



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

I Talk Like a River

Jordan Scott (Author), Sydney Smith (Illustrator)

I wake up each morning with the sounds of words all around me. And I can't say them all...

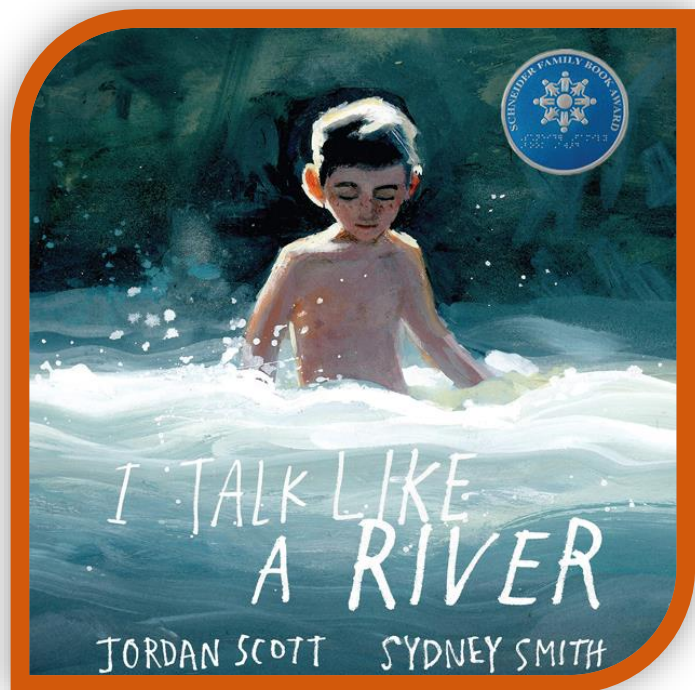
When a boy who stutters feels isolated, alone, and incapable of communicating in the way he'd like, his concerned and compassionate father and a walk by the river helps him find his voice. Parents and families everywhere will instantly recognize a father's ability to reconnect a child with the world around him.

ISBN: 978-0823445592

Publisher: Neal Porter Books

Year Published: 2020

Age Range: 6-9



Book Themes

Disabilities and Ableism, Stuttering, Teasing, Family, Acting as an Ally

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind children of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and

point out to students when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms.](#)]

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|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| ■ bubbling | ■ peep | ■ speech | ■ tangles |
| ■ calm | ■ proud | ■ storm | ■ tough |
| ■ churning | ■ remember | ■ strange | ■ whirling |
| ■ moonlight | ■ smooth | ■ stuck | |
| ■ mumble | ■ sounds | ■ stutter | |

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- What do you see on the cover?
- What is the title of the book and what do you think it means?
- What do you think the book might be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers.

- What is the boy looking at? (page 5)
- How is the boy feeling when he talks (page 15)?
- What does the river look like? (page 22)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- Why do you think the boy stays quiet in school a lot of the time?
- Why does the boy "hide in the back of the class?"
- How do you think the boy feels when his classmates turn and look at him?
- What are some of the ways the boy describes his struggle to speak?
- Why does the boy's Dad call some days "a bad speech day?"
- How do you think the boy feels at the river with his Dad? How do you know?
- What does his Dad say and do to try to make the boy feel better?
- What does his Dad mean when he says, "See how that water moves? That's how you speak."
- How does the boy "talk like a river?"
- When the boy is in school the next day and tells the class about the river, how do you think his classmates will respond?
- How do you think the boy feels when he talks about the river? How do you know?
- Have you ever had an experience like that, or known someone else who had?

- If you were in the boy's class, what could you do to help?
- Why do you think the author, Jordan Scott, wrote this book?
- Why is the book called *I Talk Like a River*?
- What is the overall message of the book? What lessons can you take from the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Metaphors and Similes

Explain to students that metaphors are used throughout the book. If you haven't already discussed metaphors, define **metaphor** as a word or phrase that is used to make a comparison between two things that aren't alike but have something in common. You can also share that similes are similar to metaphors except that they use the word "like" in them. Therefore, the title of the book, *I Talk Like a River*, is a simile. Explain that this sometimes helps the reader see and visualize the feeling or experience being described. Elicit and/or provide examples of metaphors such as "he is a night owl," "the snow is a white blanket" or "the moon is a white balloon." Explain how, in the example of "the snow is a white blanket," that the snow isn't actually a white blanket, but it can feel like that because it covers the ground like a blanket covers you. You can add that sometimes metaphors elicit feelings and like a blanket, snow can feel positive and cozy to you—similar to a blanket.

Re-read the book aloud and ask students to look out for other metaphors in it such as: "quiet as a stone," "storm in my belly," "eyes fill with rain," and "even the river stutters." For each metaphor, ask what two things are being compared and why they think the author used that metaphor. Then, have students come up with their own metaphors by using a process as follows (and you can model one together):

- Invite students to think of something they did or experienced for the first time (e.g., ride a bike).
- Describe how they felt when they had this new experience (e.g., scared and excited).
- Name something else that made them feel the same way, evoked similar feelings (e.g., riding on a rollercoaster).
- Put it all together (e.g., riding on my bike was a rollercoaster ride."). Have students work alone or in pairs to come up with 3–5 metaphors.

Elicit/explain that metaphors allow us to share feelings and experiences with people who may not have had that experience for themselves; it helps to build empathy. If time permits, have students turn one of their metaphors into a short story or poem.

2. What is Stuttering?

Ask students: *Why do you think the book is called I Talk Live a River?* Elicit and explain that the boy's father tells the boy that he "talks like a river" to explain how he stutters. Explain that when someone stutters, they may repeat parts of words (repetitions), stretch a sound out for a long time (prolongations), or have a hard time getting a word out (blocks). People who stutter know what they want to say but sometimes have difficulty saying it. Ask: *How does the boy feel when he stutters? How do his classmates respond when he stutters? How did the boy's Dad help make him feel better about his stuttering?* Talk about what the boy experienced and felt.

Ask students if they have heard about a boy named Brayden Harrington? Explain that Brayden is a young person who stutters. He connected with President Biden when Biden was campaigning in New

Hampshire. President Biden also stuttered and talked with Brayden about his experiences. Show the YouTube video [13-year-old Brayden Harrington speaks at Democratic National Convention](#) and discuss this with students, asking: *How did Brayden feel about meeting Joe Biden? What did he learn from him? Why did Joe Biden say he and Brayden were "members of the same club"?*

Ask students to reflect on whether they know anyone who stutters or has difficulties with speech. Explain that many people stutter; 70 million people worldwide (3 million in the U.S.) stutter and 5% of all children stutter. There are various famous people who stutter or stuttered as a child, including actors, writers, singers (Elvis Presley and Kendrick Lamar) and elected officials like President Biden. If you want to explore more on this topic, visit [SAY: The Stuttering Association for the Young](#), which provides many helpful resources. More facts and information can be found at Stuttering 101.

We reached out to Brayden Harrington and he shared the following advice for teachers and students for how to support students who stutter and who have other speech challenges. You can discuss Brayden's advice with your class.

Brayden's Advice for Supporting Students

- Do not finish students' sentences for them.
- If a student is stuttering, be patient and wait for them to finish what they are saying. This will help to build their self-confidence.
- Be aware that if a student is new to the school or new to a group of people, that can increase their stuttering due to discomfort or anxiety.
- Make an extra effort to support students who stutter or those who have other speech issues, especially if they are being teased, made fun of or bullied. This can include being an extra nice to them, asking them to do something, or saying something that uplifts them.
- For teachers: If you have a student in your class who stutters or has another speech issue, talk with them privately to come up with a hand signal or nod to do when they don't want to be called on in class. Also, talk with them privately about class jobs and whether they want to (or not) have a job that requires a lot of speaking, such as answering the class phone.

3. Disability, Ableism and Acting as an Ally

Talk with students about what it means to have a disability. Be sensitive and thoughtful about whether you have students with disabilities in your class, especially disabilities that may not be visible. Ask students: *What does it mean to have a disability?* Elicit and define **disability** as a mental or physical condition that restricts an individual's ability to engage in one or more major life activities (e.g., seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, communicating, sensing, breathing, performing manual tasks, learning, working or caring for oneself). Explain that some people consider stuttering to be a disability and some do not. Either way, it is important to discuss because sometimes people engage in teasing, bullying, or name-calling children who stutter.

Ask students: *In the book, how was the boy treated and how did he feel about being in school?* Talk about how the boy was teased and stared at when he stuttered. Elicit from students how they think the boy felt when that happened and why he didn't talk much at school because of his stuttering. Define **ally** as someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias. Ask students: *How did the boy's Dad act as an ally to him? If you were in the boy's class, how could you support or act as an ally to him?* Have students draw a picture of themselves acting as ally

to the boy. As an additional activity, use those ideas to make additional pages of the book where students in the class, instead of teasing him, act as an ally to the boy.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on disabilities, ableism and acting as an ally.

Curriculum Resources

Dolls Are Us, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/dolls-are-us.

Equal Treatment, Equal Access: Raising Awareness about People with Disabilities and Their Struggle for Equal Rights, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/equal-treatment-equal-access-raising-awareness-about.

"The Present" and Living with a Disability, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/the-present-and-living-with-a-disability.

Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. (Also in Spanish.)

Disability Glossary

www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/disability-glossary

Disability related terms and definitions often associated with and provide a common, working language for ADL's educational anti-bias programs and resources.

The Question Corner: Early Childhood FAQs

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner

A collection of answers to frequently asked questions about anti-bias issues faced by early childhood professionals and family members interested in promoting respect for diversity among young children. See [How Should I Respond When Children Notice Differences in Others?](#)

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Ability, Disability & Ableism, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-0=1&tid\[160\]=160&tid\[161\]=161&tid\[162\]=162&tid\[163\]=163](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-0=1&tid[160]=160&tid[161]=161&tid[162]=162&tid[163]=163)