

Alexandra Strick

Children's book author,
reviewer and consultant

Surrey, UK

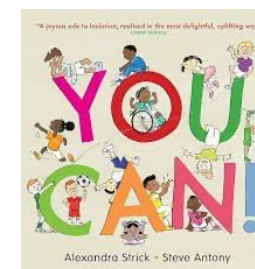


My career / background

- Worked at **BookTrust** (Head of Bookstart then a consultant)
- Packs for sensory impaired children - **Booktouch** and **Bookshine**
- Have worked directly with disabled children (e.g. at Whizz-Kidz)
- Carried out consultation with children on disability in books
- “**In the Picture**” steering group 2005-2008
- Review books, especially inclusive books
- Co-founded **Inclusive Minds** and **Outside In World**
- Created tactile books like ‘Off to the Park’ with Child’s Play
- New Arts Council “**Reflecting Disability**” project on representation
- Author of inclusive picture books like ‘You Can’ and ‘We Can’.



Inclusive Minds



The common thread

My belief that ALL children should:

- be able to **access** books
- be **included** in books
- be **listened** to
- have **choice**.



Accessibility: Visual impairment

Visual impairment is a spectrum.

A child may be completely blind, no light at all.

Another may have a full field of vision, but everything they see is undefined.

Might have no central vision but side (peripheral) vision remains intact.

Might have clear peripheral vision with no vision in the central visual field.

Most have *some* sight.



Accessibility:

Visual impairment

CVI (Cerebral Visual Impairment) :

- Recent data suggests as many as one in 30 children in UK may have CVI
- CVI is becoming recognised as major reason for childhood visual impairment
- CVI essentially means the vision problems are cerebral (brain-related), not eye-related.



Accessibility: Visual impairment

Key learning points:

We need to avoid making assumptions

There is no 'one size fits all'

Very few babies are completely blind – but they are just as important

A child may have CVI and/or may well have other additional needs too (for example, children who have learning difficulties more likely to also have a visual impairment).

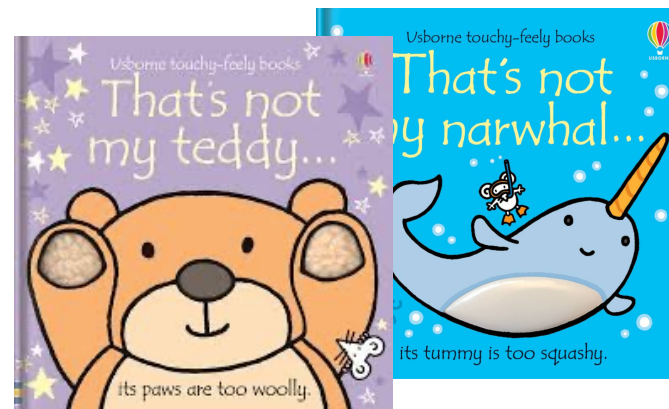


Top Tips

For creating accessible resources and choosing accessible books:

1. Ensure a **variety** of books available, so with textures, tracking, embossing, raised elements, cut out elements, buttons, moving elements, things that attract the eye...

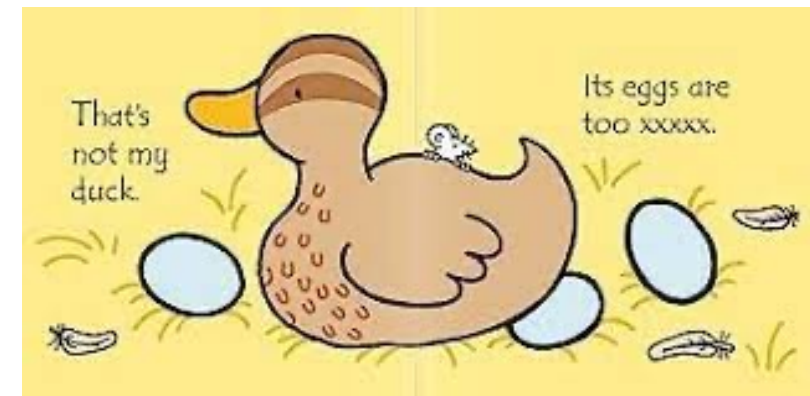
2. In terms of themes, start with **familiar** objects and themes



Top Tips:

3. **Recognisable and meaningful shapes**

4. Tactile elements that **relate** to the text and do not confuse



Top tips:

5. Go for **simple, uncluttered design**
6. Ensure plenty of **space** between tactile elements and pictures
7. Look for **incentives** - so tracks, invitations, questions and 'cause and effect' elements
8. Look out for ways to bring in **different sensory experiences** – sound, smell, music, etc.



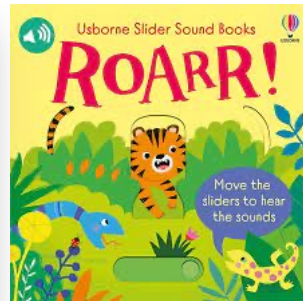
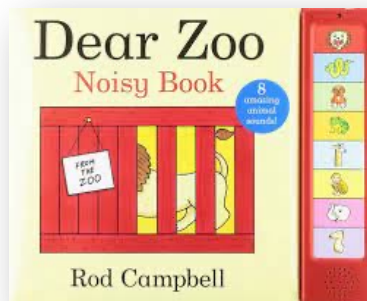
Top Tips:

9. Look for **high contrast** books
(but not JUST black & white books – variety)

NB Try the photocopying test!



10. **Supplement** - enhance book-sharing environment with **relevant** sensory props and resources and use stick-on bumps where helpful.



Accessibility: Deafness / hearing impairment

A few quick points

- Like visual impairment, there is no 'one size fits all'
- Offer plenty of variety and choice
- Try not to assume
- Respect the Deaf community – for some people being Deaf is part of their identity
- Remember deafness is not always genetic, there can be many causes and it can affect young children at different ages, including temporarily
- 90% of deaf children are born into hearing families.

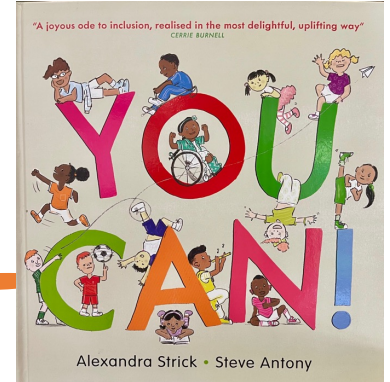


Top Tips for choosing and sharing books for deaf children

- Start with familiar concepts
- Rhythm, rhyme and repetition
- ‘Sing song’ books
- Interaction
- Stimulate language and conversation
- Look for books that you can hold and sign at same time
- Make sure baby can see adult’s face
- Look out for things to copy – expressions, actions, etc
- Important for developing empathy
- Make it fun! If parent smiles, baby smiles.



Choosing books with inclusive imagery

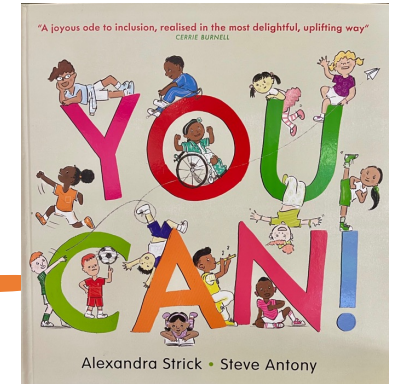



Tips on identifying what is authentic representation

- Does the hearing aid / guide dog / mobility aid *look* right?
- Does the disabled character appear to be tokenistic / dropped in / included like 'wallpaper' or do they have a real personality?
- Are there contextual signs that support the character, such as people signing, lip reading etc?
- If signing is featured, are the signs correct, meaningful signs, not guesswork?
- Does the character live in an inclusive environment – e.g. Is there a hearing loop? if there a wheelchair user are there ramps? How do they get around? What kind of chair is it? Is it appropriate for the form of disability they have?



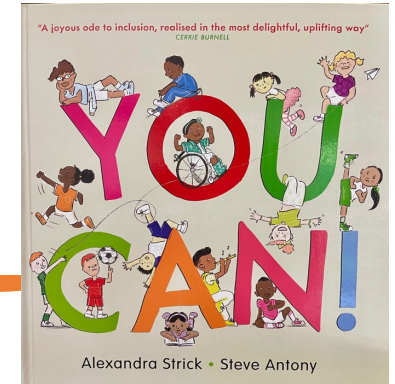
Choosing books with inclusive imagery



- Does the author or illustrator seem to have lived experience?
- Or has some research or consultation been done in order to help ensure authenticity? Have they consulted experts? E.g.:  Inclusive Minds
- Is it positive, negative *or* neutral representation? E.g.: Does a character appear to have some independence or agency? For example, if they are using a self propelling wheelchair, show them self propelling, not being pushed.
- Look out for Intersectionality - people aren't defined by one characteristic alone.
- Don't assume that a deaf child or the parent of a deaf child wants to read *about* deafness. Also look for casual, incidental inclusion.



Choosing books with inclusive imagery



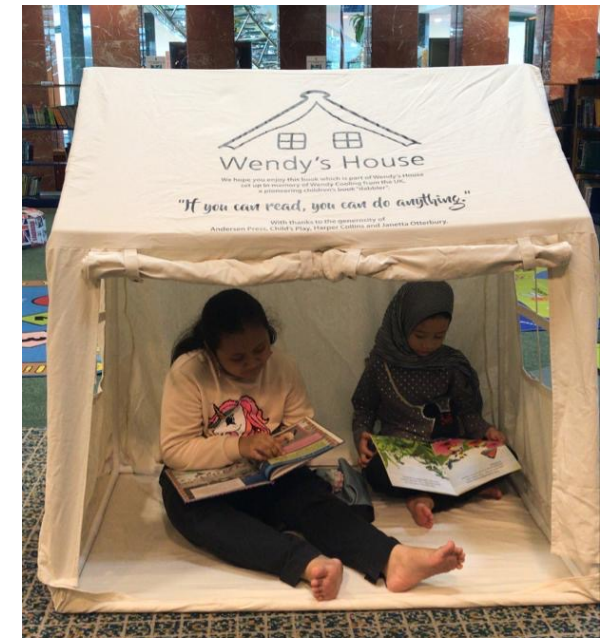
- Look for inclusion of people who have often been excluded. Eg people with communication difficulties
- Think about who has been stereotyped or villainised in the past – so include people with scars, facial differences, restricted growth.
- Historically, disabled characters have often been victims or superheroes, but also need to be seen as like anyone else.

NB: Follow @Reflectingdisability on Instagram



And finally...

- In summary, let's keep increasing variety, choice and formats we offer.
- And create spaces that are accessible, inclusive and welcoming for all.



Thank you

Alexandra Strick

ajestrick@gmail.com

@strickalexandra (Instagram)