



Reviews and Activities by Anna Stewart

Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco

Age range: 6-9

Challenge: learning disabilities, school setting

Tip: With younger kids, this book can open discussions around teasing and taunting.

Discuss strategies for dealing with bullying or teasing as a group. Older kids can explore the fact that many people (possibly including their parents) went to school when learning disabilities were not recognized.

Polacco tell her own story of being the girl who couldn't read. She was taunted, teased, and passed to fifth grade without any teacher noticing her learning disabilities. As each year passes, Trisha feels dumber and stupider, especially when her staunch supporters, her grandparents, both die, and her mother moves her and her brother to California.

Though she can draw incredibly well, she can't read, write, or count, and the other kids tease her. Not long ago, teachers thought that kids with leaning difficulties were lazy, stupid, and needed more discipline.

Polacco, also the illustrator, draws anguish in her characters and honestly shares how hard it was to go to school. She, like so many kids who are smart but can't do certain things, withdraws and is headed for an unhappy life until one teacher makes a difference. An homage to her teacher, Mr. Falker, who sees her gifts and her difficulties and gets her the help she needs to learn to read, write, and see numbers. At the end of

the story, Polacco tells the readers that the girl in the story is her and that she went on to be a children's book writer and illustrator. A very emotional story.

Write: Ask the kids to close their eyes and think about one person who saw or sees them for who they really are. Many younger kids will probably use their parents as examples (let's hope they do!) Others will use grandparents, or a relative, or a friend. It can be a stranger they met in the store who seemed to know them. If they can't think of someone real, ask them to make up someone and write about a situation.

Another way to approach this is to ask the kids to write a page or a paragraph or draw a picture for the pre-writers, about when they saw the gifts in another, when they really saw the individual before them.