

Neurodiversity & ToM in The Classroom



Increased representation of diversity within kindergarten through fifth grade children's books help students to consider how others' thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and experiences might differ from their own.

Autism, ADHD, language or literacy disabilities, Down syndrome, visual impairments, cerebral palsy, and deaf or hard of hearing are examples of **neurodivergent learning styles**.

- Considering another's perspective is vital for social and academic success, and helpful for reading comprehension.
- Although not born with this understanding, children develop to understand how others see the world (*see table*).
- Books with neurodiverse characters help children learn about others' perspectives and provide a way to talk about others' thoughts and beliefs. Try starting discussions during the book reading by:
 - Comparing how different characters think or feel instead of talking about a "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel.
 - Highlighting when characters might think or feel differently than us.
 - Explaining how the neurotype of the character can inform thoughts and motivations (e.g., *If a character is autistic, how might the character respond differently than someone without autism?*).
- Books with neurodiverse characters also might contribute to children's self-esteem by seeing characters such as themselves represented.

Age	Development
Toddler	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn that others have different desires than their own
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand that others think, believe, and feel differently• Understand that others' thoughts can be incorrect
Older Elementary-High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reasoning develops about others' thoughts and beliefs• Understand sarcasm, figurative language, deception



Access the [informational paper](#) by TRRC Faculty Affiliate, Dr. Kristen Secora, to read more about the research support for ToM and how it can be taught.