

Tomas Loves

 by Jude Welton, illustrated by Jane Telford

Identities & Themes

- Ability/Neurodiversity (Autism)
- White/European American
- 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, even at a young 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 autism spectrum?

Background Information for Teacher

Discussion Hint: Initiating conversations that allow children to explore differences is important in avoiding misunderstandings that can lead to exclusion and encourages children to make sure everyone feels safe and included. 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."

It can be tempting to try to give a preview of the book in which you try to give a quick explanation of autism. It's important, however, to let students hear the story, make their own connections, and then explain that some students are on the autism spectrum, which may make them similar to Tomas in a lot of ways. Remind students that everyone is different, so no two children with autism are the same.

Read the **Author's Note** about children on the autism spectrum in back of the book for your own information.

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:

Tomas loves trains, trampolines, and his dog Flynn. He hates loud noise, surprises and changes in routine. There are many things about Tomas that make him unique, but he loves fun and friendship — just like you.

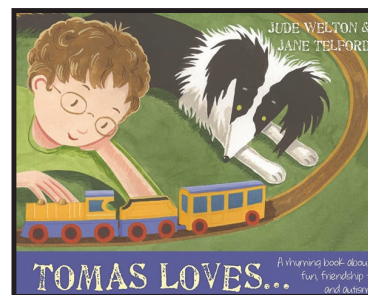
Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. What are some things that Tomas loves to do?
2. **What do you like to do? Are there any similarities between you and Tomas?**
3. **What helps Tomas feel safe? What helps you to feel safe?**
4. **Tomas also likes things to be predictable. What does that mean? How do you feel when you don't know what will happen next?**
5. **What happens when Tomas is stressed or upset? How do you react when you feel stressed or upset?**
6. What is special about Tomas's relationship with Flynn?

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. There are things Tomas does that help him feel calm or relaxed. Draw a picture or write about what makes you feel calm and relaxed.
2. Like Tomas's mom, draw a visual timetable for your day. This could be limited to school day or a weekend.
3. **Sensory Awareness Activity:** Heightened sensory awareness is common in people on the autism spectrum, providing clear boundaries about what they prefer. One way your students may be able to relate is by exploring their own sensory preferences. Provide five stations around your room for students to visit (one for each of the five senses), and invite them to explore what they prefer. Ask students to make note of their preferences and which things they didn't like but could adapt to. You can also ask them to predict what they'll like before they begin. Include three different options at each station. See some suggestions below or make up your own.
 - Sight - Three different pairs of modified sunglasses:
 - ▶ Pair 1 – Put wax paper over the lenses
 - ▶ Pair 2 – Color the lenses with a blue highlighter
 - ▶ Pair 3 – Tape a blacked-out toilet-paper tube taped to the middle
 - Sound – Three different pairs of headphones connected to devices playing the following types of music:
 - ▶ Pair 1 – Classical music
 - ▶ Pair 2 – Heavy metal music
 - ▶ Pair 3 – Jazz music
 - Touch – Three different textures:
 - ▶ Sandpaper; cooked, cooled, wet noodles; silky smooth ribbon
 - Taste – Three different tastes (be mindful of allergies):
 - ▶ Cinnamon or unsweetened cocoa powder; lemon juice; salt
 - Smell – Three different smells inside plastic containers or jars
 - ▶ Deodorant; lavender or another strong floral scent; garlic

After students finish visiting the stations and noting their preferences, discuss them together.



Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Identify details in the text
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe characters/ Character development
- Character point of view
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Vocabulary in context
- Rhythm and rhyming
- Repetition