

My Brother Charlie

by Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete
Illustrated by Shane Evans

Identities & Themes

- Black/African American
- Ability/Neurodiversity (Autism)
- Feelings
- Kindness
- Identity affirmation

Teacher Reflection Questions

1. Think about your own identity, now and when you were a child. What makes you unique? How was this identity nurtured, or how could it have been nurtured?
2. What do you know about how your students perceive their own or others' identities at this age?
3. More and more classrooms have students on the autism spectrum. What can you do to help your students show empathy, respect and compassion to students on the spectrum?

Background Information for Teacher

Not all people experience or express emotions in the same way. This story asks readers to think about life from the perspective of a child with autism and offers a lesson on accepting people's unique characteristics. Many children will be able to identify with both Callie and Charlie's challenges with expressing themselves and finding appropriate ways to show care and concern for others.

Children don't understand why people act or do things differently unless they are given the opportunity to ask questions and learn. Children with learning differences or disabilities (hidden or visible) are often excluded because their peers don't understand. Simple explanations and open dialogue nurture empathy and respect across differences.

Discussion hint: Many children have a friend, relative, or classmate on the autism spectrum. Helping children understand people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is important because they can't always tell someone is on the autism spectrum by looking at them. Children don't need a long medical lecture. Give a brief explanation about why their friend might behave differently than they do and a chance to ask questions. You could say:

"Our brains all work a little differently from everyone else's. All of us are good at some things and not so good at others. Autism is one way people's brains work differently. You can't always tell someone is on the autism spectrum by looking at them. Our friends on the autism spectrum might be really smart about some things. They might also have a harder time with loud noises, bright lights, or strong-tasting foods than other people do. And they might need a little extra help from friends to get to know other people or to know what to do about how people around them are feeling."

Discuss other invisible disabilities such as rheumatoid arthritis, hearing loss, vision loss, dyslexia, diabetes, etc., so students start to realize they don't know what peers might be struggling with just by looking at them.

See also the **Ability and Neurodiversity Primer** in this guide.

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- Empathy & Understanding
- Healthy Complex Identities
- Respect Across Differences
- Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- Responsiveness & Action

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision Making
- Relationship Skills

Read this to the students before reading the book:

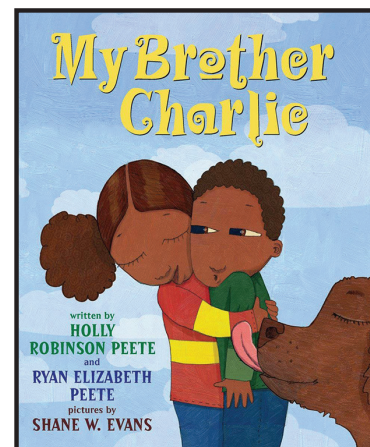
This is a book about Callie and her brother Charlie, who is on the autism spectrum. Charlie loves his family, but it is hard for him to tell them that. As we read the book, think about how you let people know you care about them. Are your ways the same as Charlie's or different?

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. **How are the twins, Callie and Charlie, alike? How are they different?**
2. **What are the different ways you show you love others?**
3. When Charlie's mom took him to the doctor, they found out he was on the autism spectrum. What do you remember about what they found out? (See the Discussion Hint if you feel your group needs more explanation.)
4. What things are harder for Charlie because he has autism?
5. What are some special things about him?
6. **Charlie did lots of things a little differently from most people. What are some ways he shows love to Callie and his family?**
7. **What does Callie learn from Charlie?**
8. **What does the author mean by "Charlie has autism. But autism doesn't have Charlie"?**
9. What are ways you show that you care about others? How are these ways similar to and different from Charlie?

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Could you tell Charlie had autism just by looking at him? What are things about you that others wouldn't know just by looking at you?
2. **Venn Diagram:** Create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast Callie and Charlie. You could also add a third circle for students to compare themselves to the two characters.
3. **What We're Good At:** Have students make a list of the things that Charlie is good at. Then have them make a list of the things they are good at. Highlight things that made it onto both lists.
4. **Timeline:** Have students create a timeline of events in Charlie's life. They can also make a timeline of important events in their own lives, and share with each other.



Literacy Connections

- Personal narrative
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast events
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe characters/ Character development
- Character point of view
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events
- Sequence events