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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Review of *Superhero Levi*

Written by Catie Cordero

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Katie Wester-Neal

Gordon State College, Barnesville, GA

Child/Student Reviewer: Charlie Neal, Preschool



Cordero, C. (2018). *Superhero Levi*. Zeeland, MI: Flywheel Books.

ISBN: 9781984347749

Adult Review: Katie Wester-Neal

In the picture book *Superhero Levi*, author Catie Cordero takes readers on an adventure into the quietly amazing life of the title character. Through rhyming text and bright illustrations, the author shows Levi participating in his typical daily experiences: playing, a trip to school on the bus, and meeting up with his friends. Levi, who has been diagnosed with an unnamed “syndrome,” turns into a superhero while facing mountains (the stairs), his nemesis (physical therapy), and his personal kryptonite (string beans). Levi often uses assistive gear, including ankle braces, special shoes, and a walker to participate in everyday activities.

Later in the text, we learn that the story is based on the author’s nephew, who has MECP2 Duplication Syndrome, a rare neurological disorder. My initial interest in this book was connected to my son Charlie, who shares the same diagnosis. I connected with the main character as Charlie often encounters similar challenges and enjoys many of the same daily activities as Levi. As a family who often reads together, we have seldom seen lives like Charlie’s portrayed in children’s texts, and the book offers a perspective on both the joys and complexities of life with MECP2 Duplication Syndrome.

I find the most appealing feature of the book lies in the balancing of Levi’s specialness and ordinariness in a way that appeals to young readers. Levi is framed as both unique and typical throughout the text. For example, Levi recognizes his need for assistance while also approaching life as it comes with the ups and

downs that many of us encounter throughout the day. While the book offers slices of life rather than a traditional plot, this breadth of experience—not just the struggles or differences, but everyday life as well—centers Levi’s humanity, rather than his special needs.

As Charlie’s mom, I recommend the book for families of children with MECP2 Duplication Syndrome and other rare diseases, because it is fulfilling to see their underrepresented experiences. As an educator, I recommend this book for all families and classrooms based on its general enjoyability and the normalizing perspective it offers on (dis)ability.

Adding to the story, the book concludes with a tribute to the real-life Levi who inspired the story. Following the text, the author includes the dedication, a poem, and photographs of the book’s namesake. The author’s note ends with the following sentence: “You are not alone.” *Superhero Levi* is a joyful reminder of that sentiment and a charming, colorful celebration of life.

Student Review: Charlie Neal

Charlie, age 4, does not yet speak verbally, but he communicates through behavior and sign language. We often read together, and he seems to enjoy this book. Here is his video recommendation of *Superhero Levi*:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14KLyiNEmrNUZ8DzNOBekfD3I7BEiOWq2/view?usp=sharing>