – funny, clever, sly, deceitful, resourceful, happy, loyal, determined, a winger, tough, weak, brainy, sensitive, greedy, handsome, pretty, plain, a joy to be with and a pain in the tail, and so on... bit like all of us, eh?”

This leads to a few words from fellow illustrator Jane Ray who wants to add something to counterbalance the technical information that comes next:

“Don’t be afraid to have a go. Play with it! There is still a place for fantasy and celebration!”

General principles

The guiding principles of the In The Picture are based upon the Social Model of Disability and Scope's Children's Charter

1. *Books should be created with all children in mind, for all children to share and enjoy.*
2. *The point is not that disabled children should be the primefocus of stories or pictures: simply they should be there, a natural feature of every child's landscape.*
3. *Images of disabled children should be the norm, in the same way as images of different ethnicities are now the norm.*
4. *Images of disabled children should be used casually or incidentally, so that disabled children are portrayed playing and doing things alongside their non-disabled peers.*
5. *Disabled children should be portrayed as ordinary - and as complex – as other children, not one-dimensional.*
6. *Disabled children are equals and should be portrayed as equals - giving as well as receiving.*
7. *Disabled children should not be portrayed as objects of curiosity, sensationalised or endowed with superhuman attributes.*
8. *Stories should not have “happy ever after” plots that make the child's attitude the problem.*
9. *It is society's barriers that can keep disabled children from living full lives.*
10. *We should always remember that disabled children are children first and like all children have hopes and aspirations just like their peers.*

**Some of these statements have been adapted from:
The 1 in 8 Group, formed after the Invisible Children Conference and
The Children's Society “Understanding disability and language”**

Specific information – some ideas

Children getting about

Wheelchairs in picture books

There are a lot of misperceptions about wheelchairs and their users. They seem to be the most pervasive image to appear as a representation of disability so it is important to know something about how best to include them.

- Wheelchairs are part of a range of mobility equipment young children might be using. They might also use walkers, trikes, bikes and buggies. Children may use different types of chair for different activities. Older children might have a sports chair.
- If wheelchairs are part of the scene, please try to ensure the children using them are equal participants.

- No one is “bound” to a wheelchair, despite what some journalists and writers say. Some wheelchair users transfer into a chair if they are sitting still for a while (e.g. at school, eating, playing or at social events) – others may not. A child might, for instance, have a wheelchair nearby but be sitting on the grass with others. Some use wheelchairs to prevent them from tiring quickly.
- It is a good idea if wheelchairs are included to make the children active participants in the picture. Some children can propel themselves in manual wheelchairs so they don’t have to rely on being pushed by someone else. A child could be driving a powered wheelchair (using a joystick perhaps). Where a child is propelling a wheelchair, you could show friends at their side, as equals, rather than behind them since this might give a confused message.
- Where someone cannot propel themselves, find ways to show (through the text/dialogue or visual clues like pointing perhaps) that they are still making the decisions themselves about where to go and when, rather than any implication that they are just being ‘pushed around’.
- Try for images which challenge the usual perceptions of disabled people and the equipment they use. For example a group of children out cycling together where one or more child has an adapted/power-assisted bike or trike.
- Think about showing communication aids (see later section) attached to chairs.

For useful visual references, try the lively illustrated and photographed Whizz-kidz website <http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/Page.asp>. Not many company websites give good visuals. Part of the issue may be that they are trying to give users a good look at the wheelchairs they sell. The best way of doing this seems to be to show it without someone using it! However, Permobil does have some good pictures (and some not so good pictures too) including a small minority with young users.

<http://www.permobil.com/templates/Page.aspx?id=180>.

It might be possible to visit one of Whizz-kidz mobility centres – one in Newcastle and another in Birmingham to see the range of mobility equipment available. Dealers sometimes have open days - Whizz-Kidz staff have found these extremely useful in the past and would recommend a visit.

Children and symmetry

Hemiplegia affects one side of a child’s body. The most obvious physical result is a varying degree of weakness and lack of control on one side of the body. In one child this may be very obvious (he or she may have little use of one hand, may have an uneven gait or have poor balance), yet in another child it will be so slight that it only shows when attempting specific physical activities. Illustrators need to be bold here and not aim for a “perfect” child.

Support to the legs

A common and little illustrated aid to mobility for some children is a splint (or ankle foot orthosis). These are usually moulded plastic and can have very imaginative designs – even a camouflage motif – to encourage the wearer. Nonetheless seeing them illustrated would be more of an encouragement. There is one illustrator's example in the book, **Hands up for Andie** at this website: <http://www.hemihelp.org.uk/hbbooks.htm>.

More written information about them can be found amongst the factsheets at <http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/factsheets/families/F030230/index.html>

Many children walk with walking frames of various sizes and occasionally sticks and crutches, but young children are more likely to use a tripod as in **Letangs's New Friend** cover picture. These are rarely illustrated. The book **Two Left Feet** (Sullivan and Howells) provides children with a rare glimpse of an illustrated wheeled frame – they can support the child from behind or at the front. Children usually call them “walkers”. This commercial site has some useful images http://www.quest88.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=69&Itemid=46

Visual impairments

“Given the absence of tactile illustrations in mainstream books, the idea of blind and partially sighted children failing to find images of themselves takes on a whole new poignancy.”

Marion Ripley from Clearvision

Clearvision www.clearvisionproject.org works with the tactile Book Advancement Group www.nctd.org.uk/tbag to provide publishers with guidance on making their mainstream picture books accessible to children with a visual impairment. The Right to Read campaign www.rnib.org.uk/rightoread encourages authors and publishers to facilitate production of books in alternative formats (eg large print, audio, Braille and Moon).

The different ways of representing young children who are blind or partially sighted in pictures, ideally as part of a peer group might include:

- Reading a Braille book with their fingers
- Wearing dark glasses
- Using a CCTV but note that the image should be clear that it is a child using a CCTV, so showing very large print on the display so that it doesn't just look like a child playing computer games!
- Using a video magnifier
- Using a Perkins Brailler
- Using a classmate as a sighted guide
- Wearing glasses with thick lenses
- If close-up, the child could be shown with very small eyes (microphthalmia)
- Running with a sighted guide and an elastic wrist band
- Hitting a ball off a batting tee
- Reading a book with large print
- A child with albinism – i.e. pale skin, virtually white hair, eyelashes and eyebrows and very pale eye colour.
- A child wearing a cap with the peak shading the eyes

It is worth noting that children under six in the UK are not likely to have a cane and children under the age of 16 years cannot be guide dog owners.

It is worth avoiding the temptation of using glasses in association with certain character types (e.g. “geeks”) as shorthand for negative portrayal.

Hearing impairments

Pictures should show good communication techniques and re-enforce deaf-friendly practices. The following are some key issues when producing an illustration or photograph to show deaf children appropriately:

- (i) Eye contact – e.g. showing children looking at each other when playing and adults making eye contact and bending down if necessary to a child’s height.
- (ii) Facial expression – can convey much information and is an important element of communication for deaf children. Images should therefore also portray facial expressions appropriate to the setting, activity, or mood.
- (iii) Positioning – consider whether children and adults stand in the image. For example, having children and adults sitting in a circle to show that a deaf child needs to see the faces of the other.
- (iv) Gaining attention – images can show a range of ways to gain deaf children’s attention such as the appropriate use of touch.

In addition:

It’s very important to have a balanced portrayal of deafness to reflect the diversity of communication methods used by deaf children, such as spoken and sign language. For more information see the NDCS publication Understanding Deafness. Images of some of the technological support available are also at www.ndcs.org.uk

Images need to reflect the fact that 40% of deaf children have an additional impairment and should also show a wide range of deaf children e.g. a mixture of ethnicities.

Different types of communication support used by deaf children could also be incorporated such as interpreters and communication support workers. Examples include:

- Illustrations which show communication aids (Communication Support Workers and interpreters) that children commonly use.
- Not all, but the vast majority of deaf children wear hearing aids and/or a cochlear implant and so images need to reflect this.
- Illustrations of hearing aids and cochlear implants should be realistic, of up-to-date equipment and shown being used correctly. This is also true for other technology and equipment used by children and their families. The link below is designed to support this.

- Images of deaf children in domestic settings could be made more representative by the inclusion of appropriate assistive/accessible technology. You wouldn't, of course, necessarily include everything every time, but simple additions (for example, showing sign language or subtitles on a TV screen) would be positive.

Finally, it is good to show hearing and non-hearing children enjoying themselves together.

For further information and publications including images of deaf children and their families can be found on the NDCS website.

Publications produced by the NDCS which are particularly helpful to refer to include:

- Deaf Friendly Nurseries
- Deaf Friendly Teaching
- Happy Birthday Billy
- Helping Your Deaf Child to Learn.

For more information contact the:

National Deaf Children's Society
 15 Dufferin Street
 London
 EC1Y 8UR
 Tel: 020 7490 8656
 Minicom: 020 7490 8656
 Fax: 020 7251 5020
 Email: ndcs@ndcs.org.uk
 Website: www.ndcs.org.uk

Children with a learning disability

Children with a learning disability may or may not have additional physical and/or sensory disabilities, just like their peers. The same guidance for portraying children with these disabilities who do not have a learning disability applies.

Some children with profound and multiple learning disabilities will have a range of complex learning and health issues. They may need a high level of health support. Portraying this group needs particular care and sensitivity. Children with more complex disabilities need to be shown joining in with their peers and to be included in ordinary, everyday activities.

Examples of where children might appear include:

- using oxygen
- having a tube in their nose for food
- using equipment like hoists
- using adapted wheelchairs with moulds to support them
- lying rather than sitting in a wheelchair
- using specially made chairs

Some children might express themselves through sound, facial expression, gesture and eye pointing rather than through words.

They may use objects to express choice or need, for example use a cup to show when they want a drink. Communication books with photographs or symbols may be used.

Some children with a learning disability may have additional communication needs. They may not use words or language in a formal sense, and/or have difficulties in understanding or interpreting expression. Instead they may use a range of methods to support their communication, described in the next section.

Children using communication equipment and techniques without talking

We all use many different ways of communicating. We use our faces, bodies and hands. We smile, shrug our shoulders and gesture. We also use speech. Some disabled children cannot talk, or may only be understood by their families and not other people.

The strategies we use as speakers are also used by disabled children. Facial expression, body movement and gesture may be different because the children may not be able to move as we do. Pictures showing children using 'un-aided' communication need to show children pointing, looking, smiling, frowning and so on.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) uses specific techniques to provide people who cannot speak or who need support to help them make themselves understood, with tools to communicate effectively and includes:

- **Signing** – such as British Sign Language (<http://www.learnbsl.org/>), or sign vocabularies such as the Makaton Vocabulary (check out with Makaton about any intended use of symbols and signs <http://www.makaton.org/resources/creating.htm>) or Signalong (<http://www.signalong.org.uk/> based on BSL).
- **Graphic symbols** – Picture Communication Symbols, Widgit Rebus, Makaton, Blissymbols. Symbols are simple drawings that link directly to a word and can be used in communication books or to show choices. In the UK, Widgit is the main supplier of symbols. Examples of websites using symbols are www.sldonline.org/Kingsbury/Kingsbury.htm and www.atschool.eduweb.co.uk/meldreth/index.html
- **Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)** – these may be simple devices such as Big Macks where only one message can be stored, through to sophisticated devices using synthesised speech with lots of symbols on the display. It is worth noting that most children in the early years use “low-tech” aids – apart from simple switch devices - so they should be included in illustrations sparingly. A high-tech aid is one that needs a plug or a battery.

Showing children using communication aids

Children will commonly use communication charts and books as well as VOCAs (though less often in the under sixes) and computers. All parts of the communication system go with the child all the time so they can participate and interact, ask and answer questions, comment, direct, explain and report, and practise their use of language in a natural and immediate way. Illustrators will need to show the book or board in a position that gives the child access to it with the minimum of effort. This may mean a communication book is used when the child is sitting in supportive seating, or on a wheelchair tray, with a much simpler board to access when lying on the floor or sitting on the sofa with Mum.

Think about how you show a child accessing their communication device; it varies. The child may be using their hands and pointing with a finger or part of the hand, using their eyes and looking directly at symbols or another person may be pointing to the symbols and waiting for the child to indicate that they have pointed to and said the desired word or phrase.

For further information see:

http://www.scope.org.uk/downloads/aac/AACmod%2003_nuts&bolts.pdf

Or to see some photographs a click away go to

http://www.inclusive.co.uk/communication_aids/products/index.shtml

Useful websites

Association of Wheelchair Children

<http://www.wheelchairchildren.org.uk>

Design and Manufacture for Disability (DEMAND)

<http://www.demand.org.uk>

HemiHelp

<http://www.hemihelp.org.uk/>

Whizz-Kidz

<http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk>

You can also visit the Scope links page to access more organisations.

<http://www.scope.org.uk/links/>

Events

A number of free events take place annually around the country.

Independent Living

Usually held in London and Scotland.

<http://www.independentlivingevents.co.uk>

Naidex and Kidequip

Usually held in May in Birmingham, Naidex incorporates Kidequip, an area of the exhibition specifically for children's equipment and information.

<http://www.naidex.co.uk>

Kidz Up North

The only entirely child-focussed event in the country, it is usually held at the Reebok Stadium, near Bolton in November.

<http://www.disabledliving.co.uk>

Scope acknowledges the help and support of everyone who has been involved in the production of this information, including:

RNIB Curriculum Information Officer

RNIB Children's Services Group

Clearvision

HemiHelp

Whizz-kidz

Mencap

National Deaf Children's Society

Communication Aids Project consultant

The 'In The Picture' steering group

Scope Early Years Team

A mention of any product or web link does not constitute endorsement by Scope.

Scope's website address is www.scope.org.uk

This information can be made available in other formats if required eg. large print or tape.

© We are happy for you to make photocopies of any part of this document. However, we would be grateful if you would attach an acknowledgement of the source to any copies.

Time to get equal



About cerebral palsy.
For disabled people achieving equality.

Scope is a registered charity