

Children's Book Review:
The Alphabet War: A Story about Dyslexia

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Robb, Diane. (2004). *The Alphabet War: A Story about Dyslexia*.
Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Company.

“Saw” and “was,” the letters p, q, b, and d; how was anyone supposed to learn to read when they all look the same?

“I can't do that,” thought Adam, when he was a student in kindergarten, so instead of reading, he chose to color or mold clay. When Adam entered first grade, his teacher told him he needed to put the letters together and read the word. “I can't do that,” Adam would say, and that was the beginning of the alphabet war. When Adam reached second grade, he had to learn to spell. The only way he could get through a spelling test was to memorize the shapes the words made, and even then, he would only get a few correct. His parents and teachers decided to send him to the resource room a few times a week to get extra help with reading, but some of the other kids made fun of him. He kicked them and was sent to the principal's office. At the end of second grade, Adam thought learning to read was hopeless; his best friend could read a 200-page chapter book and Adam couldn't read the directions at the top of the math homework.

When Adam got to third grade, his new teacher decided that he needed a little more help than the resource room. She helped his parents get him the testing he needed. After the test, the doctor told Adam that he was actually very smart, but the part of his brain that should help figure out letter sounds and words was not working right. They just needed to find a way to fix this connection. Adam realized that learning to read was like trying to figure out a secret code; once you learned the letters, you could break the code.

When Adam entered fourth grade, his teacher gave a test on magnets. Adam knew all about magnets! But he couldn't read the questions. His teacher gave him the test orally and he aced it. Later in the year, his teacher set up a demonstration of a circuit and a light bulb. He called Adam up to connect the wires--he did it--and the whole class cheered. At this moment, Adam realized he was smarter than he thought! Once he stopped noticing everything he couldn't do, he started to see all the things he could do. He could stand up and give a perfect oral report to the whole class, and knew a lot of facts about Blackbeard and hockey. He wasn't dumb; he was just a different kind of thinker. At the end of the book, Adam's mom gave him a book about pirates. He sat down to look at it and, before he knew it, he was reading on his own. “I can do this,” he said to himself.

This is an inspiring story about a boy with dyslexia. I think children and parents could learn a lot from this story and learn how to cope with this learning disability. I think it is extremely important how the author continues to mention all the strengths that Adam has,

and it is a crucial moment in the story when Adam realizes that there are many things he can do. His disability doesn't have to hold him back. I was very moved by the line, "I wasn't dumb; I am just a different type of thinker." Any parent or teacher that encounters a child with a disability needs to advocate that point. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, but we are all good at something and can overcome that which is most difficult.

This book includes a great *Note to Parents* at the beginning of the book. It explains to parents how their children might be feeling and describes some of the ways their children may act out. It also explains the importance of parents finding their child's strengths and involving them in those activities at which they excel. At the end of the note, it gives resources for parents to get more information on dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

Books for children are best when the reader can relate to the main character. I think any child, with or without a learning disability, would enjoy reading about Adam and his struggles, and how he overcomes them in the end. This book also has fantastic illustrations that really portray what and how the main character is feeling.