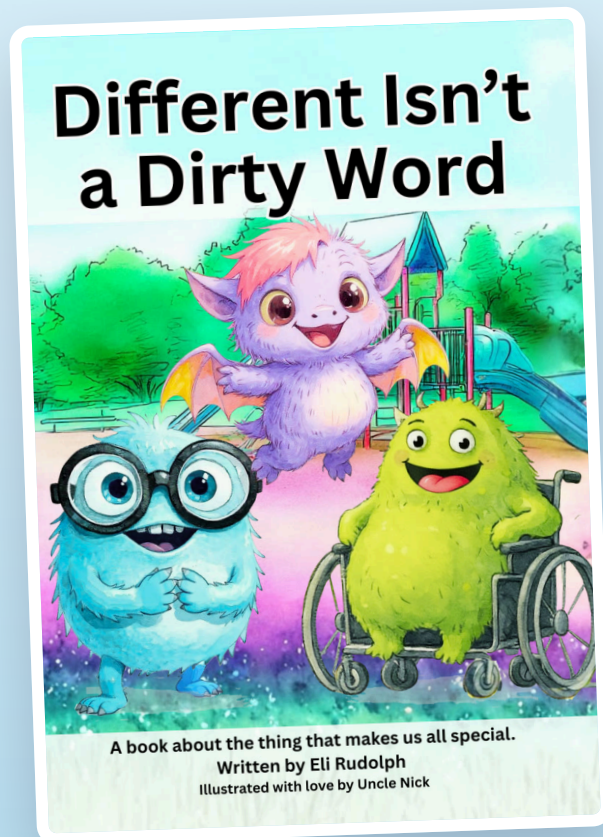




Teacher Read-Aloud Guide

Different Isn't a Dirty Word — by Eli, age 7



Everything you need to lead a joyful, meaningful read-aloud.

OVERVIEW

About This Book

About the book. *Different Isn't a Dirty Word* follows three best friends — Neeko, Zara, and Max — who look a little different and know THAT'S OK. When other monsters stare and ask “Why do you look different?”, the three friends answer with confidence: being different is what makes them *them*. Written by 7-year-old author Eli, who navigates his own mobility challenges, this is a book about difference told from the inside — with joy, not pity.

Meet the friends



Neeko

Wears big, shiny glasses and has one leg a bit shorter. He loves to hop and play jump rope.



Zara

Has wings that don't work — so she invents amazing machines that help her fly.



Max

Uses a wheelchair. He's super fast, races around the playground, and does tricks at the skatepark.

At-a-Glance

Reading age	4–8 (grades PreK–2)
Read-aloud time	8–10 minutes
Themes	Difference, belonging, disability, friendship, confidence
SEL focus	Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills
Best for	Morning meeting, SEL block, Disability Awareness Month, back-to-school community building
Free companions	SEL Lesson Plan Pack & Parent Resource Kit at elijahsbookclub.com

STEP ONE

Before Reading

Set the purpose (30 seconds). “Today we’re reading a book written by a real kid — a 7-year-old author named Eli. It’s about three best friends who each do things their own way.”

Cover walk. Show the cover and ask:

1. What do you notice about these three friends?
2. What do you think they like to do together?
3. The title says *Different Isn’t a Dirty Word*. What do you think that means?

Teaching note: If a student points at the wheelchair or glasses, that’s not a problem — it’s the lesson starting early. Respond warmly: “Good noticing! Let’s find out about Max.” Curiosity is welcome here; this book exists so kids can ask.

Vocabulary to introduce

Write on chart paper or board.

Different — not the same. And that’s OK!

Unique — one of a kind. There’s only one YOU.

Include — to make sure everyone gets to join in.

Ability — something your body or brain can do.

Adapt — to find your own way to do something.

During Reading

Page references below use the book's printed page numbers, 1–15.

Pages 1–2 • Meet the friends.

After “They look a little different and THAT’S OK!”:

→ Ask: “How can you tell these three are best friends?”

Pages 3–5 • Playing, the market, adventures.

Read through with energy; these pages establish that the friends’ lives are full and fun.

→ Ask: “What do the friends love to do together? Do you and your friends do any of the same things?”



Page 6 • Zara.

After “She has wings but they don’t work, so she used her creativity so she could fly so high!”:

→ Ask: “Zara’s wings don’t work — so what does she do?” (She invents!)

→ Follow-up: “That’s called *adapting* — finding your own way. Zara didn’t give up on flying. She found a new way to do it.”



Page 7 • Max.

After “He’s super fast and loves racing around the playground!”:

→ Ask: “What is Max GREAT at?” (Speed! Tricks!)

→ Teaching note: Let the takeaway be what Max *can* do. The book leads with his skills — so should we.



Page 8 • Neeko.

After “Neeko loves to hop and play jump rope!”:

→ Ask: “Neeko has one leg a bit shorter. Does that stop him from playing?” (No — he hops and jumps rope!)

During Reading

Page 9 · The staring moment.

★ *This is the heart of the book — slow down here.* After “Sometimes other monsters stare. ‘Why do you look different?’ they ask.”:

- Ask: “How do you think it feels when people stare at you?”
- Ask: “The friends just smile — because they know something. What do you think they know?”
- Let students predict before turning the page.

Pages 10–12 · The friends answer.

Read each friend’s line with confidence — these are the book’s power lines:

Max: “Different is NOT a bad thing! It makes me, ME!”

Zara: “We’re all good at something. And we’re all special in our own way!”

Neeko: “And we can do anything!”

- Ask: “Which friend’s answer do you like best? Why?”

Pages 13–15 · The message.

After “Our differences make us amazing!”:

- Ask: “The book says being different makes the world FUN. What would the world be like if everyone were exactly the same?”

STEP THREE

After Reading



Turn & Talk (2 minutes). Partners answer: “What is one thing that makes you, YOU?” Then a few volunteers share out.

Class brainstorm. Chart titled “Our Differences Make Us Amazing!” — collect one difference or special thing per student. Keep it posted; it becomes your classroom’s version of the book’s final page.

Movement break: Play Like the Friends. Hop on one foot like Neeko → zoom in place like Max → flap and invent a flying machine like Zara. (30 seconds each; great for wiggly listeners.)

Reflection prompt (verbal for PreK–K, written/drawn for 1–2): “One new thing I learned today is ____.” or “Something that makes me special is ____.”

If a student says something awkward (“What’s wrong with Max?”): Model the reframe calmly — “Nothing is wrong with Max! Max’s legs work differently, so he uses a wheelchair — and he’s the fastest one on the playground.” Then move on. Brief, warm, matter-of-fact is the goal.

CASEL Alignment



CASEL Competency	Where it lives in this book
Self-Awareness	Max's "It makes me, ME!" (p10); students naming their own unique traits
Social Awareness	The staring scene (p9); imagining how the friends feel
Relationship Skills	Three friends who include each other and play everyone's way (pp1–5)
Responsible Decision-Making	Choosing kind questions over staring; how WE respond to difference (pp9, 14)
Self-Management	Responding to stares with a smile and confident words (pp9–12)

Academic connections: ELA (prediction, character traits, author's message) · Art (character design, mural) · Health/SEL (bodies and abilities are different).

Extension Projects

1. Our Differences Mural

45 min · art. Roll out butcher paper titled “Our Differences Make Us Amazing!” Each student draws themselves as a monster friend — any colors, any number of eyes, any way of moving — with one thing they’re great at. Hang it at kid height where families will see it.

2. Reader’s Theater

20 min · ELA. Assign Neeko, Zara, Max, a narrator, and “other monsters.” Perform pages 9–12 (stare → question → the three confident answers). Rotate casts so several students get a power line. The physical act of saying “Different is NOT a bad thing!” out loud is the point.

3. Invention Station, starring Zara

30 min · STEAM. Zara’s wings don’t work, so she invents. Challenge: “Design a machine that helps someone do something in a new way.” Draw or build from recyclables. Share-out sentence frame: “My invention helps ____ by ____.”

4. Kind Questions Anchor Chart

15 min · SEL. Together, sort questions into “Kind & Curious” (asked to the person, with a smile: “What’s your name?” “Want to play?” “How does your chair work?”) vs. “Ouch” (whispered, pointed, or said *about* someone instead of *to* them). Post the chart. This pairs with Lesson 3 in the SEL Lesson Plan Pack.

THANK YOU

About the Author

Eli is a 7-year-old author with a big imagination and an even bigger heart. He loves writing stories, making art, dancing, and inventing new things. Even though Eli faces challenges with his mobility and other things that “make me, me,” he never lets them stop him from sharing his creativity and love with the world. This book supports Eli’s dream of attending college.

More free resources at elijahsbookclub.com

SEL Lesson Plan Pack (4 lessons + printables) · Parent Resource Kit · coloring sheets · classroom sets · book club discussion guides.

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