

Picture Book: *My Friend Isabelle* by Eliza Woloson and Bryan Gough, illustrator

Age range: 3-6 years old. A perfect first look at differences

Challenge: General differences, Down syndrome

Tip: Read at the beginning of the school year as an introduction to all kinds of friendships

In *My Friend Isabelle*, Woloson charmingly shows the tender friendship between her daughter Isabelle and her friend Charlie. Like most friends, they enjoy each other's company. On their weekly play date they eat snacks, go to the park, and play together. They are very much alike.

Though the same age, they are also different-one is fast, the other slow, one is tall, the other short. The biggest difference between them is that Isabelle has Down syndrome.

Woloson never tells the reader that Isabelle has Down syndrome. Parents and teachers learn this fact from the back cover. The author gracefully shows that everyone is different and that differences are not impediments to forming friendships. Woloson's message is that differences are what make friendships interesting.

Gough's gentle illustrations complement Woloson's sparse text. Soft sweeps of color are given shape with pencil outlines giving both children a realistic whimsy. Though they look very simple, there is movement and expression.

From Charlie's perspective, and hopefully readers, Isabelle is not defined by Down syndrome- it is just part of who she is, along with being a good friend to Charlie. He says that his life is "more fun with friends like Isabelle."

**Write:** Instead of writing, ask each child to stand up and tell the class something that is special about him or her. Another approach (also if a child is too shy or non-verbal) is to ask the class to name something special about the child next to them. An adult can write all the things on the blackboard (without the kids names) to visually look at the many kinds of "special" in every class.