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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2018 Volume III: Adaptation: Literature, Film and Society

Wonderstruck: Disability Awareness Through Visual Storytelling

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by Lea Stenson

Young people need emotional tools like empathy and acceptance to navigate our complex world. In this unit, students will build their social and emotional intelligence through the study of disability, inclusion and identity. They will build empathy along with analytical skills as we explore Brian Selznick's graphic novel *Wonderstruck* and Todd Haynes' film adaptation of the book, which feature two main characters who are deaf.

We will study the novel and its film adaptation, with particular focus on how the characters' deafness is handled in both formats. This will lead to a larger discussion of disability, inclusion and identity. We will discuss the idea of re-framing disabilities as differences that present challenges. We will look at the ways in which these differences can impact daily function and how accommodations and universal design can address these challenges.

As a culminating project, we will read picture book biographies of people such as Louis Braille, Temple Grandin and Ansel Adams. Students will form inquiry circles to learn more about these people and explore differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, blindness, deafness, and stuttering. Students will work in their inquiry circles to adapt these biographies using visual storytelling techniques, and present their adaptations to the class.

(Developed for Social Studies, grade 5; recommended for Social Studies and Reading, grades 5-8)

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