

Mary S. Randolph. An Exploration of the Relationships of Characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Young Adult and Upper Elementary Level Literature. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. July, 2008. 110 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm

This paper explores the relationships between characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other characters in young adult and upper elementary level literature. Eight books were selected for close examination. Using a grounded theory approach, I sought to determine with whom the characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders interacted, which were the most significant relationships, whether traits consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorders affected the characters' relationships, and whether the relationships presented were reciprocal. Were the characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders presented in active roles, or were they primarily receivers of care?

Examination of the texts revealed that the most significant relationships characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders engaged in were with peers and siblings. Autistic traits such as persistence, literalism, and rule-following did complicate relationships. Characters with autism were primarily receivers of care; characters with Asperger's Syndrome were active, reciprocal participants in relationships.

Headings:

Handicapped in Literature

Children's Literature / Evaluation

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS OF CHARACTERS WITH AUTISM
SPECTRUM DISORDERS IN YOUNG ADULT AND UPPER ELEMENTARY
LEVEL LITERATURE

by
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Introduction

Over the past decade there has been an incredible increase in the number of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Not surprisingly, there has also been an explosion in the number of children's books in which these conditions are featured. More children's books have been published since the year 2000 dealing with these disorders than the total number of children's books ever published on this subject prior to that year.

There has been discussion in the literature of some of these books. It is widely recognized that children's fiction can have a profound effect upon its readers, and researchers have looked at some of these books in conjunction with books about other developmental disabilities in an attempt to ascertain the quality of the literature and the characterization of the individuals with developmental disabilities in the stories.

The real power in stories about the disabled, however, is in their ability to model relationships. As more and more children are faced with neighbors, classmates, friends with Autism Spectrum Disorders, is the literature modeling relationships which will help promote understanding?

The Literature

Definition and Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders

The United States' Center for Disease Control defines autism spectrum disorders as, "...developmental disabilities that cause substantial impairments in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors and interests" (Department of HHS). Although autism spectrum disorders have only recently received wide recognition, the conditions which populate this spectrum have been recognized for a long time. "Swiss psychiatrist, Eugen Bleuler, used the term 'autism' in the early 1900s to describe individuals who exhibit fundamental disturbances of contact with the social world" (Dyches et al. 211). Two Austrian-born medical professionals, Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger, suggested a new diagnostic category based upon Bleuler's work (Dyches et al. 211). Kanner's autism and Asperger's syndrome were identified in the 1940s (Department of HHS). Over the years there has been disagreement as to the symptoms which characterize autism. However, the core characteristics remain those cited by the CDC, worded by Dyches as, "...deficits in social interactions and communication skills and restricted or unusual behavioral repertoires" (Dyches et al. 211). These are the characteristics which identify autism spectrum disorders.

There are, however, a wide range of symptoms and behaviors exhibited by individuals with autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified, and Asperger syndrome. Although all of these conditions begin before the age of three and last throughout the individual's lifetime, they differ greatly in many symptoms. ASDs occur in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. They are found, however, four times as often in boys than in girls. Thinking and learning abilities range

from extremely gifted to severely challenged (Department of HHS). Therefore, although individuals with ASDs share defining traits, "...students with autism are also extraordinarily different from one another ... Ranging in IQ from profoundly mentally retarded to gifted, in behavior from passive to hyperactive, in personality from gentle to explosive, this group requires many adaptations to meet their individual needs" (Mesibov 344).

So why is it important that we understand and attempt to serve this disparate group of individuals? In part because they are a large and growing percentage of the disabled identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law ensures that children throughout the U.S. with disabilities will receive necessary services. "IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities" (IDEA). The incidence of disabilities identified as requiring assistance by IDEA rose from 8.11 / 100 to 9.07 / 100 people ages 6-21 from 1993 to 2006. During the same time period, in the same age group, the incidence of individuals with autism served by IDEA jumped thusly:

	Autism Ages 6-21	
Year	Individuals	Percentage
1993	18,696	.39%
2001	98,032	1.69%
2006	223,395	3.73%

(IDEA)

Obviously, this rapidly growing segment of individuals requiring assistance is worth the effort to understand and serve in the most effective manner possible.

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, which later became IDEA, “handicapped” children have been deinstitutionalized and educated in as normal a school setting as possible (U.S. Office of Special Education). People assumed that, “...handicapped children really aren’t all that much different from children in general and need to be accepted in the classroom like any others” (Harrill et. al. 3). As a result of this legislation and further refinements in the interpretation of the best possible service to the disabled, service to children on the autistic spectrum can vary from integration and mainstreaming, in which students have a special education setting as their base and are moved into regular settings when they are likely to be successful, to full inclusion, which assumes that the child will be based in a regular classroom with assistance as needed (Mesibov, 337). In either case, teachers and students alike will be working with and beside increasing numbers of students with autism spectrum disorders, and it behooves all concerned to understand the unique nature of students with these disorders.

Value of Literature in Promoting Understanding and Acceptance of Disabilities

As greater numbers of children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders, more families, daycare programs and classrooms will be affected. Proximity (regular interaction with) and the provision of factual information about disabilities help children to understand their disabled classmates to some extent (Nasatir 3). More than this is necessary, however, to promote true understanding and acceptance.

Studies have shown that attempts to reduce rejection behaviors by proximity alone or information alone also tend to be unsuccessful. However, when contact is sensitively arranged and is buttressed by appropriate cognitive and affective understanding, the probability of acceptance is enhanced. That is, as positive, direct personal encounters are structured and information that normalizes and clarifies is internalized, rejection decreases. (Baskin and Harris 48)

Thus, for true acceptance of diversity to take place, information must be provided in such a way that it can be grasped emotionally, as well as intellectually. It is important that a concerted effort be made to actively support the development of positive attitudes towards children with disabilities in children while they are still young. Studies show that negative attitudes about people with disabilities can be formed at a very young age and that they may be more easily modified when dealt with earlier, rather than later (Nasatir 9).

Books, especially fiction books, are uniquely suited to promoting emotional, as well as intellectual understanding. Barbara Baskin and Karen Harris, in the introduction to their seminal research on the handling of disability in literature claim, “Fiction, we believe, is the literary genre that permits the widest latitude for the full expression of contemporary perceptions and values... While little control can be exerted over the reality of the disability, changes in the quality of the social context can have an immediate, as well as long term, beneficent impact” (Baskin and Harris Xv). Thus, attitudes and values can effectively be transmitted through the medium of fiction.

In depicting the human dilemma, a literary account is often more vivid than even our everyday experiences because essentials are winnowed from the ephemeral and highlighted. We are left with the human essence, which carries a meaning far richer and more poignant than one sees in the helter skelter of fortuitous observation. (Harrill et. al. 3)

So, the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the use of fiction to promote acceptance of differences in ability are sound.

If promoting understanding and acceptance is easiest at an early age, and fiction is the ideal vehicle by which to transmit desired attitudes towards the disabled, picture books are an important first step. John Pardeck reminds us that young children love

books with many colorful pictures. Picture books, he says, "...often reflect the feelings and thoughts possessed by children about an issue; children can project their inner feelings and perceptions onto the books' characters. This process helps them reveal their own conflicts in a nonthreatening way" (Pardeck and Murphy 80). A study by Favazza and Odom showed that kindergarten children enjoyed listening to and discussing books about children with disabilities, but that materials were hard to find (Nasatir 4). A concerted effort should be made to find appropriate materials, however, because as Baskin and Harris note

If books are to be used effectively for the integration of exceptional children, then a deliberate, concerted program needs development. The optimal time to begin building positive attitudes is in early childhood before stereotypes have crystallized. Reading aloud, discussion, and role playing should all start in the primary grades. (Baskin and Harris 64)

The value of such activities is recognized in today's inclusive classrooms. Professionals recommend that teachers use children's literature to reduce prejudice and teach children about diversity (Smith-D'Arezzo 75). Forgan and Gonzalez-DeHass discovered that in today's inclusive classrooms "...literature about disabilities has a specific and valuable purpose: it can help students become more accepting of individual differences" (Jaquinta 209). Furthermore, as children grow older, they can develop empathy and insight into the unique problems faced by the disabled (Pardeck and Murphy 79). The use of fiction at all grade levels helps to provide a safe distance between the child and the issue at hand; discussing a fictional character is easier than discussing one's own attitudes and beliefs (Stamps 26).

Of course, in order to be helpful in these ways, books must present an accurate and positive view of disabled characters. Much classic children's literature presents

characters with disabilities in a distorted fashion, as evil, subhuman or pitiful, or, conversely, as superhuman or overly virtuous (Dyches, Prater and Council 7). With the advent of mainstreaming authors began depicting children with mental retardation and / or developmental disabilities (such as autism spectrum disorders) as living at home, attending normal schools, and developing friendships. But these were rare. Books featuring characters with autism spectrum disorders were even less common. There was one in the 1960s, five in the 1970s, two in the 1980s, and 9 in the 1990s (Dyches, Prater and Council 9-10).

With so few books to choose from featuring disabled characters who were interacting with their peers on a regular basis, and fewer still of those with developmental disabilities, it is no surprise that educators found it difficult to choose appropriate materials. Teachers in the Favazza and Odom study of disability literature in kindergarten classes cited lack of knowledge of criteria to use in selecting appropriate materials as one of their main reasons for not having such literature in the classroom (Nasatir 4). These educators are right to be concerned about the impact of their choices.

Books that children read provide continuous stimuli through their formative years, and latent and overt messages in stories of exceptional individuals accumulate to form subsequent perceptions. Literary presentations that avoid distortion and that accurately reflect the reality of impairment help readers separate the disability from the false superstructure imposed by society. (Baskin and Harris Xv)

Heim elaborates,

When our students read fiction of high literary quality that conveys experiences of people with intellectual disabilities, our students can gain understanding and insight into this previously unknown and frightening world. Consequently, the vision of inclusion as true interaction can advance towards reality. (Heim 289-295)

There appears to be agreement among the experts that carefully chosen books have the power to foster understanding and acceptance and to shatter stereotypes.

Evaluating Children's Fiction Featuring Characters with Developmental Disabilities

While there appears to be a consensus among experts concerning the value of high-quality children's literature in promoting understanding, acceptance, and full inclusion of children with disabilities, there is limited information and some disagreement as to how such literature should be evaluated. One of the earliest checklists I found was in Juanita Harrell's article comparing children's literature with disabled characters produced before and after Public Law 94-142 (later renamed IDEA). The points she thought were important to consider in her evaluation include:

- frequency of appearance of disabled characters
- portrayal at various reading levels (applied to group of books – not individual titles)
- accurate depiction of disabled – not stereotyped
- disabled individuals functioning in least restrictive environment possible
- nondiscriminatory language
- interactions between handicapped, non-handicapped
- appropriate role models for disabled
- emphasis on uniqueness of all individuals
- disabled person has a purpose in story – not tokenism
- illustrations offer realistic, accurate and sensitive portrayals of the disabled

(Harrill et. al. 4)

These are still important points to consider when evaluating literature which features disabled characters. As we as a society have moved closer to full inclusion, however, concerns about least restrictive environment and interactions between the handicapped and non-handicapped have faded somewhat.

In a more recent article Smith-D'Arezzo suggests that disability literature should be judged using guidelines similar to those used to judge multicultural literature. Therefore, she concentrates her analysis more pointedly upon the character with the disability. She suggests that it is important for the characters to be well-rounded, realistic, and presented in a positive light (although not as flawless). She considers the quality of the literature itself to be important as well, insisting upon well developed structural elements. She also considers it significant that the literature strike a positive emotional chord in the teacher (she was concentrating on in-class use of these materials) and that it present special education issues accurately (Smith-D'Arezzo, 76-77).

Nasatir also sees disability literature as a subset of diversity literature. She developed her checklist for evaluating disability literature by modifying the "Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Sexism and Racism" (Derman-Sparks & Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force, 1989). The modified checklist became "Nine Ways to Evaluate Children's Books that Address Disability as a Part of Diversity". Her concerns include:

- Illustrations – stereotypes, tokenism, who's doing what?
- Story Line - standards for success, resolution of problems, role of person with disability
- Lifestyles

- Relationships between people
- Effects on child's self-image
- Author or illustrator's background
- Author's perspective
- Loaded words
- Copyright date and target age (Nasatir 5)

The copyright date and target age harken back to Harrill's division of the literature into pre-inclusive legislature and post-inclusive legislature, emphasizing the importance of timely information. The emphasis on the author or illustrator's background is in keeping with Smith-D'Arezzo's insistence upon special education issues being treated properly. An author should have some experience and/or expertise with the featured disability in order to ensure realistic depictions are being presented.

In addition to guidelines for evaluating disability literature in general, there are also a range of guidelines specifically designed to evaluate literature which features developmentally disabled characters. Developmental disabilities include mental retardation, autism spectrum disorders, and a few less common disorders. Heim is particularly concerned that in the evaluation of this type of literature that one not use the disabled character simply as a catalyst for the growth of other characters, and that the disability be confronted directly, not swept under the rug. She also cites accuracy of information, lack of stereotypes, and literary quality as important characteristics to look for in literature dealing with developmental disabilities (Heim 289-295).

Dyches and Prater go into significantly more detail in their listing of evaluative measures. They list quality of literature (including theme, characterization, setting, plot,

point of view and style), illustrations (including story interpretation, style, text enhancement, quality art, artistry and layout and design) and the portrayal of the individual with mental retardation or a developmental disability (are the individual's strengths, social issues, and struggles accurately portrayed?). They also include the criteria used by the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award (an award given biennially to the best picture book and the best children's fiction book featuring a character with MRDD). These include literary quality, illustrations, and sensitive portrayal of the character(s) with MRDD. Sensitive portrayal is further broken down into:

- Accuracy (not superhuman or subhuman, avoids stereotypes, uses first-person language)
- Exemplary practices (emphasizes similarities between disabled and not disabled, integrated settings)
- Emotional reaction - promotes empathy, not pity and acceptance, not ridicule
- Overall impact – promotes positive image, respect, self-determination and contributions of MRDD character (Dyches, Prater and Council 79)

There are clearly numerous issues and considerations involved in evaluating children's literature which features characters with developmental disabilities.

In other studies, Dyches and Prater focused primarily upon the characterization of individuals with developmental disabilities (Dyches and Prater; Dyches, Prater and Cramer). They analyze relationships between the characters with developmental disabilities and others, changes in the characters with and without developmental disabilities, and special topics related to developmental disabilities such as schooling and education, recreation, and residence. These are descriptive studies, yet they report

positive trends in characterization. The authors do, however, encourage authors of future books to "...add depth and multidimensionality to the characters with DD. Characters should be shown making deliberate, significant choices and serving more as protectors, teachers and caregivers, and engaging in "inclusionary recreational activities" (Dyches and Prater 215).

The one paper I found which suggests criteria for the evaluation of children's fiction specifically related to autism spectrum disorders is by Nicole Walsh. The focus of her thesis is writing children's fiction about autism, but she does provide a rubric for evaluating children's books about autism. Her list does not vary significantly from criteria specified for fiction about characters with less specific disabilities. She includes seven criteria in her rubric:

- Portrays characters in a realistic manner
- Builds on character's strengths
- Includes variety of settings
- Uses person first language
- Encourages acceptance and respect
- Creates an interesting story (encompasses all recognized measures of quality literature)
- Quality illustrations (Walsh and Berdan 46-47)

In summary, it is clear that the dignity and personhood of the disabled individual is of primary concern to all evaluators. Traditional measures of the quality of the literature are likewise important to all evaluators. Accuracy in the depiction of the condition, strengths and flaws must be maintained. Disabled characters must not be in

the story solely to act as a catalyst for growth in a non-disabled character, but should show growth themselves. Ideally, readers should develop feelings of empathy or even fondness for the disabled characters, seeing them as potential friends. Without making light of their condition, or sweeping it under the rug, the disabled should be seen first as complex human beings, who have more similarities to the non-disabled than differences from them. Well-crafted stories about disabled characters break down walls of misunderstanding and fear, and promote understanding and communication.

Research Question

Realizing the tremendous potential well-written, accurate children's literature has to help promote acceptance and understanding of the disabled, I decided to closely examine children's literature featuring characters with Autism spectrum disorders. Since the literature shows that a primary deficit for individuals with Autism spectrum disorders is in the area of social interactions or relationships, I decided to closely examine the relationships the individuals with Autism spectrum disorders have with other characters in the books studied. The questions I plan to answer include:

With whom do the characters with Autism spectrum disorders interact?

How much real communication occurs? How do autistic traits block or enhance communication?

What is the balance of power between the characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other characters? For example, are individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders simply acted upon, or do they play an active or even leading role in their relationships?

Selection of Books

In contrast to the years prior to 2000, since the year 2000 there have been many books written which feature characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders. In order to locate as many as possible, I searched my local libraries first, and then I proceeded to search Books in Print and OCLC Firstsearch for children's and young adult literature identifiable by a keyword search as being concerned with autism or Asperger's Syndrome. Making extensive use of interlibrary loan, I was able to acquire over thirty books.

After reading these books, I determined that the young adult and upper elementary books were best suited to my purpose. Greater length and complexity allowed for the development of more involved relationships than those possible in picture books and early readers. Therefore, I limited my analysis to eight young adult and upper elementary fiction books. The eight books I chose included four characters with autism and four characters with Asperger's Syndrome as primary characters. One also has a secondary character with Asperger's Syndrome; the primary character in Buster and the Amazing Daisy plays a minor role in Wishing on the Midnight Star. Two of the characters with Asperger's Syndrome are female; the other six characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders are male. One of the books I chose, The Silent Boy, has a historical perspective. The disabled character is a thirteen year-old white male mute. Another of my choices, A Wizard Alone, is science fiction. A Wizard Alone is the only young adult or upper elementary book I found featuring a non-white character with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The protagonist in A Wizard Alone is an eleven year-old African-American. The other six books are modern, realistic stories featuring disabled characters

ranging in age from four to eighteen. These books were purposefully selected to encompass characters with different levels of disabilities engaging in a wide variety of relationships.

Methods

Since this is an area of research which has not been explored, I did not approach this body of literature with a hypothesis to be proven or disproven. Although previous studies have attempted to categorize relationships between characters with Developmental Disabilities and other characters, they have not explored the dynamics, the interactions, which characterize these relationships. Therefore, I needed to work directly from the data using a grounded theory approach to find out what types of relationships exist and how they are presented. This research method was first employed by Glaser and Strauss, and presented in detail in The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss). The constant comparative method they enumerate is "...an iterative process involving concurrently collecting and analysing data with the ultimate aim of generating a theory (during the actual research) that is 'grounded' in the natural context in which the inquiry takes place" (Priest 31). The "natural context" in which relationships are developed in literature are the conversations between characters and / or direct interactions between characters. Therefore, my basic data consists of transcripts from each of the eight books documenting all identifiable conversations and pertinent encounters between characters.

The next step in grounded theory research is to code the data. The process begins with "open coding". Open coding consists of assigning labels to many individual phenomena which may have meaning and relevance. This is an iterative process during which the researcher attempts to label phenomena in a consistent fashion, identifying as many appropriate labels as necessary to include all relevant phenomena (Moghaddam). Going through my books line by line led to the identification of forty-seven categories of

interaction between the characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders and the characters with whom they were interacting. These are enumerated in Appendix B.

As one progresses through the data, relationships emerge among the codes identified. The terms or themes used in open coding logically arrange themselves into related blocks which represent higher-level concepts. This is axial coding, "...the appreciation of concepts in terms of their dynamic interrelationships" (Moghaddam). In my case, there were five overarching themes to consider.

In order to develop a theory of relationship, to describe the dynamics of the relationships depicted, I had to take another step. I had to correlate the themes identified with a core concept. This is known as selective coding (Moghaddam). I examined the types of relationships in which different types of interactions occurred, and the frequency with which they occurred in those relationships. This examination of the data in relation to a core concept, in this case the relational interactions between individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and specific categories of other characters, created relationships among the categories and integrated them, allowing the development of a coherent theory.

Analysis

In order to assess the types of relationships individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders have with other characters in the books I selected for study, it was first necessary to determine the types and numbers of characters with whom they interact. The results of this analysis are tabulated in Appendix A. I identified six categories of people with whom the disabled individual interacts. These categories are: others with Autism Spectrum Disorders; Parents; Siblings; Peers; Leaders; and Others.

The first three categories are clear, requiring no explanation. Peers I define as friends or people of a similar age with whom the character relates on a regular basis. A leader is a person who has some authority or responsibility with respect to the character with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. This can be a nanny, a teacher, a principal, or, in the case of Wild Orchid, a park ranger who mentors Taylor, an eighteen-year old girl with Asperger's Syndrome. The category other is a catchall for people who play small roles in the story but nevertheless interact in some way with the primary character. Some of these figures include neighbors, a woman in the dentist's office, a couple out in a boat, etc.

Among the eight books there is only one instance of two individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders in relationship. In Wishing on the Midnight Star, Nic and Daisy both have Asperger's Syndrome, and they are introduced to each other by Brianna, Daisy's cousin.

“Hi, Brianna,” he said. “Do you want to see my nature collection?”
 “Uhhh, this is my cousin –” Brianna started to say.
 “I want to see it,” Daisy interrupted as she stood up. “Do you really have a mummified frog? I found a beautifully preserved alligator lizard under a sack of cement. It was flat and dry with only a slight lingering odor.”
 She didn't seem shy now.

“Really?” Nic answered Daisy. “Do you still have it? I’d like to see that. We could add it to my collection.”

“Well, it’s part of my collection, actually, but maybe we could trade. Do you have any complete mammal skeletons?”

“No, but I have two hummingbirds’ nests...” (78)

“Cool,” Daisy said. Then she and Nic walked inside, chattering like old friends. (79)

Although Alex, Nic’s brother, and Brianna are somewhat nonplussed by the ease with which Nic and Daisy communicate, it is clear that they have common interests and enjoy each other’s company. Unfortunately, due to the home and school situations of the other characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders, there are no comparable relationships in any of the other books. Many of their other relationships don’t flow as easily, yet the characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders communicate information, feelings, etc. freely. In spite of the fact that three of the characters whose relationships I examined are nonverbal or close to, the eight primary characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders are responsible for 48% of the communications I coded.

Parents represent 16% of the people with whom the characters with ASDs interact, and they are responsible for 11% of the communications. Relationships with parents are significant in seven of the eight books. In the eighth, A Wizard Alone, Darryl’s parents are mentioned but they do not appear in the story. In Wild Orchid, The Boy who Ate Stars, and Wishing on the Midnight Star, there is a single female parent. In Buster and the Amazing Daisy and Haze, both parents are in the home and communicate with the character with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In The Silent Boy, both parents are in the home, but only the father interacts with Jacob. In Clay, the story of two children kidnapped by their mother, Tommy relates to both parents, but sequentially, as he is not reunited with his father until close to the end of the story. The relationship between

Tommy, an autistic boy who barely speaks and exhibits all of the signs of severe autism and his mother is truly bizarre. She refuses to acknowledge that there is anything unusual about him. His sister Elsie is concerned when, after yet another move, Tommy is just sitting in the middle of the floor.

“He’s really upset,” I said. “I mean *really*.”

“Oh, he’ll be fine. My Tommy’s a tough one, right, Tom?” said Mom.

“Anyway, moving’s a bit of a pain for everyone.”

“But he’s not like everyone,” I said. “And he shouldn’t have to do this. He ought to be able to stay put. He ought to be able to have friends and go to school. And he ought to be able to go to a doctor if that’s what he needs – to see what’s *wrong* with him.” (50-51)

This brings us to siblings. The three books in which a sibling is present are Clay, Wishing on the Midnight Star and The Silent Boy. In Clay and in Wishing on the Midnight Star, the siblings interact more, and share a more intense and richer relationship with the character with an Autism Spectrum Disorder than any other character in the book. These are complex relationships. These two siblings, only 3% of the characters with whom the ASD characters interact, are responsible for almost 8% of the communications. In The Silent Boy, the sister, Peggy, does not live with Jacob and has limited contact with him. She lives with, and works for, Katy’s family. While Katy’s mother is having a baby, though, Peggy takes Katy to her home. Jacob, who doesn’t speak but does understand, gives Katy a kitten. Peggy is proud of her brother, and she lets him know. “Jacob?” she called gently to her brother. “You made Katy very happy.”

“Thank you, Jacob,” I said again. (110)

Peers represent a mixed crowd. Only Tommy, the autistic young boy in *Clay*, has no interaction with peers. The fact that he is on the run with his mother and sister appears to be the cause of this phenomenon, as even more the equally impaired characters

in The Boy who Ate Stars and The Silent Boy interact significantly with peers. 31% of the characters with whom the character with Autism Spectrum Disorder interact are classified as peers. They are responsible for 18% of the interactions. Sometimes, they are curious and provide the character with ASD an opportunity to explain his condition, a literary technique which allows the author to educate the reader, as well as the peer. In Buster and the Amazing Daisy, Daisy explains:

“No – I was in a class for AW-tistic kids,” Daisy explained. “You know, for kids who have autism.”

“Autism? What’s autism?” Laurel asked.

“Well, it’s hard to explain. It’s like, umm...there’s a variety of things...”

Daisy looked up at the sky as though the right words hung there in the clouds. “It’s like something that you’re born having and it may run in your family – like your aunt or uncle may have it. Your way of seeing the world and other people is a little different than most people’s.”

“I still don’t understand,” Laurel said, shaking her head. “You seem pretty much just like any other kid to me. You don’t look any different. How are you different?” (53)

Leaders are individuals in who have authority or strong influence over the characters with ASDs. They represent 13% of the people with whom the character with ASD interact and they are responsible for 10% of the coded interactions. In general they provide guidance and support as expected, but in Haze one of the leader figures proves false, although she redeems herself later in the story. Miss Adonia, who has been Seb’s computer teacher and has been instrumental in getting him diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, appears at his house with a man and they begin going through his computer files.

"I guess you could call us Internet detectives. Our job is to prevent and intercept Internet crime."

"Both of you?" Seb asked, looking at Miss Adonia. "You're not a teacher?"

"Well I am, but I've branched into net security."
 "So you're only here because you think I crack software." Seb hurt inside.
 Betrayed again, by someone he trusted. "Why do you think it was me?"
 (105)

Others is a category which denotes only cursory involvement in the story and with the character with ASD. Therefore, although they represent 34% of the characters with whom the characters with ASDs interact, they are responsible for only 5% of the communications. Sometimes, they provide a unique opportunity for the author to explore the difference in perspective between the character with ASD and others. In Wild Orchid, Taylor jumps into the water to avoid a bear and she is picked up by a couple in a boat.

"Good thing it's a hot day," she said. "Are you afraid of bears?" I nodded.
 "Is it okay that I am in your boat?" I asked.
 "Well, sure," the man said.
 "It won't sink because of weight restrictions?"
 "No, we're fine," said the woman, laughing and handing me her coat. I wiped my face on it. I don't know why she was laughing.
 "Where would you like me to take you?" asked the man. (101-102)

To summarize, altogether there are 62 people with whom the characters with ASDs interact at least on a cursory level. One is another child with Asperger's Syndrome (2%), eight are parents (16%), three are siblings (4%), nineteen are peers (31%), eight are leaders (13%) and twenty-one are classified as others (34%). By level of interaction, however, the numbers are quite different. For the purposes of analysis, the interactions of the one character with ASD who is not the primary character (Daisy in Wishing on the Midnight Star) is grouped on the interactions page with the primary characters. As a group, that segment, individuals with ASDs, was responsible for 48% of the interactions

coded. Parents are responsible for 11%, siblings for 8%, peers 18%, leaders 10%, and others 5%.

The numbers of interactions with different types of people are important. Even more important, however, are the types of relational interactions noted between the characters with ASDs and other characters. The types of interactions I discovered in my line-by-line study of the texts naturally fell into five categories. These categories are communication, sociability, helping / hurting, expressing emotions, and compliance / assertion.

The category “communication” is comprised of encounters characterized primarily by attempts to elicit or impart information. Apologizing, when there has been a breakdown of communication and overt trust and distrust issues fall into this category. 45% of the interactions I recorded fall into this category, by far the most populous category of the five.

Sociability is the second category I identified. In general, people make a lot of social noises when they interact with one another. These are not real exchanges of information, but social grease which is expected. “How are you?” “Fine thank-you,” is one of the most common examples of this. Failure to engage in such activity when it is expected is anti-social behavior. Avoiding such interchanges, and denial of situations also fall into this category of sociability. This category accounts for 9% of the interactions I noted.

The third category I call helping / hurting. These are interchanges which serve a useful purpose, such as teaching, caretaking, directing, cautioning, and behaving heroically, but are usually one-sided, or destructive utterances and activities which

include bullying, teasing, and literalism, persistence and rule-following. Most of these categories are populated by characters with ASDs and those without, but the last three, literalism, persistence and rule-following are unique to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders in my sample. Literalism is the interpreting of figurative language literally rather than as it was meant. This produces confusion for both the person with ASD and, if acted upon, for the person who used the figurative language in the first place.

Persistence is getting stuck on a particular topic and refusing, or being unable, to abandon that topic. This impairs communication. Rule-following is rigid adherence to particular standards. The following is a good example. In Wild Orchid, Taylor's mother is trying to explain to her what a ten represents when one is rating members of the opposite sex.

“Someone like Matt Damon would be a ten.”

“Matt Damon smokes in every movie I've ever seen him in,” I said. “He couldn't be a ten.”

“Lighten up,” she said. “Lots of people smoke, but they're still good people.”

“I don't think so,” I said. “Smoking is bad, right?”

“Well, right,” she said.

“So people who smoke are bad. And I will never smoke.” (39-40)

This helping / hurting category accounts for 28% of the coded interactions.

The fourth category is concerned with the expression of emotions. Situations, problems, and blocked communication can all lead to strong emotions. Some are expressed more forcefully than others. The emotions I noted include anger, annoyance, despair, excitement, fear, happiness, humor, love, relief, sadness and surprise. 18% of the noted interactions fell into the category expressing emotions.

The last category is compliance / assertion. In this category I put interactions which appeared to primarily be expressions of power or lack thereof. Acceptance,

admiration, appreciation, compassion, empathy, and understanding all validate the other individual's importance. Coercion, condescension, manipulation, resentment, retaliation and wheedling all undermine the individual at whom they are directed. The sub-categories self-centered and self-doubt are two sides of the same coin. In the self-centered category go interactions which ignore the perspective of another completely, in the self-doubt category are interactions in which one questions the validity of one's own perspective. Standing up and going after are categories which represent the active and powerful pursuit of one's own goals. This category is smaller than some of the others, representing only 8% of the coded interactions, but it is vitally important to the understanding of the relationships characters with ASDs have with others in these stories.

Discussion

The preceding section provides a detailed analysis of the types of people the characters in the eight books I examined relate to, and a detailed analysis of the types of relational activities in which they engage. One cannot tell, however, from the figures how their relationships develop. One cannot envision the ongoing and shifting dynamics of their relationships. For that one needs to look at the individual books. So, in this discussion I have chosen to go through each book individually, quoting relationship establishing and relationship changing passages as necessary to show the growth, or lack thereof, in each story.

Wild Orchid

In Wild Orchid, Taylor, an eighteen year-old girl with Asperger's Syndrome, is uprooted by her mother, who wants to spend the summer working for and living with her current love interest. Taylor has no interest in going, so the book begins on an acrimonious note, with Taylor's mom expostulating,

“Today is the day we are going to Waskesiu,” she said, “whether you like it or not.”

“I'm not going to Waskesiu,” I said. “And you can't make me.”

“Don't you want me to have a life!” she yelled. “Why can't you just do this one thing? You'd like it there if you gave it a chance.”

“It isn't one thing,” I said. “It might be one thing for you, but it's at least twenty things for me. Twenty new things. We're talking twenty to one, Mom.”

She went out of the room and banged the door. (9)

Although this closely resembles standard mother / daughter squabbles, Taylor's tactics are a little unusual. This is the first of 23 instances of literalism on Taylor's part. New things are hard for her to face, so she has counted each new experience which will be

required of her and decided that it will not be worth the effort. Expressing herself this way blocks communication and infuriates her mother.

They do go, because Taylor's mother convinces her that she has signed a contract which cannot be broken. The trip causes Taylor a great deal of distress, and when they arrive at the restaurant Danny (Taylor's mother's boyfriend) owns, Taylor doesn't want to go in. She smells her suitcase, which smells like her last hamster, Hammy because he used to play in it.

“What are you doing?” Mom asked sharply.

“My suitcase smells like Hammy,” I said.

“Don't start,” warned Mom.

“Hammy lived to be four years old. That was fairly old for a gerbil. Before Hammy, I had Charlotte, and before her, I had June, and before her, I had Walnut, and he was the first gerbil I ever had.”

“What kind of day is it, Taylor? Look at the sky—is it clear or cloudy?” I heard Mom, but I had to finish what I was saying about gerbils or things would get out of control.

“Gerbils are rodents. They can also be described as small mammals. They are nocturnal, and, although they make good pets, they do make noise in their cages at night. They drum with their feet against the metal floor. This is their best way of communicating.”

“Taylor! Quit already!”

“What!”

“Don't you dare get onto this subject now! Quit worrying! Everything will be fine. You'll like it here. Stand up tall. First unpack, then the beach.” She gave me a little rub on the back and then opened the door of the restaurant. (19)

Persistence, another communication and relation straining trait common to individuals with ASDs brings out alternating attempts at caretaking, directing, and bursts of anger from her beleaguered mother.

Finally, they get up to their rooms, and Taylor becomes so upset she can't express herself except through cursing. When her mother finally manages to elicit the fact that

the source of Taylor's distress is the room color (yellow which she hates), Taylor's mom works it out with Danny that they will switch rooms.

"We could move the bed," said Mom. "It wouldn't be such a big deal, would it, to move your stuff in here? You and I could do it right now, before anyone gets really upset, and while we're moving the bed, Taylor could go and have a walk on the beach."

"I don't want to walk on the beach," I said. "Remember, you said we were going to unpack first and then have a walk on the beach! It was unpack, then walk!"

"Stop swearing this minute!" said Mom. She grabbed my hands and pressed hard against the palms. "It would just be a little change of plans. First the walk and then the unpacking. Okay, Danny?" (22)

Taylor's mom is trying to work things out for her, to get Danny to turn his home inside out, and Taylor is exhibiting yet another uncongenial trait, rule-following. Once she had it in her head that things were going to happen in a particular order, she was unwilling or unable to break with the plan.

One might think at this point that building a truly reciprocal relationship with someone as inflexible as Taylor might be impossible. But this is not all there is to Taylor, and she helps us to see that what we might consider "normal" social interaction frequently makes as little sense as her coping techniques. During the ride to the lake, she exposes one little absurdity.

"Got any gum?" I asked.

Mom fished out a package of Trident and I took out a piece.

"Offer me some," she said.

"Offer you some?"

"It's nice to offer me some. I'm driving and shouldn't be fiddling around opening gum wrappers, so it would be nice if you offered."

"Do you want a piece?" I asked.

"No, thanks, but maybe in a little while. You can keep the package." It's so like my mother to tell me one thing and then, in the next breath, change the rules. Why wouldn't she want a piece of gum when she had just told me to ask her? She calls it being *spontaneous*. She says that you have to

learn the scripts for social situations and then expect that the responses might be different than what you would predict. And people think I'm weird! (16)

She is trying to figure out, she is questioning, the ways "normal" people relate. They are not consistent or predictable. But she is willing to make the effort.

In Wild Orchid, there are 23 instances of such questioning, attempts to understand a different perspective, to search for common ground. Eight of them emanate from Taylor, seven from her mother, three from want-to-be boyfriend, three from Paul, the park ranger who takes on a mentoring role, and two from others. Taylor is very upset at one point and Paul asks her why she is so distraught. Taylor tells him that the boy she thought was her boyfriend was flirting with another girl.

"So you really like him?" Paul asks.

"No. He is a person without much intuition. But he looks good in jeans." Paul laughed.

"Come back in when you're feeling like it," he said. (80)

Questions such as this are one example of relation-building. Another relation-building technique used in Wild Orchid is lots of discussion. General talking about things, without undue emotion, caretaking or directing accounts for 217 of the coded interactions in the story. At one point, Taylor and Paul are discussing Paul's wife, who is afraid that she will be in a wheelchair forever.

"A person has to try and be brave," I said. "If you are in the woods and you see deer and you don't know if they bite, you can always ask someone."

"I think you are brave," said Paul.

"Thank you," I said.

"You're welcome," he said.

"I'm sleeping pretty good," I said. "It's easier to be brave when you've had enough sleep."

"That's good," he said.

It's funny, talking to Paul. I can have whole conversations with him and not once worry about making the right choices in terms of what I say. I can say anything to him, and he just listens and answers back. (98)

With her mother, Taylor has more difficulty, but they still have discussions. Her mother wants to discuss movies, Taylor wants to discuss orchids.

“Do you know how many different types of flowers grow around here?” I asked. I had been planning to tell her about finding the orchid, but she interrupted me.

“Stop changing the subject. We are talking about movies, said Mom. “If you want to ask a question, ask a question about movies.” (66)

“What is that Indiana Jones movie called? The one with the snakes?”

“Why?” asked Mom.

“Because I don’t like snakes.”

“Not that kind of question. Try again,” she said.

“What movies are playing?” I asked, thinking of saying *!!&%\$%@ @ @ movies* but restraining myself. (67)

Taylor’s mother is so accustomed to her roles of teacher (8 instances), director (24 instances), and caretaker (27 instances) that she finds it hard to yield control of the conversation.

Taylor yields at this point, but when it is important to her she stands up for herself. She doesn’t want to go back home early. She has gotten a job at the nature center, has made friends, and is happy where she is. Her mother insists that they must leave a month early. “You should try and think about my perspective for a change!” I told her. “You’re just living in your own *!!&%\$%@ @ @* head and there’s other people around who count, too!” (130) She doesn’t realize at this point that her mother’s relationship with Danny is irrevocably broken, and that her mother needs to return to her old job, because her mother hasn’t told her any of this.

When her mother reveals her grief and pain to Taylor, Taylor responds with love.

“I guess there’s other fish in the sea,” she said. “I just wonder why I can’t seem to keep a relationship going. I want someone to love me and why is that so hard to manage?”

“I love you,” I said. “If you want me to go and get you some food, I will. Maybe some apples. You like apples.”

“No thanks,” said Mom, and she folded my hands in hers. “I wish relationships weren’t so complicated.”

“You’re telling me,” I said. (145)

In Wild Orchid, the young girl who came to the lake with such a bad attitude blooms into a lovely young lady who relates better to people than she did at the beginning of the story, knows what she wants, and plans to go after it. She even manages to be civil to Danny when he asks about her future plans.

"I will try to get a job in a bookstore," I said. "I have two letters of reference, and they both declare that I am well suited to working in bookstores. After I get a job in a bookstore, I will register for one class at the university. A biology class. And if I have Thanksgiving off, I will go and visit Dad because he asked me. And I will take my new atomic watch." (152)

"Are you sure you don't want to do a cooking course, first?" asked Mom. "Cooking courses always come in handy. Restaurants often need help in the kitchen."

"I'm not very enthusiastic in the kitchen," I said. "But I am good with plants and animals. All my friends say so." (153)

Along the way she has challenged her mother's and Paul's perspectives and taught them a couple of things about relating to others as well. The people she works with learn to accept and understand her, even if her humor is still difficult to understand. When she tells them she's leaving,

"Well, at least you have three more days," said Rose. "That's enough time to plan a good-bye party, anyway."

"Is a good-bye party like a birthday party?" I asked. "Because if it is, I'm not interested."

"I was thinking about going for ice cream," said Rose. "Maybe Wednesday after work."

"If a good-bye party is going for ice-cream," I said, "you can count me in. As long as there's vanilla."

I smiled.

"That's a joke," I said. "Of course there'd be vanilla. It's the most commonest kind!"

"Would you like me to write you a letter of reference?" asked Julie. "I'd be very happy to. I'd put down how you remember all the names of the plants and how you helped me as a volunteer on my trail walks." (147)

Wild Orchid is a story in which we see relational growth and maturing not only in Taylor, but in other characters as well.

Buster and the Amazing Daisy

Buster and the Amazing Daisy begins, “Crazy Daisy is so lazy!” Marissa hissed in Daisy’s ear. (9) Daisy cannot understand why Marissa chooses to tease and bully her. Daisy, a fifth-grader who has recently transferred from SODADD (the school of doom and despair), desperately wants to fit in. But it is difficult for her, and she spends her recesses alone.

She raised her hand up so her bracelet could catch the sunlight. All the tiny animals swung and sparkled as she twisted and jiggled her wrist. They danced beautifully. Daisy was enjoying watching them so much that she forgot to watch out for Marissa. Suddenly, she heard giggling behind her. She turned to see several kids lined up with their hands raised and flapping.

Marissa yelled, “Who’re you waving at, Weirdo?” The others laughed harder.

Daisy made an X with her fingers and held them up. “If you do not cease the torture of this innocent, you shall be transformed into a stinky toad.”

She stomped her foot. “With warts!”

More mean laughter.

“Be gone with you, wretched toad!” Daisy shouted.

“Here comes the yard monitor!” someone yelled, and Marissa and her pals scattered into the crowd on the playground. (11-13)

Daisy is ill-prepared for this type of harassment, and she doesn’t know to ask for help. When she goes home and her mother asks her the standard social question about her day she gets upset.

“Hi, Honey!” Her mother looked up from a sink full of soapy dishes as Daisy walked through the door. “How was school today?”

Daisy dumped her backpack on a chair. “It was okay.” She headed toward the stairs. Her mother was so cheerful, sometimes it made her want to scream.

“Did you meet any nice kids today? Mom chirped. “Make any new friends?”

“No.” Daisy trudged up the stairs and into her room, banging the door closed behind her. “What are *friends* for, anyway?” (14)

This is an extremely anti-social reply stemming from frustration.

Daisy continues to miss opportunities to respond in a socially acceptable fashion.

On a visit to the resource room to play a computer game, Cody, a child in a wheelchair, comes up behind her.

“Hi, Daisy!” It was Cody’s rusty metallic voice.
 Daisy didn’t answer. Great! The only one who is nice to me is a creepy robot-kid.
 “Wow! You’re at level five? I can’t get beyond three,” Cody said.
 “Hmmm.” Daisy shrugged. She heard the wheelchair back away.
 Cody returned to the younger kids across the room.
 Daisy felt relieved, but also a little disappointed. All that buzzing and clicking was weird, but Cody seemed nice. Unlike some other kids. (24)

Her frustration and her sensitivity to noises hinder her ability to respond appropriately, and she appears to be condescending.

Marissa and the “bully-pops” keep up their harassment. At recess, they circle her and cause her to fall down.

“Oopsy, Daisy!” someone shouted. Laughing, they circled Daisy. She struggled to her feet.
 “Ring around the Daisy!” Marissa sang. “We all know you’re crazy! Clumsy and crazy! It’s time to fall down!”
 Marissa leaped close and *bam!* Daisy punched her in the nose. (30)

Daisy is shocked and dismayed by her own behavior. She tries to apologize, and Marissa brushes her off. The rule in her mind states that good people don’t resort to violence of that nature, and that if she succumbed in that fashion, she must be evil or possessed. Mrs. Brawnley, the special education teacher, tries to convince Daisy that retaliation is an understandable response to being bullied, but when Daisy goes to the principal she is still not convinced.

“Oh, Daisy, I wish you’d told us sooner.”

“But it is not good to tattle on your friends, Mr. Sears,” Daisy said, tears shining in her eyes. “Everybody hates tattle-tails. I just want to be good friends.”

“Daisy, they are not behaving like friends. Maybe they’re not your friends.”

“Yes, they are,” Daisy insisted. “I think. Ohhhh, I’m so confused.” She pushed her hair off her sweaty face. “Mr. Sears.” She took a deep breath and forced herself to look right into his eyes. “They are my only friends. No one else even talks to me – they just stare at me,” Daisy sniffled. Marissa used to be nicer. She’s the good one. All the other kids like her.” Daisy tried to get things straight. Her voice got louder. “I’m the bad one. I’m the violent one.” (34)

“Daisy, you are a wonderful person. You just made a mistake.”

“How can I be a wonderful person? I punched Marissa in the nose!”

Daisy shouted. “You’re not making sense, Mr. Sears.”

He tried to comfort her, but Daisy was very upset. “You’re confusing me,” she cried. “I can’t be good *and* bad. I hurt Marissa – I’m bad!” (36)

Daisy’s rule-following, her refusal to tattle because it is bad, and her inability to accept the fact that she may have made a simple mistake cause her grief and confusion. Mr. Sears, the principal, does not know what to make of her. Although he tries to help, using teaching and caretaking interactions, he ends up underestimating her. Once Daisy settles down and is ready to return to class, she says,

“Just one more thing, Mr. Sears.”

“Yes, Daisy, what is it?”

“Could you order me a new brain?”

Mr. Sears’ face changed. His gentle smile curved down into a worried-looking frown. He stared at Daisy. “Uhhh, Daisy, I ...uhmm...you know I can’t...”

Daisy stared back at him. “Mr. Sears, I was just joking. I know you can’t order a brain.”

“Oh, of course.” Mr. Sears’ face relaxed and he chuckled. “Very funny, Daisy.”

Daisy laughed too, thinking it was funny that a grown-up like Mr. Sears didn’t even know when he was being teased. (36)

Since she had shown so little understanding of “normal” behavior, Mr. Sears had underestimated her intelligence. His resulting condescension prevents him from recognizing that she is teasing.

Daisy gets permission to take the class rabbit, Buster, out during recess. A nice kid, Hammy, comes to see Daisy and Buster. In spite of her insistence on following proper feeding rules for rabbits, Hammy is still friendly. She reads him something from her book on rabbits. Her sensory hypersensitivity causes her to practice avoidance tactics even when she would like to be nice.

“What? Where does it say that?” Hammy wiped his greasy fingers on his jeans and leaned closer to Daisy. A couple of crumbs stuck to his mouth. His hot, salty, stinky breath blasted Daisy in the face. Daisy scrambled to her feet and turned her back to him. “Hammy! Would you go away now? Please!”
 “Sure.” He got up and traipsed away, muttering to himself. (41)

All looks pretty hopeless, and then Daisy meets Laurel. Laurel is a sixth-grader who asks Daisy questions about herself and really listens to the answers. She makes a serious attempt to understand Daisy’s perspective. Laurel asks about Asperger’s Syndrome, and Daisy gets upset as she is telling her about it.

“I’m sorry, Daisy. I didn’t mean to upset you.” Laurel bit her lip as she watched tears gather in Daisy’s eyes.
 “It’s not your fault.” Daisy sniffled. “It’s just another thing about autism – O get upset really easily.”
 They were quiet for a moment, then Daisy asked Laurel, “Do you think I’m weird?”
 “Not any weirder than a lot of other kids.”
 Just then Michael Duffy walked by making incredibly loud sticky-earpits farts. *Bfffffft! Bfffffft!* “See what I mean?” Laurel said. (56)

Laurel's empathy and understanding help to put Daisy's struggles in perspective. They engage in ongoing, equal discussions. Daisy feels better, a little more confident. Laurel is out sick for a few days, and Daisy begins training Buster. People begin to notice.

Daisy was so busy with Buster that she didn't notice a few kids had wandered over to watch. "Hey, that's pretty cool how you're training him," one of them remarked. Daisy turned around. It was a group of sixth graders – Laurel's friends.

"Yeah. Thanks," Daisy replied, ducking her head. "Has anyone seen Laurel?"

"She's been sick with the flu the last few days," one of the girls said. "I talked on the phone with her last night. She says she'll be back tomorrow."

"Oh. I hope so," Daisy said, glancing up at the girl.

"My name is Annie," the girl said. "Where'd you learn about animal training?"

Daisy was telling Annie about her Aunt Rosie, a professional animal trainer, when the bell interrupted her. (61)

Out of her concern for her friend, Daisy risks a social exchange and ends up with more friends and admirers.

Since she is feeling more secure herself, Daisy is able to reach out to Cody when he is distressed. Because his mother must return to work, she can no longer help in his classroom. The school insists that they don't have the funds for an aide.

"Some people say I should just go back to SODADD."

"*What?*" Daisy jumped to her feet and stood in front of Cody with her hands on her hips. "But that's not right. *This* is your school!"

Cody shrugged.

Daisy grabbed his shoulders. "Jeepers, Cody! You belong here! Don't allow the powers of darkness to discourage you!"

"Take it easy, Daisy!" Cody pushed her hands away.

"But Cody, you're practically my best friend. You're almost my only friend. It would be totally dismal around here without you." Daisy started pacing back and forth, her fists clenched. "We must gather the forces of goodness. We shall overcome this evil!"

"Daisy, I think you've been reading too many of those fantasy sci-fi books. You're beginning to sound just like Mary Popper."

Daisy narrowed her eyes at him. “Cody, we are discussing your future fate. And all you’re worried about is criticizing my linguistic patterns?” (65)

In spite of her acerbic tongue, it is clear that Daisy is beginning to be able to reach out to others. Marissa returns from having eye surgery with a huge bandage and ugly glasses. Kids are teasing her. Laurel and Daisy discuss the fact that Marissa looks unhappy.

“Oh.” Daisy cocked her head and continued to study Marissa. “Her body language indicates possible depression.” She pursed her lips. “That’s not good. I know about these things, Laurel.”...
 “Poor Marissa.”
 “Poor Marissa? Wasn’t she being awfully mean to you?” Laurel reminded her.
 Daisy thought about this for a moment. “Yeah. But now some kids are being mean to her. I heard them. Look. She’s sitting over there all by herself.” (70)

Daisy talks to Marissa. Marissa is suspicious of Daisy at first, since few people will try to cheer up their former tormentors. But Daisy doesn’t like to see anyone suffer, and she convinces Marissa to come over and watch Buster’s tricks. She shows compassion, and she makes a friend of an enemy.

Daisy has a number of friends, and Buster has learned lots of tricks. Everyone encourages her to enter a pet talent show, but she is afraid. She refuses, but then she realizes that the cash prize might pay for an aide for Cody. She is confused. She talks to her parents at dinner.

Daisy put her fork down and gazed at her mother and father. “Do you think I can do it?”...
 “If it really means a lot to you, Daisy – and I know it does – you can do it. We can just prepare for it like we do for other challenging situations.”...
 “Really?”
 “Absolutely!”... We could visit the school where the show is going to be and figure out how things are going to look and sound and what you’ll be

doing. And we could set up Buster's performance so you wouldn't be up there alone. Your friends could help with some of it – you know, bringing out the props and things. We could have our own private rehearsal..." "With a little preparation, you'll do fine!" her dad said, winking at her. (79)

Her parents provide exactly the right mix of empathy, caretaking, and teaching to help Daisy understand that she can do it. She agrees to be in the show.

There are more surprises and more challenges. Some boys come in a truck and kidnap Buster. No one can remember much about them, except Daisy.

"Can anybody remember anything else?" Mr. Sears asked. "Anything at all?"

Daisy wiped the tears out of her eyes and spoke up. "I remember some things," she said. "The boy with the dog wore a red and black checkered shirt. He had shaggy blonde hair. I think his dog was a border collie. The truck had a big dent on the back fender."

She paused to gulp for breath. She still felt all shaky.

"That's very good," Mr. Sears said, looking slightly surprised.

Daisy continued. "There was a bumper sticker that was half torn off – it said something 'is cool'. And the license plate was hanging loose, just like Hammy said." She added, "The number on it was BJ8 113."

Astonished, Mr. Sears asked, "Are you sure? How did you manage to see all that?"

"Marissa slowed him down enough," Daisy explained. "She got there first and kept him busy so while I was running across the lawn I could see everything."

"It's true, Mr. Sears," Hammy said. "Daisy practically has laser vision and once she sees something, she doesn't forget it."

"Yeah, I've seen her read an encyclopedia – upside down," Marissa said.

Daisy repeated the license plate number. "I'm sure that's it."

"Way to go, Daisy!" a few kids cheered. (87)

Daisy's incredible powers of observation have elevated her from oddball to hero.

The boys have let the rabbit go, and Daisy has the support and understanding of her parents as she looks for Buster. In spite of all their efforts, they don't find him. She rides her bike to the park at night and has an accident. Buster finds her, and stays with her. When her parents find her, they are relieved. Daisy is focused on the rabbit...

“Daisy?” It was her mother.

Daisy tried to shout loudly but her voice was weak. “Mommy!” she croaked. “Mom! I’m down here!”

A few moments later her mother’s face appeared on the dirt bank above her. “Daisy!” Her mother slid down the slope, calling over her shoulder. “She’s here! Right over here!”

“Mom, don’t scare off Buster,” Daisy mumbled. (108)

Daisy has broken her arm, but it is okay because her friends have agreed to help with the show. They all cooperate and the performance receives a standing ovation, but it is too much for Daisy and she practices avoidance by leaving the area. Later, her friends find her.

“Aren’t you curious about who won the grand prize?” Marissa asked impatiently.

“Nope,” said Daisy. “I already know Buster is the best.”

“You’re right!” Marissa hugged Daisy. “You and Buster did win! You were amazing!”

“Look at this, Daisy!” Hammy pulled out a huge golden trophy from behind his back and held it out. “It’s going to be engraved with our school name and everything.”

“Very nice,” Daisy remarked as she looked inside the trophy. “Where’s the money?”

Her friends laughed.

The next morning Daisy was called to the principal’s office. She wasn’t prepared for what she found.

Oh, no! What did I do, she wondered as she walked in. Cody was there too. And the golden trophy sat gleaming on the desk.

Mr. Sears looked very pleased. “Daisy, your suggestion was considered, and, I’m happy to tell you, it was approved. Cody’s going to be staying here with us. You won the money for his aide’s training.”

“Wow! That’s great!” Daisy said. She was so happy her fingers tingled.

“That’s fantastic! Wonderful! Stupendous! Awesome!” She paused for breath. “Can I go now?” She turned to leave.

“Hey, Daisy.” It was Cody. “You’re the best friend anyone could ever have.”

Daisy stopped at the door and glanced back over her shoulder. She smiled with her whole face and her whole heart as she looked right into Cody’s eyes. “Hey, what are friends for?” (118-119)

In this story, in spite of having some rough edges and limited social skills, Daisy not only learns what friends are for, she also teaches others what it means to be a friend. The process began with one person's willingness to question, discuss, understand, and accept her differences.

The Boy who Ate Stars

Matthew is a four year-old autistic boy who lives in an apartment with his mother and Maougo, his mute nanny. For Lucy, a twelve year-old girl who lives downstairs, the occupants of the upstairs apartment are a mystery. When they first move in, there is a lot of banging coming from the apartment. Her father goes up in a huff, comes down subdued, and the banging continues.

Lucy is curious, and the first chance she gets she pays them a visit. The nanny opens the door and lets her in. Lucy describes her first contact with Matthew:

Matthew bolted out of nowhere like a mad dog and jumped on top of me, nearly knocking me over, before ending up on tiptoes with both hands in my hair. He skillfully ran his fingers all over my head, squealing and making occasional *fshhhh!* noises. Matthew was on cloud nine, sending my hair flying in every direction and choking with laughter. He got so worked up he started chanting, "You're playing with hair. You're playing with hair..." That's when the woman stepped in. (4)

Matthew is not talking to Lucy; he is completely self-centered and is describing his actions. Maougo offers Matthew her hair instead, and Matthew shifts to Maougo. Lucy doesn't know what to say, and she rushes off. Later, she meets Marie, Matthew's mother, who explains that Matthew is autistic. Lucy and her father look this up in the dictionary and find: "Autism (from the Greek *autos*, oneself): a pathological withdrawal into an interior world resulting in a loss of contact with reality and an inability to

communicate with others.” (10) Such a definition does little to promote real understanding.

Lucy and Marie talk again and Marie says she will be happy to explain more thoroughly over dinner. Marie explains to Lucy’s mother why it would be a good idea for Lucy to come,

“... Apparently his intelligence is unaffected,” she went on. “And he doesn’t hurt himself, unlike some autistic children. I think I’d even go so far as to say he’s happy... But the problem is he tends to be happy all by himself. We need to encourage him to become more sociable. That’s where I thought Lucy might be able to help us out. That’s if she’d like to, of course, and you don’t have a problem with it. Sometimes children understand each other best, and Lucy is just right because she is between our age and Matthew’s....” (22)

Even though she is his mother and loves him, Marie sets the condescending tone one finds toward Matthew almost throughout the entire book.

When Lucy does go to dinner upstairs, she has this to say:

Matthew gobbled his soup. Sometimes he made snorting noises, too. When he was full, he jumped down and tucked himself under the table. Neither of the two women seemed to mind about this. You’d think it was completely normal for him to crouch down like an animal. I braced myself. Was he going to start licking our (27) feet? That’s when I had a brainwave about Francois: Of course, Matthew would make the perfect trainer to help Francois find his animal instincts again! (28)

The Francois Lucy is comparing Matthew to is a lap dog that she does not think shows enough gumption!

During the remainder of the dinner hour, Lucy practically forgets about Matthew.

Matthew stayed on the carpet for the rest of the meal, and I almost forgot he was there, until he jumped toward the television shouting, “You turn it on, you turn it on, it’s now!” He turned it on. A few seconds later, the weather forecast started... At the end of the forecast, Matthew jumped up and shouted, “You turn it off!” And he did. (28-30)

Matthew knew exactly when the program he wanted came on. He watches it, and then he turns it off. Instead of being impressed that Matthew could tell time, Lucy gapes at Matthew's caretakers, watching their reactions to his behavior. No one says anything.

After dinner, they all sit on the floor.

Matthew circled me like a bat, without bumping into me or looking at me, either, as if he had his own radar system. Then, without warning, he flopped against me, his tummy on my back, and I didn't dare move in case he went away again. It was that time of the evening when children want hugs. And Matthew was like a cat, the way he needed his. (31)

Lucy stays still, and she is not unkind, but again she compares Matthew to an animal. She does not speak to him.

Lucy, a friend named Theo, Matthew and Francois the dog take a walk to the cemetery. Matthew amuses himself.

Suddenly, Matthew started shouting, "You're crying! You're crying!" Using Marie's logic, I translated this to mean "I'm crying! I'm crying!" I realized Matthew was being autumn. He was being the falling leaves. Matthew made the small leap from autumn to the weather forecast and climbed onto a cross. "Good evening and welcome!"(45)

In this passage, Matthew shows great imagination. Instead of responding to him, or interacting with him, Lucy simply stands and stares at him while he gives his "weather report".

After a while, it became an inconvenience. They had to get back home.

Matthew just kept on spinning....We begged, we bargained, we promised Maougo appeared...She swayed gently as she started singing the same tune in sync with Matthew...Matthew slowed down to let her climb on, because she'd understood his merry-go-round...Then she freed him from the whirlwind, as if she was using a piece of rope to pull him out. (46-48)

Maougo is able to empathize with Matthew, to communicate with him because she understands his preoccupation and doesn't try to force, manipulate or coerce him the way Lucy and Theo have.

One might think that this would discourage Lucy from thinking of Matthew as an interesting specimen, but it does not. "We had two missions: putting meaning back into Francois's life and saving Matthew from drowning. From now on, Friday evenings and Sundays were days for experimenting." (49) The dog and the boy have equal status as objects for experimentation.

Theo's grandfather is the only person in the story who really extends common courtesy to Matthew.

"Hello, little brother," he greeted Matthew.
Matthew didn't react until he noticed the tama, and then he stretched out his arm.
Grandpa Balthazar got there before him and hit it.
"That's me saying hello. Hello! Hello!"...
Balthazar started beating out different sounds – once, twice—Matthew stretched out his hands, Balthazar passed him the tama, Matthew copied the sounds. (67)

Matthew and Theo's grandfather play an increasingly sophisticated series of taps, with Matthew copying the old man's lead. Matthew works on a series until he gets it right. Balthazar allows Matthew to take the tama home with him, where he proceeds to tap out the Hello series upon arrival. Lucy does acknowledge that as communication, but she persists in treating Matthew as one would a poorly trained dog.

The three children and the dog make a habit of taking walks. Matthew makes a habit of stopping in cafes. He runs into one, and begins to run his hands through a patron's hair. The girls play the pathos card.

So Theo took the stage and told the shouting whirlwind story, the one where Matthew gets more and more wound up in his circles and starts shouting, and Maougo comes to the rescue (79) with her long hair. That clinched it! The lady was touched by how big the little boy's troubles were. She was even flattered that he found her long hair comforting. It made her feel like a fairy godmother....She held out her hair to Matthew and set him on her knees.

"Drinks are on me," she said gently.

Another happy ending with Coca-Cola, Orangina, a glass of water, and a bowl for the dog. (80)

The woman shows compassion, but Matthew is being exploited by the girls.

The dog, Francois, goes missing and no one can find him. Matthew leads the search party. He leads them right to the cemetery, where they have been many times. At the gates to the cemetery, he begins to beat the tama he has brought. Lucy thinks that it is futile; the tama won't open the locked gates. "Matthew started beating more energetically, and my heart raced with the rhythm of his hands. It was still the same beat. Three times, the same cry in the night. Then he paused...Suddenly, there it was, the barking sound." (101)

Matthew keeps beating the tama and the dog comes to the gate. Matthew climbs over and retrieves the dog. Surely this act of thoughtful heroism should alter Lucy's attitude toward Matthew? Apparently not. The book ends with this statement. "When he heard my voice, Matthew came charging at me like a crazy dog, the Persian rug turned into a fast-flowing stream, and he shouted my name as he harpooned my hair." (107) No real relationship can grow where one person holds tenaciously to viewing another as subhuman.

The Silent Boy

This story is set in the years 1908-1911. Jacob Stoltz, the “silent boy”, is thirteen years old at the beginning of the story. He has never been to school; instead he helps out on the farm. Although he doesn’t speak, he copies sounds with remarkable accuracy. He rocks back and forth when he is excited or distressed. He avoids looking at people, although it is clear that he understands what they are saying. Today we would say he is autistic. In the early 1900s, they called him “touched”.

Katy, a curious seven year-old, sees Jacob peeking out the window when they pick Peggy up to come work for Katy’s family as a live-in servant. Peggy, Jacob’s sister, attempts to explain to Katy about her brother.

She shook her head. “Just turned thirteen,” she said. “He don’t go to school. He never could. He’s touched.”

Touched in the head, she meant. I had heard the phrase before, had never known exactly what it meant, but it didn’t feel polite to ask more. (17)

When Katy and her father are driving to mill, they pick Jacob up. Jacob likes to go to the mill, and he has ridden with Katy’s father before. When they get there, Katy overhears some men talking. “Imbecile,” he said; he nudged the man beside him and pointed to Jacob. I wasn’t certain what the word meant, but I could see that it was not meant kindly and hoped that Jacob hadn’t heard.” (29) The tone itself was enough to let Katy know that these men did not feel kindly toward Jacob.

They separate from Jacob at the mill, and Katy takes the opportunity to ask her father a question.

Father?” I asked. “Is he an imbecile? Is that what it is, to be touched in the head?”

“I wouldn’t call Jacob that,” Father said firmly, “because *imbecile* means having no brains. And Jacob, he’s *different*, all right, but he knows how to

go to what he loves, and how to stay safe near it. That takes brains, I'd say. Katy -- there he is." (34)

Katy's father has taken time to really observe Jacob – he doesn't prejudge. He passes his acceptance of Jacob's differences on to his daughter. Katy finds Jacob in her barn, humming to the horses.

I wasn't afraid at all. Being with Jacob the day we took him to the mill, my father and I, had made me familiar with his gentleness, and Peggy too, had spoken of his special way with animals, so I knew he was nothing to be wary of.

And I liked the sound he was making, a kind of singing that wasn't real singing at all. I wondered if he would mind my joining in, so I watched his face, tried to catch onto the same note, and kept at it when I saw that it didn't make him uneasy. (49)

Katy doesn't have many friends, and she is interested in, and respectful of, this much older boy.

Katy's mother's is having a baby, and it is a home birth as was normal at that time. Katy gets whisked off to the Stoltz's farm by Peggy for the day. When Jacob comes in with his father for breakfast, Katy doesn't understand why Jacob is being unsociable. Jacob's father begins washing up and barks out orders. .

He began to wash his hands, pumping the water with the handle at the sink. "Wash, boy," he said, and Jacob joined him.

It surprised me that Jacob did not look at me, or nod, or smile. I had thought that we were friends, in an odd but special way. Again and again I had stood with him in the stable, stroking the horses' massive heads side by side. We had never talked. Indeed, I had never heard Jacob speak.

But we had made sounds together – I thought of it as our special kind of singing, there in the stable – and sometimes I had walked beside him and his dog for a way, through the alley behind our house, when he left to roam off to other places that I did not know about.

But Jacob did not look at me.

We sat around the table on sturdy wooden chairs. "Cap," Mr. Stoltz said, looking at his son meaningfully. Jacob turned his face away and pretended not to hear...

“*Remove your cap, boy.*” When he repeated it, his tone was stern. Reluctantly, Jacob grabbed the cap from his own head, exposing uncombed, curly hair. (101-102)

Mrs. Stoltz serves cream.

“Did you milk the cow, Jacob?” I asked, feeling shy.

“Sure, Jake milks,” Mr. Stoltz said.

To my surprise, Jacob began making a rhythmic sound: not the shooooda, shooooda of the millstone, not the song of the horses, but a psssss, psssss that he repeated again and again. Anna giggled.

“Enough, boy,” his father said sternly. Then to me he explained, “That’d be the sound of the milk into the pail.” (102-103)

Jacob’s father speaks for him, and he does not allow Jacob to continue making the sounds of milking. Jacob understands, and he is trying to communicate, but he is cut off by his father, who displays no warmth toward him.

Later, Jacob has a surprise for Katy.

He rocked back and forth a little. I had seen him do it before, a motion that I knew by now meant that he was pleased. Finally, he hummed a little -- that was no longer a surprise to me, either -- and he pointed down into the hay near his own feet.

I saw it then, and knelt down and picked up a small kitten the same color as the hay. Though small, it wasn’t newborn; its eyes were wide open, dark brown, and when I stroked its soft golden fur, it began to purr.

Jacob rocked and rocked with pleasure.

“Oh, Jacob, thank you!” I said to him. “You knew I wanted a kitten, didn’t you? Peggy must have told you.” He looked away, back out toward the meadow, but his face was flushed with embarrassed excitement. (109)

Jacob is expressing pleasure at Katy’s happiness. He is pleased to be able to do something for this girl he clearly considers a friend, in spite of his lack of social overtures at breakfast.

Katy wants to invite Jacob to her birthday party, but Peggy helps her realize it would be awkward for everyone. Katy settles for saving the two best marbles, party favors, for Jacob.

“Anyway, I wanted to give you these.” I reached into my pocket and pulled out the two big cat’s-eye marbles I had brought him... Jacob took them from me and they clicked together in his hand. He imitated the click with his tongue against his teeth, and smiled in that odd way he had, with his eyes looking someplace else. (149)

Blocked from expressing her friendship in the standard fashion, Katy has thought hard to come up with something Jacob would appreciate.

Katy finds Jacob in the barn after finding out that there is illness at his house. No one has told her what the problem is, and she has no idea how to help Jacob, who is clearly distressed.

He returned the marbles to the pocket of his overalls. He was silent now but began to sway slightly, back and forth. His fingers tapped rhythmically on his own knee.

“My baby sister, Mary, was sick last week, with a cough and a fever. But Father gave her medicine and she is all better now. Father says that sometimes *time* is the best healer. But medicine helps, too.”

He continued to rock back and forth, seated there on the hay bale.

“And love, of course. My mother says that, and Father says he agrees. When Mary was sick, Mother stayed with her every minute, rocking her, and nursing her, and wiping her forehead with a cool cloth.

“The window right above the kitchen is Mary’s window,” I said, even as I knew that he would not be interested, “and my room is down the hall, over the porch. My room has blue curtains. You can see them from the yard.” I was just talking aimlessly because I did not know how I could help him. It was clear that Jacob was distressed about something, but it was not something I could understand or make right. (153)

Tragically, it turns out that Jacobs other sister, Nellie, has had a baby out of wedlock, and she is refusing to care for it. In trying to make conversation about illness in general, Katy has unwittingly given Jacob an idea. Jacob attempts to bring Nellie’s baby

to Katy's mother, laying the baby in Katy's sister's crib. The baby is dead when Katy's mother finds it. There is a hunt for Jacob, who is missing, because the men of the town assume Jacob has killed it (on account of being touched). Katy knows better. "But Jacob had meant only to save Nellie's baby by bringing it to my mother. I was certain of that. It was just too small, and the night too cold and wet; the journey was too long." (169) But Katy is only eight years old at this point, and when she is given a direct order, she follows it. She knows Jacob is in the barn; it is his safe place. She finds him there. Her father tells him to bring Jacob to the house.

"You must come now, Jacob," I told him. "They're looking for you." I lifted the blanket from him and helped him stand. Though he had always withdrawn from my touch in the past, now he let me hold his hand and take him to the house, where the men were waiting. (169)

The men, lacking Katy's insight, or perhaps not caring, take Jacob away to the Asylum and lock him up. Katy never sees him again. This is a tragedy which could have been avoided if people other than Katy had been willing to look beyond the lack of speech and odd mannerisms to the kind and singularly altruistic character who was Jacob Stoltz.

Clay

Our first introduction to Tommy, the seven year-old autistic boy in Clay, is when his sister Elsie, eleven, starts telling him what to do. She wants him to come watch new neighbors move in.

"Hey, Tommy, there're people moving in across the way. Real people, with children. Come here and look."
He didn't, of course. Come to look I mean. I thing that's mostly because my brother lacks what I heard somebody on *Oprah* once call "intellectual curiosity." "Come *here*," I said again. "There's a girl looks like is my age and a boy about the same as you and a mother with spiky hair and a guy

who's maybe the dad or maybe just the truck driver. I'm not sure which. Tell me what you think." (2-3)

Tommy doesn't come immediately. He's too busy swirling stones. Eventually, he does come over to see.

"Okay," I said. "That's it. Come on, we're going."

"Where?" said Tommy.

"Outside."

"Why?"

"To meet the new kids. Come *on*." Tommy didn't say anything, so I went on in my best I'll-explain-this-one-more-time voice. "There's a girl and a boy moved into the other building. I *told* you, and now they're out front, and if we go out kind of casual and make like we're going to the store for milk or something, then we can say 'hey' and they'll say 'hey' back to us, and we'll *know* them. Okay?"

Tommy didn't answer. He lined the gray stones down one side of the table and the white stones down the other.

"The boy might let you play with his skateboard," I said to the top of my brother's head. "And you know what else, I'll bet he has a ton more stuff inside just waiting to be unpacked. I'll bet he has a soccer ball and a deck of Uno cards and maybe even a bike." I hadn't actually seen those things, but I said it anyway. I'll bet he has an army truck and a dozen yo-yos and if we get to know them they'll ask us in someday to watch their big TV. And I'll bet the girl has a karaoke machine that I'm really gonna want to play with. Anyway, you *have* to come on account of Mom said I'm in charge and now I say so." (3-4)

At this point, Elsie has played almost all her cards. She's tried teaching, directing, discussion and coercion to try to get Tommy to cooperate with her plan. Finally, she thinks of something that will work.

"If you come, I'll help you find more stones," I said in my sticky-nice voice. "We'll go to that driveway down by the corner where there are a bunch over to one side, and you can get maybe a hundred."

"Yeah?" said Tommy.

"Yeah. I'll get a plastic bag to carry them in."..."Now remember, act cool," I said once we were outside. (5)

They get outside with the stone collecting bag and meet the new kids. Manda, the new girl, notices that Tommy isn't talking and speaks to Elsie, not Tommy.

“Can’t he talk?” said Manda.

“Sure he can, when he’s got something to say.” I gave Tommy a sort of say-something poke, but he just stood there, folding and unfolding his plastic bag. “Which I guess he doesn’t right now. I’m eleven. How about you?” (6)

Elsie wants Tommy to be sociable, but she is clearly protective of him as well.

Elsie knows, as we learn right at the beginning, that Tommy is different, and she feels compelled to be his caretaker, even when their mother is around, because their mother is in complete denial with respect to Tommy’s condition. Elsie’s mother has kidnapped the children. Elsie’s attempts to befriend the new neighbors have resulted in a fresh outbreak of paranoia in her mother, and her mother decides they must move again.

“Bring your brother, Elsie,” said Mom, sighing and heading for the door. “Just bring him.”...

But instead I knelt on the floor in front of him, propping him up so he had to look at me. “Come on Tommy. It’s time to go. And you know what? There’s going to be tons more stones where we’re going, all just waiting for you.

“Where?” said Tommy.

“Somewhere,” I said. “Now come on. *Please*. It’s just for a spell, and then we’ll be right back here.” The last twelve words were a lie, but sometimes I say anything I have to, to keep Tommy from getting all riled up. (26-27)

Elsie loves her brother and tries to do her best for him in spite of her mom’s indifference.

Elsie finally gets her brother in the car, averting her mother’s wrath, even though she herself is upset about the move.

I looked over at Tommy, but he had zonked out almost as soon as the car started. All of a sudden I wanted to punch him and scream at him and ask him why he was asleep instead of awake and caring about what was happening to us. That’s the thing about Tommy – you can never be sure when he’s going to *care* about things. (27)

In spite of all she’s done to avoid a scene, Elsie is annoyed and even resentful that her brother can, at least sometimes, simply tune things out.

Nevertheless, Elsie risks their mother's volatile temper by trying to get their mother to get Tommy some help.

“What do you mean ‘the way he is’?”

I was pretty sure it was a question that wasn't meant to be answered, but I answered it anyway. “You know, how he doesn't even know his letters and scribble-scrabbles when he goes to draw and doesn't hardly *say* anything or *care* about anything except for stones and won't look anyone straight in the eye.”

The car swerved again as Mom said, “There's nothing wrong with Tommy – just because he keeps things to himself and doesn't blab all over the place like some people I know. There's nothing wrong with your brother. You got that, Elsie? Elsie? Elsie?” (29)

Obviously, Elsie is all Tommy has and it is quite a strain on her. When they finally stop at a hotel in the middle of the night, Tommy falls to pieces.

Mom steered Tommy into the bathroom, but when he came out, instead of getting into bed, he squatted on the floor, rocking and starting to howl a funny animal kind of howl.

There was a sudden thumping on the wall, and an angry voice called out, “Don't you people know it's the middle of the night? What are you *doing* in there?” There was another thump, and I held my breath, afraid that some hairy fist might break through and reach out and clobber us all. (39-40)

Their mom leaves it to Elsie to settle Tommy.

“It's okay, Tommy,” I said, getting down on the floor beside him. “It's okay. This is Virginia, and you're going to like it here... We'll find a library and I'll take you there and we'll get books and I'll read them to you, same as we've always done... I babbled on, saying the same things over and over... And we'll find stones. I promise you that tomorrow we'll find stones. Stones, stones, stones.” (40)

Through long practice, Elsie knows how to settle her brother. She has paid attention to him, and she knows what he cares about.

Elsie is an eleven year-old full-time caretaker of a child others find bewildering.

Once they are in a new apartment, this becomes even clearer. Their mother, who is usually working, takes them to the store. Tommy has had too much change too fast, and he sits down on the sidewalk and won't move.

“Come on, Tommy. Right this minute. I'm not fooling,” my mother said. The slug on the sidewalk got tighter and smaller. Several people stopped to watch. “What's wrong with the kid?” said a man leaning on a bicycle. “There's *nothing* wrong with him,” my mother snapped, shoving her hands into her hair. Then she turned to me and whispered, “Do something with him, Elsie. I'll meet you both inside.” I waited for her to be all the way gone before I sat down on the ground next to Tommy, trying to pretend we were in our own backyard and that people weren't having to move around us to get to where they were going. I hummed and talked a kind of monotonous gobbledy-gook. I made pigeon noises, and after awhile I took Tommy by the arm and steered him into the store. (56-57)

Tommy becomes extremely ill and their mother persists in ignoring it.

“Well? Did you get him up?” she asked, putting down her coffee. “He's *sick* and he can't get up. I told you last night, and I'm telling you this morning,” I said. “And I told you – Tommy never gets sick. Watch your tone of voice, missy.” “I don't see what's the big deal about my tone of voice when you don't even care that your own son is sick.” “If Tommy was really sick, I would care,” Mom said. “But you know yourself, he doesn't always want to do what we want him to do. It's one of his little quirks.” (78)

Instead of staying around to deal with the problem, their mom decides to go into work early and work an extra shift.

Tommy becomes so ill he is limp and unresponsive. Elsie is pretty sure he can't understand her in his condition, but because she loves him she communicates her plans to him, in case he understands more than she thinks he does.

“I ran back to the bedroom, sitting on the side of Tommy's bed and taking hold of his hot, dry hands. “Tommy, listen. I've got to tell you this.” I knew he couldn't hear me, but I had to tell him anyway.

“We’ve got to get help on account of you’re really sick, only Mom says you’re not and that you don’t need anything. Except you do. And I couldn’t figure out what to do, but now I’ve thought of something. Of someone. Her name is Vi and she works at this sub shop and she’s really nice and she said that sometimes things need to be talked about and maybe even to change.” I stopped for a minute and looked at my brother, who had pulled his hands away and rolled onto his side. (83)

Elsie goes for help, and there is a long wait before anything happens. Finally, Child Protective Services and the FBI show up. But Elsie cannot relinquish her role, even when Tommy is safely ensconced in the hospital and their father shows up. Elsie’s father offers to take her to the hotel where he and her grandparents are staying while they wait for Tommy to become well enough to travel. “No,” I said, scrunching the blanket into a knot. You don’t understand. I’m not leaving Tommy. I have to stay.” (112) She doesn’t trust anyone else to understand or take care of her brother.

After they get back to the house they haven’t seen in four years, it is obvious that no one else can understand Tommy. Tommy’s grandmother serves him lunch, which he hurls to the floor. He then goes into the hall and watches the pendulum in the clock.

“What’re you doing, Tommy?” said Dad, getting down on the floor next to him.” (123) It is clear, though, that their dad is going to make the effort, both to understand Tommy and to get him some help so he can reach his potential, whatever that may be.

Their father takes Tommy to be evaluated, insisting that Elsie, now known as Clay, stay home. After Tommy gets officially diagnosed as autistic, their father talks to Clay.

When my father spoke again, his voice was softer than it had been before and sort of choky. “Maybe this is the way Tommy’s meant to be – and if it is, you know, we’ll love him the same as we always have.”...”Anyway, I didn’t mean to sound like the voice of doom here. There’s a lot of help out there, so let’s wait to see what the doctors at Hopkins say, and what

they suggest. And whatever the diagnosis, Tommy's going to need a great deal of intensive work, maybe even a special school. But we can handle that, can't we, Clay? (140-141)

He does not intend to dump this on Clay, however, just to share with her and reassure her. Tommy is finally going to get the type of care, love, and teaching that Clay had tried to provide on her own.

They have a long way to go, and a lot of neglect to make up for. Dad and Tommy return from another evaluation session and sit down for dinner.

"It was a hard day, right, son?" Dad said as he pushed Tommy's chair into the table. I can't exactly figure if my father thinks that someday Tommy's going to answer him like a regular boy, but this time the way he answered him was to shove his plate of lasagna onto the floor, to spill his milk, to howl. (145)

Nevertheless, one gets the feeling that Tommy will settle in and learn to relate to people in much healthier ways as he is able to settle in and establish routines.

Wishing on the Midnight Star

This book begins with a sibling squabble.

Rattle, bang! Rattle bang! Rattle, bang-bang!

"Would you quit that!" I poked my brother. "I can't even hear the TV!"

Rattle, bang! Nic kept jiggling and kicking at our bed railing. Besides, the top bunk is mine.

"Get off my bed!" I nudged him with my elbow.

He kept kicking.

"You're bonkers," I told him as I started down the ladder. I planned to turn up the volume on the TV.

Then, wham! His foot smacked into my chin and launched me into space...

Nic peeked down at me through the railing. He'd finally stopped rattling the rail. "Alex! Are you okay? I didn't mean to do that! I'm sorry!"

I gritted my teeth and pulled myself up. My knees wobbled, "Yeah, you're going to be a lot sorrier, you-" (11-12)

The mutual annoyance and anger which are apparent here are not unusual for thirteen and fourteen year-old brothers. The only thing which might appear a little unusual is the intensity of Nic's apology. Nic is the fourteen year-old. He has Asperger's Syndrome.

Mom gets involved.

“Alexander and Dominic! What are you two doing in there?” It was Mom. She rushed into the room. “What happened?”
 “Nothing much. Nic almost busted my back, that's all.”...
 “I didn't mean to – honest, Mom!” Nic whined. “Alex just makes me so mad – he kept bugging me!”
 “You were on my bed, remember, you birdbrain!” I glared at him.
 “Okay, knock it off or the TV goes off.” Mom sounded like she meant it...
 “Dominic, time for chores,” Mom said. “Please go give Butter some fresh water. Alex, the chickens are waiting for their dinner.” (12)

Mom is not going to put up with this nonsense; she stops the interaction and directs both boys to head in opposite directions. Still, Alex is upset. “Come on, both of you! Go outside for a while.’ Mom put her hands on our shoulders and steered us down the hall. I slammed the door as I went outside. It's so unfair. Mom lets Nic get away with everything.” (13) Nic is full of resentment at this point.

The boys go outside to do their chores. Alex notices that one of the chickens is missing, and he decides to ask Nic to help him look for her. .

He's such a klutz. Still, he's the only brother I've got and it's not his fault he's so ... so different. Like the bunk bed thing. I know he didn't really mean to do that.
 “Hey, Nic,” I called. “Have you seen Fluffy?”
 “No,” he said.
 “Would you help me find her?”
 “Sure!” It seemed he'd already forgotten we were mad at each other, so I decided to forget it too... (13-14)

In spite of his annoyance and resentment, Alex really does care about his brother.

Nic is lying in the grass, apparently not searching for Fluffy.

“You’re going to get ticks all over you,” I said.
 He scrambled to his feet... Then he said, “I was just trying to figure out what that blob is.”
 “What blob?”
 He pointed to a large Douglas fir...
 I looked. “Oh, yeah. I see it.” I grinned at him and gave him a shove.
 “That round blob up there is what we’ve been looking for.”
 “I knew that!” Nic chortled. He grabbed me and gave me a noogie, rubbing my scalp with his bony knuckles enough to make it tingle.
 “Hey! Enough already!” I pulled away and we headed into the woods...
 (15)

Nic is very excited that he has found the chicken and gotten the best of Alex.

While they are rescuing the chicken, Alex slips out of the tree. As they walk back to the house, Nic begins apologizing again.

As I limped toward the house, Nic clutched my arm.
 “I really didn’t mean to push you off the bunk, you know.”
 “I know.”
 “You could have broken your neck. Or suffered some other serious injury.”
 “I know, but I didn’t. I’m fine.”
 “You’re not fine -- I can see your leg hurts.” Nic’s fingers tightened.
 “Really, Nic. I’m okay.”
 “Not okay! I saw you limping! You shouldn’t lie, Alex.” (18)

Nic exhibits persistence in his not letting go of the subject when Alex wants to drop it.

He also engages in rule-following, spoiling his apology by accusing Alex of lying. Alex is used to Nic, however, and he explains that the limp came from falling out of the tree, which was not Nic’s fault. Satisfied with this explanation, Nic finally lets the subject drop.

At school Alex serves as Nic’s protector. Todd is a swaggering bully who picks on Nic.

“C’mon you little dummy! Hand it over. I know you’ve got a chocolate bar in your pocket.”

Nic huddled against the wall, eyes scrunched tight. “Leave me alone!” he yelled.

“C’mon!” Todd poked him in the shoulder. Hard.

“Hey! Bug off, creep!” I can’t stand bullies, especially when they pick on Nic.

Todd straightened up and turned to face me. “Mind your own business, dog doo!” His pale eyes looked like dead fish eyes.

“Alex!” Nic ran over and hugged me.

I pushed him away. “Get off!”

“Ahhh, ain’t that sweet!” Todd sneered. “Little squirrely Dominic has a bodyguard! Ain’t that sweet!” He stuck his hands in his pockets and swaggered out like he’d successfully finished some important business. I wanted to finish him!

“Alex, you saved my life! How can I ever repay you?” Nic grabbed my hand...

“Alex, here, you can have my Snickers bar!”...

“That’s okay. I’m not hungry, Nic. See you later!” (24-25)

Although he is perfectly willing to act the hero for his brother, Alex is overwhelmed by Nic’s excited response and runs away, avoiding Nic’s intense emotion.

Nic and Alex are both excited to see that Brianna Santos is now riding their bus.

When Brianna gets on the bus, Nic asks her if she wants to sit with him. She does and they chatter away, much to Alex’s chagrin. As they’re walking home, Nic tells Alex that Brianna wants to come see their chickens sometime.

He whispered something to me.

“Nic, you don’t need to whisper. No one’s around.”

“But it’s a secret. You have to whisper if it’s a secret,” he explained.

“Okay. Whatever.”

“I think Brianna’s in love with me. She told Lottie Whitmore that she thinks I’m cute.”...

“Did you hear me, Alex?” Nic asked, impatient.

“I hate to bust your bubble, Nic, but that’s a crazy idea. Why would a girl like Brianna Santos...” My voice trailed off...I couldn’t blow that happy blaze out. “I mean, what I mean is...you just met her today.”

“Haven’t you ever heard of love at first sight?”(29-30)

Alex exhibits both caretaking and compassion in spite of Nic’s annoying rule-following.

On Saturday morning, Brianna shows up at the door while Alex is still in his pajamas and Nic is still asleep. Alex wakes him up.

Nic blinked at me, sleepy-eyed. “What?” he asked, rubbing his face. Panting, I stared at him. Finally, I found my breath. It’s Brianna Santos,” I gasped. “She’s here.”
 “Where?” he said loudly, looking around the room as if she’d come in with me.
 “Shhhh.” I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to concentrate.
 “Oh, yeah,” my brother said, yawning so wide his jaw clicked.
 “Oh, yeah? What do you mean, oh, yeah?” I opened my eyes and looked at him.
 “I asked her to come over today. What time is it? Is she still there?” He slung the blanket onto the floor and headed for the door. He was wearing his underpants. Just his underpants.
 “Nic, wait!” I grabbed his shoulder. “You can’t go out like that!”
 He stopped. “Oh. You’re right.” (40-41)

Alex saves Nic from a serious social faux pas. They get dressed and prepare to welcome Brianna, on whom Alex has a serious crush. In spite of the craziness of the situation, they manage a civil discussion.

“Hey, Nic?”
 “Yeah?”
 “Next time will you tell me if you’re expecting company?”
 “Sure.” (41)

Later in the week, Nic asks Alex if he likes Brianna. He says that Brianna likes Alex. Alex starts babbling questions; Nic changes the subject.

“Nic! We are talking about Brianna Santos. I thought *you* liked her.” I didn’t know why I was having this conversation with Nic. What did he know, anyway?
 “Well, I do like her. Just as a friend, you know.”
 I will never understand my brother.
 “Why don’t you ask Brianna herself?” Nic said as if anybody could talk to her. (51)

Alex keeps trying to understand Nic, who ironically handles his relationship with Brianna better than Alex does. The next time she comes over, Brianna and Nic get stuck on the roof and Alex has big ideas about rescuing them.

“Hi, Alex.” It was her....
 “Hilo, Bianca.” Dang it! What was I saying?
 She smiled uncertainly and looked at Nic.
 “He means to greet you,” Nic explained. (55)

The rescue turns into a fiasco, due to red ants, and Alex avoids both Nic and Brianna for awhile.

The boys’ mother tries to make peace between her sons.

“Alex, listen to me. Nic feels bad about what happ—“
 “Mom, you don’t even know a thing about what he does to me. Everywhere I go, there he is to embarrass me. At school, on the bus, even in my own yard! I can’t take it anymore.”
 “He doesn’t mean to—“
 Mom, I don’t want to talk about it.”(61-62)

Alex avoids Nic and Brianna as thoroughly as possible, as long as possible, but eventually he runs into Brianna in the driveway and he decides everything is okay. Brianna tells Alex she admires Nic for being himself. Nic says that he is going to get iced tea and Alex suggests he bring some for Brianna. He comes back with one glass.

“Nic, I think Brianna wanted some too.
 “Oh, my goodness. I didn’t know that,” Nic said. He thrust his glass at her. “You can have mine. It’s not sweet enough anyway.”
 Yeah, he’s just so, so himself alright.
 Walking off, Nic announced, “I’m gonna watch some TV now.”
 “Sorry,” I muttered as I reached for Nic’s glass. (67-68)

While they are outside, Todd shows up. He insults them. They try to warn him that he is about to be attacked by a rooster, but he doesn’t believe them and ends up hurt. Brianna laughs.

“Brianna, why are you laughing? That wasn’t funny –Todd got hurt. Didn’t you see him bleeding?
 “I’m sorry Nic,”
 “You shouldn’t laugh when someone is hurt.”
 “Sorry,” Brianna said, biting her lower lip.
 Nic stomped off to the garden, muttering. (72-73)

Nic is the only one to exhibit empathy for Todd, in spite of the fact that Todd torments him.

Later, though, Alex finds the rooster dead. He recognizes the shotgun spray from when he saw Todd shooting ducklings. He tells Nic.

“Todd shot the Beast.”
 “What? Our rooster? Why?”
 “Because Todd’s a cowardly creep and the Beast beat him up the other day, remember?”
 “But he didn’t have to shoot him,” Nic protested.
 “Well, he did.”
 “We should press charges against him. He must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law,” Nic said, as he stood there in his underwear...
 “We already know his motive – revenge. And he had the opportunity too, since he’s our neighbor. He could’ve easily sneaked over here.”
 My brother was rambling on and on, as usual.
 “We need evidence,” Nic proclaimed, hands on hips. “That’s the next stage in this investigation.”
 Nic and his true crime stories! He gets carried away sometimes...
 “Like what kind of evidence?” I asked Nic. (89-90)

In spite of Nic’s being so keen to prosecute, when they next see Todd Nic takes pity on him. When Alex calls Todd’s parents to tell them what Todd has done, they pretend indifference. When Alex and Nic go over there, though, it is clear that Todd is receiving a beating. Todd runs into the woods, and Alex wants to leave. But Nic has another idea.

In fact, his freckled elf –face wrinkled in concern. He rose up to his knees and looked at me. “Todd’s crying.”
 “Shhh. I know. This is our chance. Let’s go.” I started creeping away again.

“We can’t leave him like this,” Nic protested. “I learned in my ST group that it’s important to try to comfort someone who is crying...”

“Nic!” I gasped. “Come back here!” Somehow I didn’t think Todd would be happy to see us right then. But my brother is clueless about that kind of fact...

Nic plopped himself down next to Todd, slung his arm around Todd’s brawny shoulders, and said “Looks like you’re having a real bad day.” I held my breath.

Todd drew back, staring at Nic, bewildered. After a few moments, he nodded, yes, and made this sort of strangled laugh. Then he started blubbing like a baby....

About an hour later Nic shuffled down our driveway. “Todd’s not going to bother us anymore,” he said. “We’re buddies now.” (95-97)

In this case, rule-following plays into Nic’s natural empathy and he is able and willing to comfort Todd.

Daisy teaches Nic about eggs and chicks, as Fluffy has had a hard time trying to hatch her eggs. With Daisy’s guidance, chicks are hatched. One is slow to hatch, and Nic takes a special interest in it. Once hatched, it has a deformed leg and requires special care.

“Nic, how do you know about all this stuff?” I gestured at the egg and the water. “Wait, let me guess. Daisy White.”

“That’s right. You’re fairly smart, Alex. For a neurologically typical person, anyway.”

“What are you calling me? Never mind, I’m going to ignore that.”

My brother smiled at me. “It’s okay, Alex, you’re fine just the way you are.” “Yeah, whatever.” I stood up. “I’m going to see how the others are doing.”(103-104)

Nic’s knowledge gives him a sense of superiority in this area, which gives him a chance to express mild condescension, but also good-natured humor.

The boys’ mother has gone out to deliver a baby and Alex, Brianna, Daisy and Nic are supposed to go to a costume party. Daisy calls up and says that she is sick and cannot go. Nic does not take this change of plans well; he becomes extremely angry.

Alex says Nic should go anyway, but Nic refuses. He says he'll stay by himself. Then the lights go out.

Nic really hates the dark.

"Nic! Turn on your flashlight," I yelled as I hurried down the hall.

"Where is it?" he screamed.

I opened the bedroom door. "It should be right there next to your pillow. Where it always is."

"It won't work, it won't work!" Nic muttered, banging it on the wall.

"Here! Take this one!" I handed him mine and went scouting around for another.

"Alex, don't leave me..."

"I'm not, I'm not! Would you quit grabbing at my outfit like that?" I shove his hand away. (111)

Alex takes care of his brother, but he is annoyed. He wants to go to the party. So, he gets Nic settled and tries to sneak out. A terrible row ensues. The boys shout awful things at each other, Nic insisting that Alex hates him and Alex finally agreeing. Nic runs off, and all of a sudden Alex realizes Nic is outside. He hears him calling for a chick. He also hears coyotes. He runs out to rescue Nic. He yells at Nic to climb a tree. He gets to him and is able to help Nic up, but the coyotes attack.

Desperate, I started swinging wildly. I sobbed like a baby. I was a goner, for sure.

Nic yelled something.

Duck? I ducked.

A light flashed by me. Banged the big coyote right on its head. *Thunk!* It staggered for a moment, shaking its head. Then it went down, its eyes rolling back, lathered tongue lolling out. The others sniffed at the downed coyote, then, whimpering, scuttled off into the darkness.

I stood there, gasping for breath. I stared. "Way to go, Nic! Bull's eye!"

"Are you okay, Alex?" Nic called down to me. His voice wobbled.

"Yeah, basically, I'm okay."

"Good, that's good," Nic said. "He's okay. I'm okay. We're all okay."

Then he pulled something out of his pocket and leaned over, handing it down to me. "The wind blew the gate open and he got lost."

"What? I mumbled. "Who?"

"Here," Nic said. (123-124)

Nic has managed to rescue the chick and Alex as well. Alex has been injured in the fight with the coyotes, and Nic apologizes.

“Alex, I’m sorry.” Nic stood in front of me, looking me straight in the eye. “I’m so sorry.”

“For what? You nailed that coyote and saved my hide – most of it, anyway,” I told him, smiling. “You did good.” I punched his shoulder gently.

“I mean, I’m sorry for everything. You know... I’m not the easiest brother to be stuck with.” The skin around his eyes got this purple-plum color. His eyes glistened.

“No, Nic, it’s not like that. Not at all like that.” Nic’s face blurred. “Nic, you are the best brother in the entire world! The best!” I had to choke the words out. “And, I wouldn’t trade you for anything.” I wrapped my arms around him and hugged him so hard he squeaked. “I love you like crazy, you dope. You better not ever forget it.” I meant every word of that, too. My brother, Dominic Stone, had a hero’s heart beating in that scrawny little chest; he was true and brave in all the most important ways. (125-126)

Alex realizes that Nic has unique attributes that are both infuriating at times and produce remarkable results at other times.

A Wizard Alone

A Wizard Alone is science fiction. Darryl is an eleven year-old boy who is autistic, in a special education class, and doesn’t speak. Nevertheless, in the realm of science fiction, this does not stop him from communicating. Darryl is an incipient wizard who is struggling to get through his Ordeal which is something like a final exam. Kit, another young wizard, has been asked to find out what the problem is. He and his dog, Ponch (who can also think-speak) and find various ways to enter Darryl’s mind, track him down, and communicate with him. Darryl also initiates contact with Nita, another wizard, but communication is difficult at first. Before we meet Darryl, he shows up in Nita’s dream.

Darryl shows up, unnamed, as a clown riding a tiny bicycle in Nia's dream. But the face under the white greasepaint was as immobile as a marble statue's, expressionless, plastered in place. Only the eyes were alive. They shouted, *I can't get off! I can't get off!* And just this once, the clown didn't think it was funny either. (32)

He is trying to make contact with her, but he is trapped, despairing.

In Kit's first attempt to contact Darryl, he is amazed both at the way Darryl can hide within his own mind and at the wealth of detail in Darryl's interior landscape.

Who'd have thought somebody autistic could notice things this way, Kit thought. But then he shook his head at himself. He'd hardly ever thought about autistic people except to feel vaguely sorry for them, and he'd never given any thought as to what they might or might not be able to do. That was changing now. Whatever else might be going on inside of Darryl, he could *see* things – possibly more clearly than Kit had ever seen them, except under the most unusual circumstances. (76)

Kit begins to rethink his preconceived notions, to develop some admiration for Darryl, but he is still unable to reach him.

Darryl seeks Nita again in her dreams a couple of times, and they are finally able to communicate. But Nita has trouble understanding his perspective, which is self-centered to the extent that he can negate the existence of others.

“I couldn't understand a lot of what you were saying to me then, but I think that may be fixed now,” Nita said. “What can I do for you?” There was another long pause. “Nothing,” the voice said. “This is the vigil. There's nothing to do but wait for the fight to begin again.” “What fight?” Nita said. “With the Enemy,” the knight said. “What else is there? Outside of the fighting, nothing exists but this.” Nita glanced around her. There was no sign of anything else but the two of them in this whole place, which seemed to stretch away into a dark infinity. (127)

Darryl speaks of the Lone Power which all wizards must fight, but he speaks of the battle as his alone.

Kit, whose job it is to reach Darryl, is still being frustrated in his attempts. He chases Darryl around Darryl's mind landscape.

“Darryl!” Kit shouted. “Hey Darryl, wait up!”

Darryl turned his head for just a flash, looking toward Kit. For a fraction of a second, their eyes met.

Darryl ran on. Kit reeled back as if someone had hit him across the face, and staggered with shock and pain. He had felt, for that second, what Darryl had felt: the unbearable pain of another person's regard. (163)

Kit is shocked, but feels empathy for this boy who experiences things so intensely.

The Lone Power show up to battle with Darryl, but Darryl encases himself in ice, and eventually absents himself completely although his image remains.

“Are you really stupid or crazy enough to think I'm just going to walk away?” the Lone Power said, and the menace in Its voice made Kit's hair stand up all over him. “I have centuries, *aeons* at my disposal. I can hound you from life to life if I chose, until for the sake of a moment's peace you *beg* me to destroy your soul. Is this what your precious Powers gave you your wizardry for? To stand here inactive, as a statue, refusing the inevitable? Well, it won't help you. Coward! You can't come out the other side of this until you confront me. And you *won't* confront me! You'll just stay in here like the pitiful reject that you are, while outside in reality your darling mother and father grieve over you every day. You're not being very considerate of them, are you? After everything they've gone through? Now you have a chance to stand up, to conquer me, to come out the other side of your power, and you won't take it.” (170-171)

Darryl is able to escape this venomous, condescending, bullying attack by removing himself to another place in his mind.

This sort of hide and seek, and the stilted conversations in which Darryl refuses to acknowledge the existence of the very people he is talking to, continue. He appears again as a clown in Nita's dream. “I didn't know everything was like this for you,” Nita said.

The clown winced, as if something had pained it. “I? But I *did* know. There is no other I.” (182)

Nita asks him why he wears the clown suit, she really wants to understand.

The clown looked at her in astonishment. “You can tell it’s a costume?” “Under the costumes,” Nita said, “even clowns have lives. Outside the circus, anyway.”

The clown was silent again, for even longer than before. Nita waited, untroubled. This far along in her practice, she had learned that a lot of wizardry wasn’t speech, but silence. “It seemed right,” the clown said. “The body I wear usually doesn’t work real well, and that makes people laugh. They may as well laugh for a good reason as for a bad one.” And suddenly it wasn’t a clown standing there, but a boy of maybe eleven. He was handsome, in a little-kid way, skinny and sharp-faced, with a short, restrained Afro cut high in the back. But his eyes were younger than his body. “Nothing works,” he said, sounding abruptly matter-of-fact—or maybe it was just the loss of the clown suit that reinforced this effect. “Everybody laughs. Especially the ones who don’t do it out loud; they do it the loudest.” (186)

Nita has finally reached Darryl, he shares his sadness. He also shares the intense joy he feels fighting the Lone Power; it is something he can do that has value.

“But I always have to make sure I stop having the fun before It notices,” he said. “Every time I find out again that I’m not alone, I let the knowledge go.”

That explains it. That’s why he keeps forgetting things, and has to ask questions over and over. “But why?” Nita said.

“Because it’s what always happened when things got bad for me,” the boy said, “when It first turned up in my life, the way It turns up at the bottom of everything bad. I was fine, I always knew who I was...until the world started screaming at me, making it impossible to think, to be with people...to *be*. I would forget myself, again and again. I couldn’t help myself. I would forget everything that hurt...and everything that didn’t. (188-189)

Now Nita has an explanation for why Darryl has retreated from the world, an explanation for his autism.

Kit still has trouble reaching Darryl. He continues to chase Darryl around, and finally, exhausted, he falls. Darryl picks him up. Kit is amazed at his strength, but still insists Darryl needs to come with him.

Kit said. “Darryl, I’ve been trying to catch up with you for a long time. I’m on errantry, and do I ever greet you! Now we can go somewhere and have a quiet talk, because—“

“No,” Darryl said.

“You don’t understand,” Kit said, getting his breath again, but only slowly. “You really ought to get out of here while you’ve got the chance. It’s not here yet, but I think It’s coming—“

“That’s just why I can’t leave,” Darryl said. “There are still things I have to do here, and in all the other heres. It doesn’t matter whether—“He stopped, as if searching for words. “It doesn’t matter what else might be here. It doesn’t matter if there is a way out. I can’t take it. I have to find the thing that still needs to be done before I can go.” (213)

Kit is sure he knows better than Darryl; his tone is condescending. But Darryl knows he must complete his Ordeal. He asks Kit and Ponch to leave; they leave and return. Darryl believes that there is no way out of the trap which he has devised for the Lone Power and that they are all stuck in his mind forever.

The Lone Power and Nita show up as well, and Nita explains that the communication Kit, Ponch, and Nita have had with Darryl has helped to expose the lies the Lone Power has been feeding Darryl.

“And once we got in - although we came and went - our points of view stayed behind, at least a little,” Nita said to the Lone Power. “While only you were in here, Darryl believed what you believed about this space, and about his Ordeal-“

Darryl had walked over toward Nita and Kit while Nita was speaking...and the smile growing on his face now was rapidly becoming a match for Nita’s: angry, but still very amused. “I may be autistic,” Darryl said, to the Lone One, grim, “but I’m not stupid. You’ve invested a lot of energy in your little cat-and-mouse game. Well, I can play this game, too. Maybe I’ll just amuse myself playing with *you* for the rest of my natural life. It’s sure been fun so far!” (294)

Darryl is beginning to recognize and assert his true worth. He would like to leave this trap, but he makes a deal with the Lone Power, though, that he will stay if Kit, Ponch and Nita are allowed to go, an act of true heroism. The Lone Power leaves for the time being.

Darryl reveals to the others that he can be in two places at once. That is one of the tactics he has used to fight the Lone Power. Nita suggests that in that case, they all leave.

Darryl looked at Nita in shock. “But I can’t leave. The Ordeal isn’t over.”...

“Sure it is!” Nita said. “You passed your Ordeal weeks ago. You passed it the minute you managed to say the Oath.”

“Remember how you had to fight to get it out, word by word, phrase by phrase?” Kit said, slowly starting to grin. “How you kept losing it, forgetting it, having to start over again and again?”

“That was the Lone One interfering,” Darryl said softly. He was wearing a listening look, as the Silence spoke to him...

“That was the real battle,” he said. “And I won it! I won...”

“And just the act of saying the Oath, accepting it, for someone autistic...” Nita looked at Darryl with renewed admiration. “You have to accept the concept of the Other, that there *are* others, to do it at all. It must have been like eating broken glass.”

Darryl stood there looking as if a whole new world was opening up before him, as if his past pain was retreating into the shadows. “It *was* hard,” he said. “The whole Oath is about doing things for other people...” (300-301)

Darryl’s Ordeal has been to escape the boundaries set by his autism. Darryl is relieved that his Ordeal is over, but part of him must remain trapped in this place he has created. He considers just staying put. “In here... it’s been safe. In here I never have to look, never have to be afraid I’ll see what may be there. Rejection. The one who sees me and doesn’t *want* to look back. Because he’s bored with me, or I’ve hurt him, or...” (302)

In spite of his bravery, he is still afraid of the outside; he is still practicing avoidance.

Kit and Nita convince Darryl that he can do more good if he is not trapped in his mind. They convince him to leave with them. Nita suggests that he think real hard about what part of him he wishes to leave behind.

Darryl looked from Nita to Kit, and slowly, surmise dawned in his eyes.
 “The autism...”
 “Why not?...”
 “But giving it up...” He looked distressed. “I don’t know if I can! It’s part of me.”
 “So,” Kit said. “Is it a part you need?”
 “No!” Darryl said.
 And then he fell silent.
 “I hear a *but* coming,” Nita said.
 “I don’t know if I know how to live without it,” Darryl said...
 “It’s how I stood being alive,” Darryl said. (304-305)

Nita and Kit convince Darryl that he doesn’t need that part of him; his autism is left in the trap.

When he leaves the autism behind, his body begins to function properly. In his special education class, his teacher notices something.

Darryl McAllister looked at him, looked at him straight on.
 The teacher went over to the boy, and got down beside him where he had been sitting on the floor and rocking. “Hey there, Darryl,” he said,
 “What’s up?”
 “I don’t think,” Darryl said, in a voice that cracked and creaked with not having been used for words for a long time, “I don’t think I need to be here anymore.”
 The teacher’s mouth dropped open.
 “Can I go home now?” Darryl said, and smiled. (308)

Darryl has “recovered” and is explains to Kit and Nita later that his parents are overjoyed. In order to relate to others outside of his own mind, though, Darryl has to magically divest himself of the autism as if it is something foreign and not integral to his being. One must wonder if a number of positives may have disappeared with the negatives.

Haze

Seb, a seventeen year-old boy with undiagnosed Asperger's Syndrome, does not want to go to the school dance. "His mother said he had to go. 'Just go for a little while, Seb,' she pleaded, 'Get away from the computer for a couple of hours.'

'It'll be great,' Dad said. 'A chance to meet some girls.'" (5)

His parents direct him to go for his own good. Rather than rebelling, Seb goes, even though situations like that make him uncomfortable. The dance is a complete disaster, even though Seb's friend Guzzle attempts to teach him the ropes.

"Come on," Guzzle urged. "Give it a go."

Seb stood at the back a long time and observed. He tried to work out the rules, but gave up. It was all too hard. Then he saw Kristie... With his stomach churning, he asked her, "Would you like to dance?"...

"Stupid nerd," Guzzle yelled later over the music. "She can't stand ya. Can't ya tell?"

Seb couldn't think. "No. How can you tell?" he asked, feeling stupid...again.

"See the way she looked back at her friends and scrunched up her face. That says she didn't wanna to dance with ya." (6)

Seb doesn't know why social situations are so difficult for him. He has figured out rules for some situations, but there are still many that are too complicated and irregular for him to grasp. For example, he is accustomed to being bullied. "The first three letters in **D**angerous and don't you forget it,' was how Dan introduced himself, after he'd spat at Seb that first day.'"(8)

Nevertheless, he will stand up for someone else who is being bullied. When Kaziah is picking on Kristie, he steps in. She turns on him and teases Seb instead, but she leaves Kristie alone.

Seb has trouble understanding people, but he has no trouble with computers. Seb can and does access the teachers' passwords while Guzzle watches. Guzzle asks Seb to change his grades, but Seb has reservations. He agrees to change the old grades which have already gone out when Guzzle says his mom will be proud if he passes. Guzzle is manipulating him, but Seb wants to help his friend.

Kristie calls him to thank him for standing up for her, and Seb is tongue-tied. By the time he summons up the courage to call her back, it is very late.

A man's voice, full of sleep, groaned, "Goddam. Who the hell is this? It's nearly midnight."

Seb hung up, heart thumping.

Breathing hard, he picked at the scabs on his hands. (21)

People are unpredictable, unlike computers.

The new computer teacher seems to respect Seb's knowledge. She makes him speak up in class. She leads him into a conversation about hackers. This is a subject he understands.

Seb's parents are concerned about him.

"Seb, we need to talk," Mum said.

Seb glanced at his watch. 6.49am. He reached for the cereal box....

"Leave it, Seb. Have it later." His dad moved the box away.

"Dad and I are worried about you, Seb," Mum said. She went to stroke his arm. To let him know worry came from love, but he drew back.

"We think you might need some help."

"Help with what?" He spoke quickly, trying to speed up the conversation.

"With lots of things. With the problems you have getting along with people. With your unreasonable need for routine. With the bullying at school."

Seb stiffened. How did she know about that. He never told her.

"Who do you think repairs the rips in your clothes each week, Seb?" she answered his unasked question.

"We've booked you in to see the school counsellor, Seb," Dad said gruffly.

"We're coming with you to see him on the first session, then after that you'll go on your own every Tuesday."

The school counsellor. Someone new. Asking questions. Seb's breathing quickened.

"We just want to help you, Seb. To see you happy."

"When?"

"The first appointment is tomorrow. Tuesday, 1pm."

"Lunch time?"

"Is that OK? We can change it if you like?"

"It's OK," he said finally. It wasn't so bad, really. He could adapt given time. (36-37)

Although the conversation begins with the parents directing and caretaking, and Seb practicing avoidance, it turns into a discussion. The session with the counselor is okay. Seb promises to work harder on the classes he doesn't like, and they arrange for him to have afterschool sessions with Miss Adonia in acknowledgement of his exceptional abilities on the computer.

After Seb's first computer session at home with Miss Adonia, she makes conversation.

She smiled. "Star Trek. Bit of a Trekkie are you?"

"Yep. Even got a costume."

"Let me guess. Spock?"

"Close. Another Vulcan. Tuvok."

"Logical unemotional men. You relate to them, do you?"

"They make sense."

Miss Adonia laughed. "All Vulcans have Asperger's."

"Have what?"

Miss Adonia stared at Seb. "You don't know what Asperger's Syndrome is?"

"Never heard of it." (47-48)

Seb continues to have trouble with girls. Kristie asks him to a movie. He, very logically, wants to know which one, because if it is not something he likes, he doesn't want to go. Kristie gets embarrassed, Jen gets angry, and it takes Madeline to explain to Seb what he has done wrong.

"When Kristie asked you to come with us to the movies, she was really asking if you'd be her friend," Madeline said softly. "The movies are unimportant. They're just a reason to be together."

Movies means friends.

He'd said no to movies, therefore he'd said no to friends. How was he supposed to realize that?

"I thought you should know." Madeline said.

"What do I do now?"

"Come to the movies. Say you'd love to go, and say sorry you were rude."

"But I don't like the movies. And I wasn't rude."

Madeline shrugged. "Go to the movies to please Kristie. Or not go and lose her friendship. Your choice. And Seb, you *were* rude. Sometimes truth is not the best policy." (53-54)

Madeline tries to teach him the illogical ins and outs of friendship.

Seb looks up Asperger's Syndrome and tests positive for it according to an internet checklist. He talks to Guzzle about it, who says he's sorry. Seb doesn't see why Guzzle should be sorry; he finally has an explanation for why he is the way he is.

"Asperger's Syndrome. Why would that make you sorry?"

"Well it's not exactly normal, is it."

"It's normal for me."

"So ya're not worried? Ya don't mind havin' it?"

Seb thought a while. "I'd like to understand people better, but I don't really care about the other bits. If I didn't have Asperger's than I wouldn't be so brilliant at computers."

"Obviously being humble is not part of this syndrome thing," Guzzle laughed. (57)

Guzzle obviously does not know what to do with this information, so he uses humor to cover his confusion.

Soon Seb is compelled to discuss this with his other friends as well, because he cannot handle the movie which he has agreed to see. Kristie tries to take his hand, the noises and the smells are overwhelming, and he has to escape. He runs into Miss Adonia, and when the girls catch up with him, Miss Adonia helps explain. Seb explains it to his parents, and later recounts what happened to his friends.

"You just don't get it, do you?" Kristie tried to explain. "You think your parents aren't upset about you having Asperger's, but they probably are. Your dad went all quiet and your mum cried."
 "But there's no reason to get upset. I'm still the same person."
 "The same person with a life sentence."
 "I'm not dying."
 "So you don't mind having Asperger's?" Jen asked.
 "Why should I? Some of the most brilliant minds in history are suspected of having it. Mozart. Einstein." (69)

His friends point out that it is not normal. Seb stands up for himself. " Seb shrugged. 'What's normal? Is Dan normal? Chalk? I don't want to be like them. Maybe I'm the normal one and everyone else is weird.'" (70)

Seb can't handle it when he discovers that Guzzle is dating Kaz and is friends with Dan and Chalk. He loses control and ends up putting his hand through a window. He gets suspended. Miss Adonia asks him about it when she comes for his lesson.

"Did you tell anyone?"
 "No."
 "Why not? You might not have got into so much trouble."
 "Rule number one. Don't tell."
 "Who told you that?"
 "Everyone knows that. If you tell, you get it worse the next day. Anyway, I don't care. I'm glad I'm suspended. I hate school."
 "I understand. But if your parents explain to your teachers that you have Asperger's then people might be a bit more understanding. And besides, if you are going to be a world famous computer specialist, you need to finish your schooling."
 Seb shrugged. "I suppose." (92-93)

Seb's rule-following is obstructing his ability to act in his own best interest. But more betrayal is yet to come. Miss Adonia brings Rodin to see Seb. He finds out that they suspect him of hacking a newly released computer program. Seb retreats into himself, trying to avoid the pain.

"Seb's telling the truth. We were wrong. He's not who we are after."

"We'll know soon," Rodin replied, not taking his eyes from the computer.
 "We know now. We should go, Rodin. We have done enough damage as it is."
 "Sit down, Adonia."
 Miss Adonia bit her lip and turned to Seb and spoke to the rumped bag.
 "Seb. I'm sorry. So sorry. But we have to check you out, don't you see. It's our job and you were so talented that we thought you were the one we sought." (106)

Miss Adonia is sorry, but the damage is done. Seb's trust is broken.

The girls, Kristie, Jen and Madeline come to see Seb and he is mindlessly watching TV. They try to make conversation. Finally, he tells them what has happened.

"She thought I was a thief. I never want to see her again."

Kristie reacts with shock, as she understands and admires Seb's honesty.

"A thief? You? That's crazy. You're so honest it's pathetic. I remember when once you found a pencil in the school yard and handed it in to the office."

Madeline comes to visit Seb, alone. It turns out she is a computer expert as well, and she discovers a leak in Seb's security. Someone is tapping into his files.

"Do you trust me?" Madeline asked, staring at the blinking light on Seb's modem.
 "Trust you to do what?"
 "I can contact somebody who can trace that leak."
 "What? Who?"
 "It's hard to explain. Do you mind if I at least try?" (128)

Madeline contacts someone named Mr. Minty, who she says can help trace the leak. She says he is always there when she needs help.

Because Madeline has visited Seb, her crazy mother locks her in an empty room. Seb feels as if it is his fault. He goes to her house to see if she's okay.

"GO AWAY!" she mouthed.
 Seb peered beyond her. Shone a torch into her room. "NO!!!!" Madeline screeched silently. "GO! GO!!!"

"Are you OK?" she saw him whisper. She nodded furiously.
(138)

Seb has learned enough now, though, not to take her seriously. He contacts Mr. Minty, who turns out to be Madeline's uncle, although Seb does not know that at the time. He only knows that Madeline has said that Mr. Minty helps her. Later, once her uncle comes and saves her from her crazy mother, Madeline and Seb talk.

"I contacted Mr. Minty that night I came round to your window. I didn't know what else to do."

"You did that for me?" Madeline brought her head up and stared at Seb. He left his head crooked at an angle. Too self-conscious to move.

"I wondered how he knew," she said. "I thought it was just coincidence. And it was because of you all along."

You are so sweet, Seb. Thank you." She leaned over and gave him a kiss on the cheek then snuggled up to his arm again. (151-152)

Seb has come a long way, thanks to parents and especially friends who won't give up on him. He even thanks his mom.

"Thanks Mum," he said, the words awkward off his tongue. "For not giving up on me."

"You're welcome," she said, holding back tears of love that she knew he would misinterpret as sadness.

"I'm going over to see Maddy. Is that OK?"

"Fine," she said calmly, as she thought to herself, "That is so incredibly, wonderfully fine that I could scream." (156)

There will still be misunderstandings and rough spots, but Seb understands his strengths and limitations. Seb has grown relationally and so have those around him.

Conclusion

Having now dissected the relationships depicted in these texts, reconstructed them as a mass of thematically segregated interactions, analyzed them by frequency of occurrence, and examined them in context, what can we conclude about the relationships of characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders in recent young adult and upper elementary level fiction? Can we reach any conclusions with respect to the proposed research questions?

First of all, although these characters interact with a large number and wide variety of other characters, peers represent the single largest group with whom characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders interact, both in percentage of individuals to whom they relate and the percentage of interactions. A large percentage of the interactions with peers fall into the category of communication. Although many types of interactions occur, peers are the group with which individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders are most likely to engage in general conversation. Peers can also cause a lot of trouble, as they are sometimes bullies. In two cases, however, acts of kindness (expressions of empathy) on the part of the character with ASD result in bullies developing increased appreciation for the character with ASD. Enemies become friends.

In the stories that feature siblings, the siblings are extremely important. Relationships with siblings are intense, producing many emotionally charged encounters. No matter how angry or frustrated the siblings get with the character with ASD, it is clear that each of the siblings is very protective of his brother (all of the characters with ASDs who have siblings are male). Caretaking is of extreme importance in Clay, in which the mother abdicates her responsibility for her son who is autistic, and Elsie, his sister, takes

on the primary caretaker, caregiver role. Even in Wishing on the Midnight Star, in which the mother is clearly a responsible adult, the sibling, Alex, feels compelled to take care of his older brother with Asperger's Syndrome.

Parents and leaders (except for the park ranger in Wild Orchid who is as much a friend as a leader/mentor) seem to spend most of their time caretaking and directing, as may be expected since they are in positions of authority, but there is less real communication than one would like to see. Perhaps, in part, this is because a number of the characters with ASDs are teenagers, and parent / teen interactions are generally strained under the best of circumstances.

“Others” are generally included in the stories to highlight some of the bizarre behavior individuals with ASDs engage in. They help move the plot along. In *A Wizard Alone*, however, the “Lone Power” is a bully who is depicted as being responsible for Darryl's having autism, giving the “Lone Power” much more significance than other individuals in this category.

The characters with ASDs do engage in off-putting relational activities. They can be very emotional, and they exhibit literalism, persistence, rule-following and self-centered interactions which throw others off balance. It takes determination, compassion, and a lot of effort on the part of others to get past this so that significant communication can occur and equal, reciprocal relationships can develop. It is easy to underestimate the intelligence and other fine qualities of the characters with ASDs because of these off-putting and anti-social behaviors. This plays out tragically in The Silent Boy.

Finally, the question of the balance of powers between characters is complicated. Characters with Asperger's Syndrome are generally recognized as very intelligent and /

or talented. They stand up for themselves, and they help others. Although people bully them on occasion, they generally manage to turn this around. As active, intelligent characters, they consciously make choices to help others, sometimes in ways that they alone can manage due to the very condition (Asperger's) that can make social interactions difficult. Their ability to focus on a task (rabbit training), their intense interest in a particular subject (computers), and even their rule-following (you must be kind to someone who is sad) enable them to help others. Characters with Asperger's are presented as brilliant and quirky and well worth taking the time to get to know.

Characters with autism, however, do not fare as well. They are less active and more likely to be acted upon. They have few opportunities to perform deeds in service to others, and when they do, they are frequently misinterpreted. In spite of the fact that Matthew, in The Boy who Ate Stars, thought of the plan to find the missing dog, and actually managed to recover the animal, it did not change Lucy's attitude toward him. She still regarded him at the end of the story as she did at the beginning, as another creature to play with and train. No reciprocity there. Also, the only person in The Silent Boy who believed he was capable of an act of attempted heroism, as opposed to murder, is a small girl who doesn't even tell what she knows in his defense. The "touched" boy is carted off to an asylum. In Clay, there is hope at the end of the story that Tommy will become more active and engaged, but throughout the story he is acted upon. His only recourse is to temporarily refuse to do as he is bidden, but he is not proactive.

A Wizard Alone presents itself as showing the inner workings of the mind of a mute child with autism. It shows the mind of the child as being replete with detail, a magnificent, creative structure. It also shows the imagination, intensity and tenacity of

the child. Kit and Nita are impressed with all he has accomplished in his fight with the “Lone Power”. Nevertheless, when Darryl must leave a part of himself behind, trapped with the “Lone Power”, they suggest he leave his autism. This would seem to negate the value the book might otherwise have in promoting the appreciation of individuals with autism. Autism is represented as being completely negative, to be shed if at all possible, and not as responsible for many of the traits to which they had previously assigned such value. A mixed message at best.

So, characters with Asperger’s do play active and leading roles in their relationships. They stand up for themselves, and some of the relational interactions they engage in are enhanced by their “different-ability”. The characters with autism do not fare as well. So no unified theory of relation can be developed, there are separate theories of relationship for individuals with Asperger’s and autism. All ASD characters relate to a variety of individuals, but the characters with Asperger’s Syndrome are generally presented as proactive and equal, whereas the characters with autism, even when they do attempt to be proactive, are either disregarded or misinterpreted. True communication is missing.

APPENDIX A

Book	Characteristics of Primary Character with Autism Spectrum Disorder			Verbal Ability
	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Age	Sex	
Wild Orchid	Asperger's Syndrome	18	F	high
Buster and the Amazing Daisy	Asperger's Syndrome	5th Grade	F	high
The Boy Who Ate Stars	Autism	4	M	low - not conversational
The Silent Boy	Autism	13	M	mute
Clay	Autism	7	M	low - conversational
Wishing on the Midnight Star	Asperger's Syndrome	14	M	high
A Wizard Alone	Autism	11	M	mute - can converse in thought
Haze	Asperger's Syndrome	17	M	high

Book	Characters in Relationship with Primary Character with Autism Spectrum Disorder						Total
	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	
Wild Orchid		1	6	1	1		9
Buster and the Amazing Daisy		3		2	5		10
The Boy Who Ate Stars		1	3	1	1		6
The Silent Boy			3	1	1	1	6
Clay			6	2		1	9
Wishing on the Midnight Star	1	1		1	2	1	6
A Wizard Alone		1	1		3		5
Haze		1	2	2	6		11
Total	1	8	21	10	19	3	62

APPENDIX B

Totals Across Books							
Code	Character						Total
	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	
Apologizing	6	1	0	0	0	0	7
Discussion	308	80	36	34	141	36	635
Distrust	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Questioning	49	11	4	8	28	4	104
Trust	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Total	368	92	40	42	170	40	752
Anti-social	17	0	0	0	2	0	19
Avoiding	45	1	3	3	4	3	59
Denial	1	0	0	8	0	0	9
Social	18	9	11	1	19	2	60
Total	81	10	14	12	25	5	147
Bullying	0	0	3	0	9	0	12
Caretaking	9	18	4	38	11	26	106
Cautioning	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Directing	10	12	5	40	9	25	101
Heroism	10	0	0	0	0	1	11
Literalism	33	0	0	0	0	0	33
Persistence	63	0	0	0	0	0	63
Rule-Following	69	0	0	0	0	0	69
Teaching	10	10	3	10	34	1	68
Teasing	1	0	1	0	8	0	10
Total	205	40	16	88	72	53	474
Anger	37	0	4	11	4	11	67
Annoyance	21	2	2	13	5	21	64
Despair	10	0	0	0	0	0	10
Excitement	10	0	0	0	0	2	12
Fear	6	0	0	1	0	0	7
Happiness	21	0	0	5	3	5	34
Humor	18	6	1	4	14	0	43
Love	3	1	0	3	1	3	11
Relief	3	0	0	3	0	1	7
Sadness	14	13	0	4	6	0	37
Surprise	2	0	0	2	0	0	4
Total	145	22	7	46	33	43	296
Acceptance	2	2	1	1	7	1	14
Admiration	4	10	2	1	27	2	46
Appreciation	1	1	0	2	8	2	14
Coercion	0	0	0	1	2	1	4
Compassion	5	1	4	4	17	2	33
Condescension	8	1	9	2	21	5	46
Confidence	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
Empathy	4	0	0	5	9	2	20
Going After	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
Manipulation	2	0	0	3	2	3	10
Resentment	6	0	0	0	1	2	9
Retaliation	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Self-Centered	22	0	0	0	0	0	22
Self-Doubt	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
Standing Up	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
Understanding	9	6	1	4	13	1	34
Wheedling	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	118	21	17	23	110	21	310
Grand Totals	799	164	77	188	300	141	1669

		Wild Orchid							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing							0	
	Discussion	117	55	19	24	2		217	
	Distrust							0	
	Questioning	8	3	2	7	3		23	
	Trust							0	
	Total	125	58	21	31	5	0	240	
Sociability	Anti-social	8				1		9	
	Avoiding	7	1	3	3			14	
	Denial							0	
	Social	11	5	9		7		32	
		Total	26	6	12	3	8	0	55
Helping / Hurting	Bullying							0	
	Caretaking		3	4	27			34	
	Cautioning							0	
	Directing	1	9	5	24			39	
	Heroism							0	
	Literalism	23						23	
	Persistence	25						25	
	Rule-Following	26						26	
	Teaching	5	6	2	8			21	
	Teasing							0	
	Total	80	18	11	59	0	0	168	
Expressing Emotions	Anger	14			11			25	
	Annoyance	8	2	2	12	1		25	
	Despair							0	
	Excitement	1						1	
	Fear	2			1			3	
	Happiness	1						1	
	Humor	10	6	1	4			21	
	Love	1	1					2	
	Relief	1			1			2	
	Sadness	2	13		4			19	
Surprise				2			2		
	Total	40	22	3	35	1	0	101	
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance							0	
	Admiration	1	7		1			9	
	Appreciation		1		2			3	
	Coercion				1			1	
	Compassion	1						1	
	Condescension	2			2			4	
	Confidence	5						5	
	Empathy	2			1			3	
	Going After	3						3	
	Manipulation	2			2			4	
	Resentment	1						1	
	Retaliation							0	
	Self-Centered	1						1	
	Self-Doubt	2						2	
	Standing Up	11						11	
Understanding	5	3		2			10		
Wheedling							0		
	Total	36	11	0	11	0	0	58	

		Buster and the Amazing Daisy							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing	1						1	
	Discussion	18	1		1	18		38	
	Distrust							0	
	Questioning	8	1			4		13	
	Trust							0	
	Total		27	2	0	1	22	0	52
Sociability	Anti-social	2				1		3	
	Avoiding	4				1		5	
	Denial							0	
	Social				1	1		2	
	Total		6	0	0	1	3	0	10
Helping / Hurting	Bullying					3		3	
	Caretaking	1	7		1			9	
	Cautioning					1		1	
	Directing							0	
	Heroism	1						1	
	Literalism							0	
	Persistence	6						6	
	Rule-Following	13						13	
	Teaching		1		2			3	
	Teasing					3		3	
	Total		21	8	0	3	7	0	39
Expressing Emotions	Anger	6						6	
	Annoyance	3				3		6	
	Despair	3						3	
	Excitement	1						1	
	Fear							0	
	Happiness	4			2			6	
	Humor	2				2		4	
	Love	2			1			3	
	Relief				2			2	
	Sadness	2						2	
	Surprise							0	
	Total		23	0	0	5	5	0	33
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance		2			4		6	
	Admiration		2			12		14	
	Appreciation							0	
	Coercion							0	
	Compassion	2	1		3	1		7	
	Condescension		1			3		4	
	Confidence	2						2	
	Empathy				4	4		8	
	Going After							0	
	Manipulation							0	
	Resentment							0	
	Retaliation	1						1	
	Self-Centered							0	
	Self-Doubt	2						2	
	Standing Up	6						6	
	Understanding					2		2	
Wheedling					1		1		
Total		13	6	0	7	27	0	53	

		The Boy Who Ate Stars							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing							0	
	Discussion							0	
	Distrust							0	
	Questioning							0	
	Trust							0	
	Total		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sociability	Anti-social	1						1	
	Avoiding							0	
	Denial							0	
	Social	1		2				3	
	Total		2	0	2	0	0	0	4
Helping / Hurting	Bullying							0	
	Caretaking		2			1		3	
	Cautioning							0	
	Directing							0	
	Heroism	1						1	
	Literalism							0	
	Persistence							0	
	Rule-Following	2						2	
	Teaching			1				1	
	Teasing							0	
	Total		3	2	1	0	1	0	7
Expressing Emotions	Anger							0	
	Annoyance							0	
	Despair							0	
	Excitement	1						1	
	Fear							0	
	Happiness	1				1		2	
	Humor							0	
	Love							0	
	Relief							0	
	Sadness							0	
	Surprise							0	
Total		2	0	0	0	1	0	3	
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance	1						1	
	Admiration							0	
	Appreciation							0	
	Coercion					1		1	
	Compassion			4				4	
	Condescension					5		5	
	Confidence							0	
	Empathy							0	
	Going After	1						1	
	Manipulation				1			1	
	Resentment							0	
	Retaliation							0	
	Self-Centered	5						5	
	Self-Doubt							0	
	Standing Up							0	
Understanding				1		1	2		
Wheedling							0		
Total		7	0	5	1	7	0	20	

		The Silent Boy							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing							0	
	Discussion	1				2		3	
	Distrust							0	
	Questioning					5		5	
	Trust	1						1	
	Total		2	0	0	0	7	0	9
Sociability	Anti-social							0	
	Avoiding							0	
	Denial							0	
	Social					5		5	
	Total		0	0	0	0	5	0	5
Helping / Hurting	Bullying			1				1	
	Caretaking						1	1	
	Cautioning							0	
	Directing				5	1		6	
	Heroism							0	
	Literalism							0	
	Persistence							0	
	Rule-Following							0	
	Teaching							0	
	Teasing							0	
	Total		0	0	1	5	1	1	8
Expressing Emotions	Anger							0	
	Annoyance							0	
	Despair	1						1	
	Excitement							0	
	Fear							0	
	Happiness	4				1		5	
	Humor							0	
	Love							0	
	Relief							0	
	Sadness							0	
	Surprise							0	
Total		5	0	0	0	1	0	6	
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance			1		3		4	
	Admiration			1				1	
	Appreciation					2	1	3	
	Coercion							0	
	Compassion					1		1	
	Condescension			2				2	
	Confidence							0	
	Empathy						3	3	
	Going After							0	
	Manipulation							0	
	Resentment							0	
	Retaliation							0	
	Self-Centered							0	
	Self-Doubt							0	
	Standing Up							0	
Understanding					1	2	1	4	
Wheedling								0	
Total		0	0	4	1	11	2	18	

Axial Code	Clay							
	Code	Character						Total
		Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	
Communication	Apologizing							0
	Discussion	2			1		3	6
	Distrust							0
	Questioning			2	1		1	4
	Trust							0
	Total	2	0	2	2	0	4	10
Sociability	Anti-social							0
	Avoiding	3						3
	Denial				8			8
	Social							0
	Total	3	0	0	8	0	0	11
Helping / Hurting	Bullying							0
	Caretaking				1		17	18
	Cautioning							0
	Directing						5	5
	Heroism							0
	Literalism							0
	Persistence							0
	Rule-Following							0
	Teaching						1	1
	Teasing							0
	Total	0	0	0	1	0	23	24
Expressing Emotions	Anger	1		1				2
	Annoyance							0
	Despair	1						1
	Excitement							0
	Fear							0
	Happiness							0
	Humor							0
	Love				1		1	2
	Relief							0
	Sadness	2						2
	Surprise							0
Total	4	0	1	1	0	1	7	
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance						1	1
	Admiration							0
	Appreciation							0
	Coercion						1	1
	Compassion				1			1
	Condescension			2				2
	Confidence							0
	Empathy						1	1
	Going After							0
	Manipulation						2	2
	Resentment						1	1
	Retaliation							0
	Self-Centered	1						1
	Self-Doubt							0
	Standing Up							0
Understanding							0	
Wheedling							0	
Total	1	0	2	1	0	6	10	

		Wishing on the Midnight Star							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing	5						5	
	Discussion	41			1	6	33	81	
	Distrust							0	
	Questioning	6					3	9	
	Trust							0	
	Total		52	0	0	1	6	36	95
Sociability	Anti-social	3						3	
	Avoiding	1					3	4	
	Denial							0	
	Social	4				2	2	8	
	Total		8	0	0	0	2	5	15
Helping / Hurting	Bullying					2		2	
	Caretaking	1	1		1		8	11	
	Cautioning							0	
	Directing	6			5		20	31	
	Heroism	2					1	3	
	Literalism							0	
	Persistence	27						27	
	Rule-Following	8						8	
	Teaching	5						5	
	Teasing	1				2		3	
	Total		50	1	0	6	4	29	90
Expressing Emotions	Anger	14					11	25	
	Annoyance	6					21	27	
	Despair							0	
	Excitement	6					2	8	
	Fear	4						4	
	Happiness	5			1		5	11	
	Humor	2						2	
	Love						2	2	
	Relief	2					1	3	
	Sadness	1				1		2	
	Surprise	2						2	
	Total		42	0	0	1	1	42	86
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance				1			1	
	Admiration	1				1	2	4	
	Appreciation					1	1	2	
	Coercion							0	
	Compassion	2					2	4	
	Condescension	2					5	7	
	Confidence							0	
	Empathy	2					1	3	
	Going After	3						3	
	Manipulation						1	1	
	Resentment	1					1	2	
	Retaliation							0	
	Self-Centered	3						3	
	Self-Doubt							0	
	Standing Up	1						1	
	Understanding						2	2	
Wheedling							0		
Total		15	0	0	1	4	13	33	

		A Wizard Alone							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing							0	
	Discussion	7		1		11		19	
	Distrust	2						2	
	Questioning	7	1			4		12	
	Trust							0	
	Total		16	1	1	0	15	0	33
Sociability	Anti-social	1						1	
	Avoiding	15						15	
	Denial							0	
	Social	1				1		2	
	Total		17	0	0	0	1	0	18
Helping / Hurting	Bullying			2				2	
	Caretaking	4				3		7	
	Cautioning							0	
	Directing	1				1		2	
	Heroism	5						5	
	Literalism							0	
	Persistence	1						1	
	Rule-Following							0	
	Teaching					17		17	
	Teasing			1				1	
	Total		11	0	3	0	21	0	35
Expressing Emotions	Anger					1		1	
	Annoyance	1						1	
	Despair	5						5	
	Excitement	1						1	
	Fear							0	
	Happiness	3						3	
	Humor	1				1		2	
	Love							0	
	Relief							0	
	Sadness							0	
	Surprise							0	
	Total		11	0	0	0	2	0	13
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance							0	
	Admiration	1				5		6	
	Appreciation							0	
	Coercion					1		1	
	Compassion					8		8	
	Condescension	2		1		1		4	
	Confidence	3						3	
	Empathy					1		1	
	Going After							0	
	Manipulation							0	
	Resentment							0	
	Retaliation							0	
	Self-Centered	4						4	
	Self-Doubt							0	
	Standing Up							0	
Understanding							0		
Wheedling							0		
Total		10	0	1	0	16	0	27	

		Haze							
		Character							
Axial Code	Code	Autism Spectrum Disorder	Leader	Other	Parent	Peer	Sibling	Total	
Communication	Apologizing		1					1	
	Discussion	122	24	16	7	102		271	
	Distrust	2						2	
	Questioning	20	6			12		38	
	Trust					1		1	
	Total		144	31	16	7	115	0	313
Sociability	Anti-social	2						2	
	Avoiding	15				3		18	
	Denial	1						1	
	Social	1	4			3		8	
	Total		19	4	0	0	6	0	29
Helping / Hurting	Bullying					4		4	
	Caretaking	3	5		8	7		23	
	Cautioning							0	
	Directing	2	3		6	7		18	
	Heroism	1						1	
	Literalism	10						10	
	Persistence	4						4	
	Rule-Following	20						20	
	Teaching		3			17		20	
	Teasing					3		3	
	Total		40	11	0	14	38	0	103
Expressing Emotions	Anger	2		3		3		8	
	Annoyance	3			1	1		5	
	Despair							0	
	Excitement							0	
	Fear							0	
	Happiness	3			2	1		6	
	Humor	3				11		14	
	Love				1	1		2	
	Relief							0	
	Sadness	7				5		12	
	Surprise							0	
Total		18	0	3	4	22	0	47	
Compliance /Assertion	Acceptance	1						1	
	Admiration	1	1	1		9		12	
	Appreciation	1				5		6	
	Coercion							0	
	Compassion					7		7	
	Condescension	2		4		12		18	
	Confidence	5						5	
	Empathy					1		1	
	Going After	1						1	
	Manipulation					2		2	
	Resentment	4				1		5	
	Retaliation							0	
	Self-Centered	8						8	
	Self-Doubt	3						3	
	Standing Up	6						6	
Understanding	4	3		1	6		14		
Wheedling					2		2		
Total		36	4	5	1	45	0	91	

APPENDIX C

Annotated Bibliography

Young Adult and Upper Level Elementary

Brenna, Beverley. Wild Orchid. Canada: Red Deer Press, 2005.

YA - grades 9 - 12

Told from the perspective of an eighteen year old girl with Asperger's Syndrome, this story creates a bond between the reader and the protagonist. Taylor must struggle with the unknown while her mother concentrates on a rapidly disintegrating relationship with the owner of a pizza parlor in Albert National Park. She deals with all of the normal concerns of adolescence, including trying to find a boyfriend, working a first job, with the added burden of difficulty reading people's social cues and interpreting what people say literally. Her inner strength, integrity, and high intelligence get her through the summer and assure the reader that she will thrive despite, or perhaps because of, the struggles she has endured.

Choldenko, Gennifer. Al Capone Does My Shirts. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004.

Juvenile – grades 5 - 8

This hilarious yet touching piece of historical fiction gives a remarkable insight into the predicament of families struggling with an autistic child in 1935. Most were put away; people did not understand or deal with severe disabilities well at that time. The story is told from the perspective of the younger brother of an autistic girl. The family scrimps, saves and schemes to get the girl into a school which they believe will help her, rather than an institution which would simply warehouse the girl. Moose's exasperation with his sister, and his obvious affection for her, play tug-of-war with his and the reader's emotions.

Duane, Diane. A Wizard Alone. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2002.

YA – grades 6 – 10

This fantasy novel is the continuation of a series concerned with the struggle between the powers of good, as championed by the wizards, and the powers of evil, represented by the Lone Power or the Enemy. A fledgling wizard has spent much too long in his Ordeal, his encounter with the powers of darkness. Kit is sent to find out why. The would-be wizard turns out to be an eleven year old autistic boy. Kit, Ponch, and Nita follow him into his mind to determine why the Ordeal is taking so long. Along the way, they learn about the unique strengths and weaknesses of the autistic personality.

Haddon, Mark. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time. New York: Doubleday, 2005.

YA – grade 9 – adult

A book to challenge, intrigue and fascinate readers. This book, a tale of a mysterious dog killing and a fifteen-year old's attempt to track down the killer using the methods of his hero, Sherlock Holmes, derives interest and poignancy from the fact that the narrator has Asperger's Syndrome. He relates to the world literally, neither recognizing nor understanding the emotions of those around him. This unique perspective adds a touch of the absurd to the proceedings, but it also helps the reader understand what it is like to have a fantastically acute mind yet lack social skills and empathy.

Hoopman, Kathy. Haze. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2003.

YA – no specific ages

Seb is a loner, a computer expert, a complex teen who has trouble relating to his peers. During the course of the story, he discovers that he has Asperger's Syndrome, which explains many of his strengths and weaknesses and gives the author a chance to educate the reader about the syndrome without being pedantic. In this story of mystery and intrigue, Seb is just one of a number of complex and troubled teens. His best friend, Guzzle, has a drunk, abusive stepfather. Madeleine has an extremely emotionally abusive mother. Their stories intertwine in this engrossing story of confusion, deception, cyber-fraud and personal growth.

Kochka, The Boy who Ate Stars. Trans. Sarah Adams. New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2002.

Juvenile – ages 9-14

Nominated for the prestigious Rennes Prize in France, this book is an unusual story of how a young girl and an autistic boy's lives intersect to the benefit of both of them. Under the watchful eye of Matthew's non-French speaking nanny, Lucy (a 12-year-old girl) and Matthew (a 4-year-old autistic boy) change each other's lives. They become very fond of one another. After meeting and trying to understand Matthew, Lucy decides that she wants to teach autistic children.

Lord, Cynthia. Rules. New York: Scholastic Press, 2006.

Juvenile – grades 4-7

Twelve year old Catherine wants a normal life. It doesn't seem like too much to ask. But her autistic brother David, and all that goes along with having a disabled sibling, prevents her from obtaining this elusive ideal. She struggles to control David's behavior by making extensive lists of rules for him. As Catherine develops new friendships, however,

she begins to question her values. Maybe normalcy isn't all it is reported to be, and occasionally rules are meant to be broken.

Lowry, Lois. The Silent Boy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.

YA – grades 6-10

Everyone knows that Jacob Stoltz is “touched”. He doesn't speak, doesn't look directly at people, and copies sounds with uncanny accuracy. The townspeople treat him with varying degrees of kindness, tolerance, fear and ridicule. Katy Thatcher's father is one of the few people who take an interest in the boy and treats him kindly. Katy, seven years old at the beginning of the story, is taught to treat him kindly as well. They begin an odd sort of friendship. Unfortunately, tragedy awaits.

Ogaz, Nancy. Buster and the Amazing Daisy. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers., 2002.

Juvenile – grades 4-8

Daisy, a fifth grader with Asperger's Syndrome, struggles to stay away from bullies and to blend in when she switches to a “normal” classroom. She spends some time in the resource room, where she meets Cody, who becomes her friend. Nevertheless, she struggles with many things, as she tells her other new friend, Laurel. Laurel and Buster the rabbit make recess, which had been a time of torment, pleasant for her. She uses her animal training skills to teach Buster tricks. Little does she know that this pleasant pastime will bring on a great challenge with high stakes for both herself and Cody.

Ogaz, Nancy. Wishing on the Midnight Star. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers., 2004.

Juvenile – grades 5-8

Alex wishes that things would change. He wishes that his older brother was not so different, that Nic didn't need and get special treatment from his mom, and that he didn't embarrass Alex and need Alex to protect him from bullies. The boys face challenges at school, with girls, and with each other. Throughout the course of this story, Alex learns to appreciate some of Nic's unique qualities. A good look at the resentment, frustration, love and understanding for their siblings common among the brothers and sisters of children with Asperger's Syndrome.

Rodowsky, Colby. Clay. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001.

Juvenile – grades 4-7

Elsie McPhee's mother has told her not to trust anyone. She and her brother Tommy, lead a lonely existence. They don't even go to school, since their mother says they can learn just as well at home. Tommy doesn't experience the loneliness the same way Elsie

does; as long as Tommy has his stones he is okay. Elsie knows this isn't right—she knows her brother needs help. When Tommy gets really sick and her mom won't listen, Elsie knows she has to reach out for help in spite of her mother's paranoia and denial.

Lower Elementary

Clark, Joan. Ann Drew Jackson. Shawnee Mission: Autism Asperger Publishing Co., 2007.

Juvenile – grades 3 - 6

Hillary has enough problems already, and then she gets stuck with Jackson as her science partner. In this sequel to Jackson Whole Wyoming, Hillary has had a rough life. She has learned to lie and wiggle her way out of uncomfortable situations. Jackson's brutal honesty is new to her, and in the end, helps her to overcome her lying and pretending. Jackson has his own struggles, of course, since his Asperger's makes it difficult for him to relate to people, or even to understand jokes. Hillary and Jackson learn to appreciate each other's strengths, and they become unlikely friends.

Clark, Joan. Jackson Whole Wyoming. Shawnee Mission: Autism Asperger Publishing Co., 2005.

Juvenile – grades 3 – 6

Tyler Carson has been selected to give Jackson Thomas the scrapbook the class has put together for Jackson Thomas, a member of his class who will be moving away. It's supposed to be an honor. As he debates with himself whether or not he will present the scrapbook to Jackson, he thinks back over the years they have been classmates and "speech buddies". The joys and trials of being friends with a child with Asperger's syndrome are clearly drawn.

Eden, Alexandra. Holy Smoke. Santa Barbara: Allen A. Knoll Publishers, 2004.

Juvenile – grades 4 – 6

The second book in the Bones and the Duchess series of mysteries, this book has Bones and Verity (the child with Asperger's who actually comes up with the solutions to the problems) looking into a church burning. Bones had wanted to do this one himself, but the reverend won't hire him unless he promises to work with Verity again.

Eden, Alexandra. To Oz and Back. Santa Barbara: Allen A. Knoll Publishers, 2003.

Juvenile – grades 4 – 6

The first in the series entitled *Bones and the Duchess*, this book features the unlikely teamwork of a former police officer and a 12 year old girl with Asperger's. Together they try to solve the mystery of two 12 year old girls who have disappeared.

Hoopman, Kathy. *Lisa and the Lacemaker*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2002.

Juvenile – grades 3-5

This third "Asperger Adventure" centers on Lisa, a young girl with Asperger's syndrome. This somewhat farfetched magical mystery, complete with a ghost, highlights the strengths and struggles of Lisa and Ben as they try to unravel the mystery surrounding the derelict hut they find hidden in Ben's backyard. By a strange twist of fate, Lisa's Aunt Hannah used to live in those rooms and holds the key to the mysterious appearances of the ghost.

Hoopman, Kathy. *Of Mice and Aliens: An Asperger Adventure*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2001.

Juvenile – grades 3-5

Ben, recently diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, has trouble understanding people. Ben and his best friend, Andy, discover an alien spacecraft in the backyard. The alien who emerges, Zeke, has the same troubles Ben does understanding the way people talk, figuring out what they mean. Ben and Andy try to help Zeke find the people and the things he needs on Earth so he can return to his own people.

Hoopman, Kathy. *Blue Bottle Mystery: An Asperger Adventure*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2001.

Juvenile – grades 3-5

Sometimes it seems as if everything is a mystery to Ben. Teachers, parents, classmates, all behave in ways he can't understand. One day he and his best friend Andy find a blue bottle near the playground. They begin wishing for all sorts of things – winning the lottery for Ben's dad, a growth spurt for Andy. Imagine their surprise when their wishes start to come true. Furthermore, Ben gets some answers concerning his communication problems.

Matlin, Marlee and Doug Cooney. *Nobody's Perfect*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2006.

Juvenile – grades 4-6

This book centers upon Megan, a well-adjusted (if imperfect) deaf fourth grader. Just as she is finalizing plans for the ultimate purple birthday party, a new girl joins her class.

Friendly and outgoing, Megan attempts to befriend Alexis and invite her to her party, only to be rebuffed multiple times. It isn't until Megan and Alexis are forced to work on a science project together that Megan discovers that part of Alexis' problem is that she is embarrassed by her younger brother, who is autistic. Justin has a small but significant role in the plot. It is clear that it is neither the deaf child nor the autistic child who is the most troubled character in this book, but Alexis, the practically perfect child.

Setzer, Lee Ann. Sariah McDuff Will Walk with You. Springville: Bonneville Books, 2005.

Juvenile – no specific ages

In the Latter Day Saints School Sariah McDuff attends, there is a special class with only one student. That student is Chrissy Henderson. Everyone knows about her, but no one knows her. The teachers want to change that, by having the other classes visit her, starting with Sariah McDuff's class since they are the same age as Chrissy. Everyone is a little apprehensive, and everyone except Sariah ends up avoiding the visit. Sariah is quite nervous herself, but she rises to the challenge.

Welton, Jude. Adam's Alternative Sports Day: An Asperger Story. Jessica Kingsley Publishers., 2005.

Juvenile – grades 4-6

Nine year old Adam has Asperger's Syndrome. Every year he dreads Sports Day, because he does poorly in the races and isn't chosen for team sports. This year, however, will be different. Instead of sports, the competition will center on puzzles, quizzes, riddles and a treasure hunt. Adam has a good chance of winning. But so does Josie, his best friend. Also, another child decides to level the playing field by cheating. This book presents a candid view of the challenges faced daily by a child with Asperger's.

Picture Books

Ellis, Marvie. Keisha's Doors. Round Rock: Speech Kids Texas Press, Inc., 2005.

Picture Book – grades pre-K – 2

This dual language book (English/Spanish) depicts the diagnosis and early treatment of three year-old Keisha, as interpreted by her nine year-old sister, Monica. Monica relates her frustration with her sister who won't play with her and doesn't communicate well. Keisha is diagnosed with autism and the family is sent to a therapist. The therapist suggests techniques for communicating with Keisha. The story ends on a note of guarded optimism. The pictures, particularly those depicting the "doors" blocking Keisha from the rest of the world, are attractive and add to one's understanding of the situation.

Ellis, Marvie. Tacos, Anyone? Round Rock: Speech Kids Texas Press, Inc., 2005.

Picture Book – grades pre-K – 2

This dual language book (English/Spanish) has bright, cheerful pictures and a simple story of Thomas, who wants to play with his younger brother, Michael. His brother has autism and does not interact with him the way he would like him to. The therapist recommends that he watch Michael carefully for signs of activities he likes and doesn't like. By doing so, he manages to reinterpret one of the activities from therapy that Michael enjoys, thus creating a new game they can play together. A pleasant, positive story.

Ely, Lesley. Looking After Louis. Morton Grove: Albert Whitman Company, 2004.

Picture Book – grades 1 - 3

This book is about a student with fairly severe autism who is nevertheless in a mainstream classroom. One of the other students, the narrator, has taken Louis under her wing. Louis has an adult assistant, Mrs. Kumar, as well. This book gently expresses some of the exasperation other students may experience in dealing with autistic classmates, as well as their empathy and altruism. The story is rather bland; Louis becomes interested in playing soccer, even though he does not understand the game, and as a result he and another student get to play outside even when it isn't recess time.

Etlinger, Rebecca. To be Me: Understanding what it's Like to Have Asperger's Syndrome. Los Angeles: WPS Creative Therapy Store, 2005.

Picture Book – no specific ages

This book was written as part of a master's thesis project in school psychology. The author writes from the perspective of a 10 year old boy with Asperger's. The pictures by Mark Tomassi add to the enjoyment and impact of the book, without the cheerful pictures the story would be rather clinical. However, with the pictures to lighten things up, a picture of a real, imperfect but pleasant 10 year-old with all of the normal concerns comes through. Lots of good information is provided as we follow "David" through his confusion about being different, to his diagnosis, to his becoming comfortable with himself and others.

Hoopman, Kathy. All Cats Have Asperger's Syndrome. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006.

Picture Book – Juvenile no specific ages

This book offers a unique perspective on Asperger's, a cat's eye view if you will. The author doesn't sugar coat her description of the behavior of those with Asperger's, tantrums, inability to communicate and other potential problems are mentioned. Nevertheless, the adorable cat pictures in amusing poses and situations soften the impact

of some of the potentially embarrassing descriptions. Positive aspects of Asperger's are also referred to, with the same gently amusing type of cat photos. An enchanting, laugh out loud yet still learn something important book.

Luchsinger, Dena Fox. Playing by the Rules: A Story about Autism. USA: Woodbine House, Inc., 2007.

Picture Book – K- grade 2

This is the story of Aunt Tilda's visit with Josh, a child with autism, and Jody, Josh's sister. Jody and Josh are playing a game, and then Aunt Tilda wants to play. Josh walks away. Jody and Aunt Tilda play a game, with multiple interruptions by Josh. Jody expresses some exasperation, but she is patient with both Josh and Aunt Tilda, who doesn't know how to interact with Josh. Aunt Tilda (and the reader) learn a lot, Jody and Aunt Tilda manage to finish their game, and Jody is excited because with her guidance, Aunt Tilda and Josh are getting along and Aunt Tilda will be able to visit for awhile. This book shows the need "normal" siblings have for attention, in addition to how much they care about and help others understand their autistic siblings.

Murrell, Diane. Tobin Learns to Make Friends. Texas: Future Horizons, Inc. 2001.

Picture Book – grades pre-K - 2

In the tradition of The Little Engine that Could and Thomas the Tank Engine, this encouraging and instructive book has a train engine named Tobin as the main character. Although the condition is not named, Tobin appears to have Asperger's Syndrome. In each section of the book Tobin faces social situations with which Asperger's children struggle, i.e. shouting, crowding, sharing, borrowing, interrupting, taking turns, being kind, good manners and rules. All children can benefit from this tale of Tobin's misadventures as he struggles to make and keep friends.

Reish, K.B. Matthew's Box. Santa Barbara: KBR Mutti's Publications, 2004.

Picture Book – no specific ages

Although beautifully illustrated by Herb Leonhard, this is not a simple storybook but a political soapbox. Kathleen Reish, the author and stepmother of the child who is the inspiration for the book, is a proponent of two theories, one concerning immunizations as a cause of autism and one concerning diet as a treatment for autism. Neither one of these theories has been proven, yet they are presented as fact.

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