

## Evaluate Children's Books that Address Disability as Part of Diversity

Evaluated book: *Russ and the Apple Tree Surprise*, by Janet Elizabeth Rickert (1999). Photographs by Pete McGahan

**1) Check the Illustrations** Look for Stereotypes. This book uses pictures to illustrate the story of Russ, a child with Down syndrome, who helps his family bake an apple pie. There are no stereotypes promoted, with the exception of a two-parent home and older grandparents.

Look for Tokenism. Russ is depicted as a genuine individual with his own distinct features.

Who's Doing What? Russ is depicted as a leader in this book. He helps his family bake an apple pie.

**2) Check the Story Line.** Standard for Success. Russ is successful simply by helping out his family. There is no comparison of other children or "typical" behavior. Russ is a child who does not have to exhibit any extraordinary qualities.

Resolution of Problems. Russ wanted a swing set in his backyard, but all he had in his backyard was a big apple tree. In this story Russ, through the help of his family, learns how much fun an apple tree can be.

Role of Person With a Disability. Russ's achievements are based on his own initiative and intelligence. Success is also due to his relationship with his family. Although Russ does have Down syndrome, it makes no difference to the story. A child or adult could read this story, without closely looking at the pictures, and not even realize that Russ has a disability.

**3) Look at the Lifestyles.** Russ is not represented as being at all different than any other child. The illustrations and text offer genuine insights into Russ and his family.

**4) Weigh the Relationships Between People.** Russ possesses power and makes important decisions, as do other members of his family.

**5) Consider the Effects on Child's Self-Image.** This story does not limit any child's aspirations or self-concept. Russ is a person with whom any child could readily identify as a positive and constructive role model.

**6) Consider the Authors or Illustrator's Background.** Janet Elizabeth Rickert is Russ's mother. She tells her stories from her own first-hand experiences of being his mother. She is also a member of the National Association for Down Syndrome and thus has an understanding of issues of Down syndrome. Many of Russ's real family members are photographed in this book.

**7) Check Out the Author's Perspective.** Being the mother of Russ, Janet Rickert has very personal and honest perspective of her book. Her perspective strengthens the value of her written work.

**8) Watch for Loaded Words.** There are no loaded words in this book.

**9) Look for the Copy Date and the Target Age.** The book was written in 1999, and is intended for 3-7 year olds. The book uses current terminology. Furthermore there is a good match between its target audience and the developmental level of its content and language.