



Reading Guide

The poetry in the book *I Am Me* by Katelyn S. Herrygers and illustrated by Ashely Bryant is all about helping readers recognize and believe in who they are and ultimately, that who we are is good and meant to be.

This charmingly illustrated book gently teaches children that we are all unique, and although we are different, we are all meant to be.

Before Reading

ASK: What makes you who you are?

SHOW: Look at the picture on the cover of the book. Name the things that you see. Share, write, or draw a few of your most favorite things.

CONNECT: Share some of your favorite things with a partner. How are you alike? How are you different? You each have a very special place in the world because there's only one you. "You are you and I am me, just exactly how life is meant to be." Understanding ourselves helps us to connect to one another. When we give of ourselves, we are giving a one-of-a-kind gift.

During Reading

ASK: During the story, the pages show a progression of ages and scenes. What is the same on every page? [I am me, and that is all I need to be.]

SHOW: Find the pictures in the book that show you have a superpower – that superpower is simply being you! [Students might point out superhero capes or masks or dolls]

SHOW: Find the pictures in the book that have three arrows. Talk about what the three arrows represent – Trisomy 21, three copies of the 21st chromosome. Chromosomes make up our bodies. We all have them and all chromosomes are similar, yet different.

CONNECT: If you could be anything in the world, who would you be? [Goal student answer = Me!]

After Reading

ASK: How did this book make you feel?

SHOW: When we think about ourselves and one another, we must recognize that we are a community. A community is made up of a group of people who either share common interest or are a part of a common experience. We are individuals but we are also connected in community. We are part of the community of the world. When we accept ourselves and one another as we are, the world becomes a kinder place. We are all here, we are all super, and we are all who we were meant to be.

CONNECT: Have you ever said, "I want to be like *so and so* when I grow up"? It's good to have goals and dreams and to work hard to achieve things in your life. But it's also important to remember that you are worthy, have value, and are full of potential each second of every day. When we recognize that we have a greatness inside of us, a superpower, we show a greater understanding for everyone around us. "We are all different, our shapes and our sizes, our color of skin and hair. But still we're the same and we need one another to love and listen and care."



Suggested Activities

- *I Am Me* poster: Let students create a small poster about who they are. They can use markers, pencils, magazine images, newspaper clippings, craft materials, etc. Have students do a gallery walk to view one another's posters and then have each student share their *I Am Me* poster with the group. Ask students to talk about two or three similarities they noticed in peers' posters. Point out the fact that although we are individual and unique, and who we are meant to be, we are still part of a larger community that requires respect, love, and care. Share in a visible hallway and on Social Media #MeantToBe #IAmMe @iammemeanttobe on Instagram or @superjaybrand on Facebook
- *I Am Me* doll as a classroom mascot. Read the book *I Am Me* and encourage students to oversee the classroom *I Am Me* doll throughout the school year. Take the *I Am Me* doll on field trips or incorporate the doll in other class activities. Encourage students to take photos and write or share a story about their time spent with the *I Am Me* doll. Post student pictures and stories in the classroom as a reminder of the way we all have similar experiences, and yet, each experience is also unique.
- For WDSO (March 21 each year) encourage students to wear brightly colored, mismatched, fun socks to school. Talk about the importance of Person First language (e.g., 'Jameson has Down syndrome' rather than 'Jameson's Downs' or 'Down syndrome boy') and read the *I Am Me* book. Note that generalizing people by their disability is disrespectful. Remember, each person with autism or Down syndrome is their own person. No two people are the same. All people have their own abilities, their own strengths and weaknesses, and their own likes and dislikes. The same is true for any disability! #LotsofSocks #MeantToBe
- To build community and engage students in a morning routine, work together to create a classroom mantra and incorporate the "I am me and that is all I need to be message". Give one student a chance to lead the mantra for the class each week of the school year.
- Connect with another classroom and allow your students to read/be read a favorite book with a new friend. Read *I Am Me* to the whole group and talk about how we grow in community when we share something as simple as reading a story.

Other FREE Resources and Activities

- Consider using resources and activities from the Disability Awareness Toolkit via Learning to Give - teach lessons that build empathy for people with physical and mental differences. Lesson plans, project ideas, and community partners help students understand abilities and strengths of people who are differently abled. (<https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/disability-awareness>)
- Consider using resources and activities from the Able-Ness Toolkit via Learning to Give - Students with differing abilities and skill levels can experience greater potential in general education, peer to peer relationships, and for a productive and engaging life after school years, if they have support and encouragement in place. This toolkit provides information, activities, and service-learning project ideas to help students of different levels and abilities participate in life skill opportunities with philanthropy themes. (<https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/able-ness-toolkit>)
- Consider using resources and activities from the Establishing a Culture of Kindness Toolkit via Learning to Give - this toolkit provides lesson plans, project ideas, and background information related to promoting kindness and anti-bullying. (<https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/service-learning-toolkit-grow-kindness>)



What is Down syndrome?

In every cell in the human body there is a nucleus, where genetic material is stored in genes. Genes carry the codes responsible for all of our inherited traits and are grouped along rod-like structures called chromosomes. Typically, the nucleus of each cell contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, half of which are inherited from each parent. Down syndrome occurs when an individual has a full or partial extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material alters the course of development and causes the characteristics associated with Down syndrome. A few of the common physical traits of Down syndrome are low muscle tone, small stature, an upward slant to the eyes, and a single deep crease across the center of the palm – although each person with Down syndrome is a unique individual and may possess these characteristics to different degrees, or not at all.

Additional information via *National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS)*: <https://www.ndss.org/about-down-syndrome/down-syndrome/>

What is World Down syndrome Day?

World Down Syndrome Day (WSDS), March 21st, is a global awareness day which has been officially observed by the United Nations since 2012. The date for WSDS is March 21 each year and selected to signify the uniqueness of the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down syndrome. WSDS is a day to encourage friends all over the world to choose their own activities and events to help raise awareness of what Down syndrome is, what it means to have Down syndrome, and how people with Down syndrome play a vital role in our lives and communities.

Additional information via World Down Syndrome Day: <https://www.worlddownsyndromeday2.org/>

October is Down syndrome Awareness Month

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