This study describes a content analysis of young adult literature which includes at least one visually impaired character. Eight novels published between 1957 and 2008 were selected and examined in regards to their portrayal of the visually impaired character(s). The focus of this paper is to see whether there are any differences in character portrayal in books published before and after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

Based on the findings, there is no significant difference in the portrayal of visually impaired characters in young adult novels published before and after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Any differences in their portrayal seem to come from the character’s status as a major or minor character.

Headings:

Content analysis – Young adult literature/visual impairment

Young adult literature – Evaluation
VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHARACTERS: HAS THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT CHANGED THE WAY THEY ARE PORTRAYED IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE?

by

Denise R. Munro

A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

July 2010

Approved by

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Sandra Hughes-Hassell
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Introduction

One reason people read books is to experience a place or activity that they have not had the opportunity to try in their own lives. Meeting new types of people who live in ways different from the reader is also part of that experience. These experiences can be positive, negative, or neutral in the mind of the reader, but regardless of the type of experience it will leave an impression on the reader. This impression is one that the reader will carry with him throughout life until he is confronted with a reason to amend that impression.

Literature should strive to show a society in which people with disabilities are portrayed in a manner that does not perpetuate myths and stereotypes about that group of people. This is especially true of children’s and young adult literature which is helping to formulate the attitudes and beliefs of highly impressionable young people who generally have had fewer opportunities to interact with disabled people than their adult counterparts.

A major turning point in the way the general public views people with disabilities came about with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which was enacted in 1990. This piece of federal legislation opened up many doors for the disabled that had previously been closed to them. Those doors had been closed by the able-bodied population due in part to a lack of knowledge of the capabilities of disabled people and myths and stereotypes that had been perpetuated in literature and other realms.
I aim to study the portrayal of a specific group of differently-able people, the visually impaired, in the context of a specific portion of literature, young adult literature. I have a personal interest in topics involving the visually impaired that has developed since I met and married my husband, Rob. Rob is visually impaired and has been since he was six months old. Some of the knowledge I possess in terms of the visually impaired, e.g. how to properly guide a visually impaired person and stereotypes about this population, comes from my husband and interactions he/we have had with other individuals.

Young adult literature not only provides its readers with “characters with whom teens with disabilities can identify, helping them understand that they are not alone,” (Cole, 2009, p. 138) but also “accurate stories help healthy teens understand teens who are disabled or sick and help all teens realize that other teens face similar obstacles” (Cole, 2009, p.138). For many people literature provides the beginning basis of knowledge about a subject, in this case the visually impaired, with which the reader may have never had the opportunity to interact. After acquiring new knowledge the reader needs to discuss his thoughts and feelings about the topic in order to make sense of it. Young adult “literature can provide a forum for conversation about how to treat those with differences and how to deal with the emotional and physical toll caused by disabilities” (Cole, 2009, p. 139). For this reason young adult literature needs to accurately portray visually impaired characters rather than perpetuating myths and stereotypes.
Literature Review

The presence of visually impaired characters in literature is not new. Characters with visual impairments have been appearing in literature since the Bible and Greek mythology (Campbell, 2006, para. 3). However, they were generally minor characters (Brenna, 2009, p.10) whose impairment it was believed was a punishment for some sin and, therefore; had been brought on by themselves (Campbell, 2006, para. 4). “A favorite method of punishment among the gods of ancient Greece was blinding” (Jernigan, 1974, para. 7). In other stories the visually impaired were characters at whose expense the main characters derived pleasure by playing tricks on them, making fun of them, and forcing them to perform silly acts (Jernigan, 1974, para. 28). This would seem to reflect the way the visually impaired were seen by medieval society at the time as it was not uncommon for disabled people of all types to be forced to act the fool for the enjoyment of others (Jernigan, 1974, para. 28). “The character with a disability acts as a symbol…scapegoat…catalyst for change in characters who are not disabled…[and] comic relief” (Campbell, 2006, para. 3).

Young adult literature is a more modern phenomenon. In terms of reading materials one previously moved from children’s books to adult materials without having a transition stage. The young adult novel as we think of it today came into being with the rise of popularity of problem novels in the 1960s (Smith, 2002, p.7).

In 1974, Kenneth Jernigan, then president of the National Federation of the Blind, stated in a banquet speech that “the literary record … displays a bewildering variety of images” (Jernigan, 1974, para. 4) in terms of how the life of the blind is viewed. He
found that the literary record did display certain themes in regards to the portrayal of the blind. The nine themes identified by Jernigan are:

1. blindness as compensatory or miraculous power
2. blindness as total tragedy
3. blindness as foolishness and helplessness
4. blindness as unrelieved wickedness and evil
5. blindness as perfect virtue
6. blindness as punishment for sin
7. blindness as abnormality or dehumanization
8. blindness as purification
9. blindness as symbol or parable (Jernigan, 1974, para.5)

Although Jernigan found these themes to be dominant in the literature produced before 1974 he believed that these themes/stereotypes could be changed by the visually impaired community. Jernigan concluded his speech by saying, “As we shape our lives, so will we shape our literature” (Jernigan, 1974, para.54).

In the early 1960’s Jean Little was breaking ground in the children’s book industry by “resist[ing] the exclusion of people with disabilities from wider life and so writing” (Minaki, 2009, p. 12). Little’s writing helped to bring disabled children into the forefront of the story as the protagonist. Before Little pushed for equality of inclusion in literature disabled characters were often used as tertiary characters whose role was one of comic relief, scapegoat, or catalyst for the protagonist’s change.

“Traditionally, children with disabilities are portrayed in literature as either the ‘brave little soul’ or the ‘poor little thing,’ neither of which is a very accurate or
appealing description” (Campbell, 2006, para. 3). This attitude of “brave little soul” and “poor little thing” links directly back to Jernigan’s themes of blindness as total tragedy and blindness as foolishness or helplessness. Characters who are referred to in these terms are not ones that readers desire to associate themselves with as they are constantly being looked down upon by society.

When disabled characters are used as tertiary and secondary characters within a story “we don’t see the character with disabilities developing to the extent that another typical character might” be developed (Brenna, 2009, p. 10). One of the characteristics of good young adult literature is that it enables readers to see themselves in the characters. What does it say to a disabled reader if all of the protagonists he/she encounters in literature are able individuals? It tells the reader that people like him/her are not interesting and valuable enough to be written and read about.

Young adult literature that realistically portrays characters with disabilities must meet certain criteria. The first is the need to provide “accurate information… including the use of current terminology” (Carroll, 2000, p. 623). Providing the reader with accurate information in terms of technologies and techniques used by the visually impaired is important as this may be the only opportunity the reader has to learn about these topics. The second criterion is to “avoid stereotypes of the disabled and provide insight into the life of the person with disabilities” (Carroll, 2000, p. 623). The reader may never interact with a person with a visual impairment and thus will only learn about the abilities and lifestyle of a visually impaired person through the literature he has read. Criterion number three is simply that the disabled character “should be well written” (Carroll, 2000, p. 624). A well written character is a criterion that all pieces of literature
are judged on and it should be no different if the character is disabled. The fourth criterion is that “the book should confront the disability in a realistic manner, not overemphasizing the disability but providing evidence that the character faces challenges because of it” (Carroll, 2000, p. 624). When the disability is overly emphasized the reader sees the disability not the character. The reader should see the character who has a disability not the disabled character. The last criterion identified in Carroll’s research is that “the book should avoid simply using a character who is disabled to promote the growth of a nondisabled character in the book” (Carroll, 2000, p. 624). When a character with a disability is used to effect change in someone else they are usually relegated to a minor role in the story and are never fully developed (Brenna, 2009, p. 10).

The enactment of laws that have increased the legal and civil rights of disabled people have also led to an increased interest in literature that portrays disabled characters in a positive light (Campbell, 2006, para. 6). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is one of those laws. The main purpose of the act was to “provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities” (Department, 1990, Section 12101 Findings and Purpose, b1) This effort to eliminate discrimination would bring more disabled people into the workplace and various other public places as the law now required making those places physically accessible to the disabled population.

The ADA defines disability in three ways.

(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such impairment (Department, 1990, Section 12102 Definitions).
People with visual disabilities meet the first definition. The physical impairment is the loss of vision. The major life activities being limited are all of those that require sight.

The ADA is divided into five subchapters commonly referred to as titles. Those subchapters or titles are: Employment (Title I), Public Services (Title II), Public Accommodations (Title III), Telecommunications (Title IV), and Miscellaneous (Title V) (Department, 1990, Subchapter Headings).

The Job Accommodation Network provides a brief summary of each title of the ADA on its website.

Employment (Title I) Business must provide reasonable accommodations to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of employment. Possible changes may include restructuring jobs, altering the layout of workstations, or modifying equipment. Employment aspects may include the application process, hiring, wages, benefits, and all other aspects of employment. Medical examinations are highly regulated. (Job, 1997, para. 4)

Public Services (Title II) Public services, which include state and local government instrumentalities, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, and other commuter authorities, cannot deny services to people with disabilities participation in programs or activities which are available to people without disabilities. In addition, public transportation systems, such as public transit buses, must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. (Job, 1997, para. 5)

Public Accommodations (Title III) All new construction and modifications must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. For existing facilities, barriers to services must be removed if readily achievable. Public accommodations include facilities such as restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, retail stores, etc., as well as privately owned transportation systems. (Job, 1997, para. 6)

Telecommunications (Title IV) Telecommunications companies offering telephone service to the general public must have telephone relay service to individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTYs) or similar devices. (Job, 1997, para. 7)

Miscellaneous (Title V) Includes a provision prohibiting either (a) coercing or threatening or (b) retaliating against the disabled or those attempting to aid people with disabilities in asserting their rights under the ADA. (Job, 1997, para. 8)
Compliance with each of these sections of the ADA can be achieved through the use of auxiliary aides and services as defined within the ADA. “The term auxiliary aides and services includes qualified readers, taped texts, or other effective methods of making visually delivered materials available to individuals with visual impairments” (Department, 1990, Section 12102 Definitions).

The following are a few examples of how people and business can comply with the ADA. In hotels, schools, and other places where rooms are commonly labeled with a sign this means adding a sign that uses Braille to identify the room, so that a visually impaired person may locate and identify the room on his/her own.

In a restaurant or another place where food is served compliance with the ADA may be achieved by providing a Braille menu or simply by having a staff member read the menu to the visually impaired customer.

In the workplace reasonable accommodations can be met by providing the visually impaired employee electronic copies of documents and materials as well as a computer with text to speech software installed on it which will enable the employee to read the materials on his/her own. When applying for a job the requirements of the ADA can be met by the potential employer by simply assisting the visually impaired applicant with filling out the application.

In terms of public transportation, bus, cab, train, subway, etc. a visually impaired person has the right to use a guide dog for mobility purposes as a guide dog is considered to be an auxiliary aide. The ADA did not specifically address air travel as it had been previously addressed in the Air Carrier Access Act of 1986 (American, 2010, Transportation Policy section).
In 1974 Kenneth Jernigan predicted that as visually impaired people changed their lives the portrayals of them in literature would also change. It has been twenty years since the enactment of the ADA; it remains to be seen whether this life changing law has changed the way visually impaired people are portrayed in literature.
Methodology

This study is a content analysis of young adult literature in which at least one character is identified as visually impaired. In The Practice of Social Research, Babbie (2010) defines content analysis as “the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings, and laws” (p. 333). Babbie also states, ‘content analysis is particularly well suited … to answering the classic question of communications research: ‘Who says what to whom, why, how, and with what effect?’” (Babbie, 2010, p. 333). The dialogue between characters in literature reveals much about the value placed on a character by the author and society. This study uses latent content coding for the purpose of determining the treatment of visually impaired characters. Latent content as defined by Babbie is a study of “the underlying meaning of communications” (Babbie, 2010, p. 338).

Young adult literature is difficult to define, but is generally agreed to have certain characteristics. These unique features include, but are not limited to a teenage protagonist around whom events revolve while he/she struggles to resolve a conflict, the voice of a young adult or a teen viewpoint is used to tell the story, and the story addresses coming of age issues (Cole, 2009, p. 49).

Procedure

This study first requires a definition of visually impaired. Visual impairment covers a wide range of abilities from complete blindness to low vision. The American Federation for the Blind (AFB) defines low vision as “vision loss that may be severe enough to impede a person’s ability to carry on everyday activities, but still allows some functionally useful sight. Low vision cannot be fully corrected by eyeglasses, contact
lenses, or surgery” (American, Glossary of Eye Conditions letter L section, para. 6). The University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center further clarifies the matter by stating that a person is considered to have low vision when their vision is measured at 20/70 or worse. While a person who is legally blind has a measured vision of 20/200. For comparison a person with perfect vision would be said to see 20/20 (University, Eye Conditions – Low Vision – Definition section, para. 1-3).

A list of books featuring visually impaired characters was obtained from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired website. In addition titles found under the subject headings blind and blind-fiction in Best Books for High School Readers Grades 9-12 and Best Books for Middle School and Junior High Readers Grades 6-9 were compiled with the original list. Titles from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired list that did not meet the definition of young adult literature were removed from the final list as well as all titles that had been duplicated in the compilation process. Titles that featured a visually impaired animal rather than a human were also removed from the final list as animals are not people and, therefore; do not fit the definition of visually impaired.

The titles were further divided into two lists based on their original copyright dates with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 serving as the dividing point. At this point it was determined that choosing books that all represented the same genre would be best as it would allow for the most accurate comparison of titles. The genre of realistic fiction was chosen for the fact that it is meant to reflect real life and would therefore be the genre most inclined to demonstrate differences based on an element of real life, the ADA. Eight books were chosen for inclusion in this study (Table
1). Four of those books were published before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990. The remaining four books were published after 1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Author</th>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>Book Format</th>
<th>Gender of Visually Impaired Character</th>
<th>Race of Visually Impaired Character</th>
<th>Development of Visual Impairment</th>
<th>Author Experience with the Visually Impaired Community **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow My Leader – James B. Garfield</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Accident in preteen years</td>
<td>None noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift of Gold – Beverly Butler</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Medical problem in teenage years</td>
<td>Author lost vision at age 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen for the Fig Tree – Sharon Bell Mathis</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Medical problem in preteen years</td>
<td>None noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half the Battle – Lynn Hall</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Medical problem before age 5</td>
<td>None noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can You Feel the Thunder? – Lynn E. McElfresh</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Medical problem before age 5</td>
<td>Author has experience with deaf and deaf-blind communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind’s Eye – Paul Fleischman</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Male* and Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Old age (Female) - *Imagined and not explained (Male)</td>
<td>None noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Million Dollar Putt – Dan Gutman</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Novel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Medical Problem before age 5</td>
<td>None noted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beanball – Gene Fehler</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Verse Novel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Accident in teenage years</td>
<td>None noted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Author information from book jacket/cover

Table 1. Study Sample

An attempt was been made to include titles that represent a variety of formats within the realistic fiction genre. Six of the selected titles are written as novels, one is a verse novel, and one is written in the form of a play. The chosen novels also represent
characters who developed their vision problems at various times throughout their lives. Three of the titles feature characters whose vision problems developed between birth and age five. Two of the books have characters who lost their vision due to an accident during their preteen and teen years. Two selections feature a character who lost her sight during her preteen and teenage years due to a medical condition. In one title the visually impaired character is elderly and has developed her vision problems in old age. Only one of the books features a visually impaired character who is African-American. Of the remaining seven books four have a Caucasian male as the visually impaired character and three use a Caucasian female character. According to the book jackets, of the eight authors who penned the included titles one is herself visually impaired and one has had personal experiences with the deaf and deaf-blind communities through her involvement with the Girl Scouts.

Table 2 shows the coding scheme used to evaluate each title. Each title has been evaluated based on how it does or does not exhibit examples of the following four criterion: compliance with the ADA, common stereotypes, auxiliary aides and services (assistive technologies and techniques), and Jernigan’s themes of blind literature. Each criterion was evaluated on a three-point scale. A one (1) indicates a poor representation. A two (2) signifies an adequate representation. A three (3) denotes an excellent representation.

In terms of compliance with the ADA, I was looking to see if the actions of the characters would be considered lawful or unlawful today based on the 1990 enactment of the law. Books in which the ADA regulations are followed show the reader accurate
information as described in Carroll’s criteria for realistic portrayal of characters with disabilities.

In regards to common stereotypes I was looking to see if the characters’ actions, words, and/or thoughts perpetuated myths or stereotypes about the visually impaired such as the inability to accomplish everyday tasks or the inability to be attractive to a member of the opposite sex. “Avoidance of stereotypes” was Carroll’s second criteria for evaluating young adult literature (Carroll, 2000, p. 623).

In terms of auxiliary aides and services (assistive technologies and techniques) I was looking to see if the aides used in the story were used correctly and appropriately based on the ADA and guidelines from organizations for the blind thus demonstrating Carroll’s first criteria of “accurate information and terminology” (Carroll, 2000, p. 623).

Finally, in regards to Jernigan’s themes I was looking to see if I could identify any of the nine themes described by Jernigan in the selected young adult titles. The presence or lack thereof of Jernigan’s themes also leads to the evaluation of Carroll’s criterion of “avoidance of stereotypes” (Carroll, 2000, p. 623).

The goal of this study is to see if human characters in young adult literature are portrayed differently based on the four identified criteria in books published before and after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Americans with Disabilities Act</th>
<th>Common Stereotypes</th>
<th>Auxiliary Aides and Services (Assistive Technologies and Techniques)</th>
<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 - excellent</strong></td>
<td>All characters and actions are found to be acting in compliance with the ADA regardless of the title’s publication date.</td>
<td>The title does not exhibit any stereotypes about the visually impaired.</td>
<td>Characters are always depicted correctly using technologies and techniques.</td>
<td>Title does not fall into any of Jernigan’s identified themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – adequate</strong></td>
<td>Only one or two instances of incompliance with the ADA are found in the title.</td>
<td>The title depicts one or two stereotypes about the visually impaired.</td>
<td>Characters are depicted incorrectly using assistive technologies and techniques one or two times.</td>
<td>Title falls into one or two of Jernigan’s identified themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – poor</strong></td>
<td>Three or more instances of incompliance with the ADA are found in the title.</td>
<td>The title depicts three or more stereotypes about the visually impaired.</td>
<td>Characters are depicted incorrectly using assistive technologies and techniques three or more times.</td>
<td>Title falls into three or more of Jernigan’s identified themes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Coding Scheme**
Results

Pre ADA

*Follow My Leader* - 1957

James B. Garfield published *Follow My Leader* in 1957 well before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The only incident in this book that would not be allowed to happen since the enactment of the ADA is the denial of Jimmy’s right to use his guide dog, Leader, while attending the public junior high school. In this case the school superintendent tells Jimmy that if he were older and attending a school for older students there would not be a problem, but at the junior high school “it would cause too much confusion” (148). The superintendent goes on to tell Jimmy, “You might go to the State School for the Blind, but I’m quite sure that the dog could not go with you even there” (148).

In regards to this matter Miss Thompson, Jimmy’s welfare worker, says, “The dog would be very uncomfortable, cramped under a desk all day, and would be in the way if he was in the aisle. You really don’t need him indoors any more than you need your white cane” (150). While *Follow My Leader* accurately reflects conditions in the 1950’s Jimmy’s situation would be dealt with very differently today. I personally know guide dogs who have attended school and one who was raised in an elementary school by a sixth grade class. In today’s post ADA society a blind person cannot legally be prohibited from using a guide dog in a public place. In one’s home a blind person may not need to use a dog for guidance as the person has undoubtedly learned the layout of the home, however; maneuvering around the inside of other buildings is precisely part of the guide dog’s job.
It is also noted that an eleven-year-old boy being allowed to obtain a guide dog is not realistic as one must be at least sixteen years of age to be admitted to a guide dog school. This unusualness is noted as Miss Thompson tells Jimmy “it is not customary for a guide-dog school to take an eleven-year-old boy” (76). The uniqueness of Jimmy’s position in terms of his age is not addressed again.

The reader is provided with accurate information for the time period in regards to Jimmy learning to walk with a cane, read and write Braille, handle money, and perform other daily tasks. When Jimmy’s friends, Chuck and Art, comment on the “goofy” Braille primer Miss Thompson takes advantage of the opportunity to explain to the boys what Braille is and how they should learn it as well (53-54). Likewise, when Jimmy is learning to walk with a cane his friend Slats states that walking down the sidewalk is easy, so Miss Thompson challenges him to do it blindfolded. Slats attempts it, but quickly gets angry and gives up. Miss Thompson points out to him that Jimmy can’t give up and could use support and help rather than teasing and ridicule (39-40).

Jimmy’s mother, Ruth Carter, initially reacts to his blindness with despair and pity as is witnessed in her statements after learning that her boy is blind.

“There will be no morning for him. Jimmy is entering a long, dark corridor. I wonder where it will lead him. How can he play like other boys? He was always so active. What will his life be now?” (20)

Ruth exhibits feelings of pity for her son when he first learns to walk with a cane as well as when she refers to him as “my poor boy” (41). Miss Thompson quickly squashes that statement my telling Ruth “He isn’t a poor boy. He got along beautifully” (41). Not another pitying word or despair filled statement is uttered by Ruth in this story.
Other characters in the story exhibit feelings of awe and wonder upon meeting Jimmy whether or not he is with his guide dog. Two ladies in the story are surprised that Jimmy heard them talking about him and responded to their question.

“Look at that little boy,” one of them said. “He’s blind.”
“Yes, I noticed,” the other woman answered. “He has a bright little face. I wonder how old he is.”
“If you’re talking about me,” Jimmy said, “I’m eleven.”
“Well what do you know about that?” the first woman said. “He heard us.”
“Just because I can’t see doesn’t mean I can’t hear.” Jimmy scowled.
“I guess we were talking too loud. I hope we didn’t hurt his feelings,” one of them said as they walked away.
Jimmy was angry when his mother came back. “People talk about me as if I was a table or a post.” (85)

Note that even at the end of the exchange the women do not actually speak to Jimmy. They simply wonder between themselves as to whether or not they have hurt Jimmy’s feelings. Jimmy’s comment to his mother indicates that they have hurt his feelings.

Other characters on the bus are awed that Jimmy is traveling by himself to guide dog school (92). Although, I have to say that their awe may be just as much due to his age as his blindness. During lunch the bus passengers are eager to learn how Jimmy keeps track of his money. As Jimmy describes the different shapes and textures of coins as well techniques for folding different denominations of paper money to tell them apart, his fellow passengers pull out their coins to see if they too can feel the difference between coins (93).

On his first day at the public junior high school Jimmy notices the reactions he receives from his fellow students. As he arrives in the morning with his white cane in hand, having been required to leave his guide dog with Aunt Martha, Jimmy notices that each group of kids becomes “strangely silent” as he passes them (155). As the students
enter the classroom they act “shy” of Jimmy until they see how his friends, “Art and Chuck, treat him and they try to behave the same way” (155). After school a few students followed Jimmy to his Aunt Martha’s house in order to see his dog and how they walked together (156). Would Jimmy have received different reactions from his fellow students in a post ADA book? Probably not as humans don’t learn how to deal with a situation until confronted with it either in person or in a story.

*Follow My Leader* scores an overall score of eight based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Americans with Disabilities Act</th>
<th>Common Stereotypes</th>
<th>Auxiliary Aides (Assistive Technologies and Techniques)</th>
<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 - excellent</td>
<td>Inability to bring Leader to school</td>
<td>Women at department store act as if inability to see means inability to hear, speak, or comprehend as well People on the bus are awed that Jimmy is able to travel by himself</td>
<td>Jimmy is too young to get a guide dog</td>
<td>Jimmy’s mother feels his blindness is a total tragedy for a short time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – adequate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1 - poor</td>
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Table 3: Evaluation Score for *Follow My Leader*

Overall, *Follow My Leader* is a myth busting title. Miss Thompson corrects Jimmy’s friends when they make fun of his way of doing things and shows them what it is like to be in Jimmy’s place. These scenes lend themselves well to discussion about how people see and treat others and how one might re-examine their current thinking. Jimmy is also a myth buster in that his character shows the reader that it is possible for him to do many of the same things that his sighted friends do including hiking, camping, working a
job, and going to school. Even those aspects of the book that have become inaccurate through the passage of time and changing legal/societal norms, such as Jimmy not being allowed to bring his guide dog to school, are appropriate topics for discussion and reflection.

*Gift of Gold* - 1972

*Gift of Gold* published in 1972 is the second book written by Beverly Butler based on her own personal experiences. Butler lost her sight at the age of fourteen as does the main character of this book. Cathy Wheeler is a junior at St. Chrysostom College. She is studying speech therapy and this year will be working with patients, young children, in the school’s clinic. During her high school years Cathy lost her sight to glaucoma. She now uses a guide dog named Trudy to help her navigate the world.

There are a number of characters in this book that treat Cathy in a rather despicable manner, but only one of those characters would be affected by the rules enacted by the ADA. Dr. Paulus, the new director of the speech therapy program, questions Cathy’s ability to be a speech therapist, her acceptance into the program in the first place, and whether she should be allowed to continue her studies.

Dr. Paulus released a light breath that might have been a sigh. “Very frankly, Miss Wheeler, I’m curious about how you happen to be studying speech therapy. I should think it presents a number of aspects that would be particularly difficult to master for a person with your handicap. Knowing Sister Bernard and her high standards as I do, I’m interested in what conditions you had to meet for her to consent to training a blind student.”

“Conditions? There weren’t any conditions aside from the ones everybody had to meet – grade points, high school credits, and the like. Sister Bernard said I probably knew more about what a blind person could do than she did, so if I were willing to stand or fall on the same ground as a sighted student, she felt I had as
much right in the program as any other qualified applicant.” Cathy’s smile was for Sister Bernard, who not only taught that physical handicaps could be overcome but practiced what she preached. “So far, the work hasn’t been more than I can manage.” (19)

The idea that special restrictions should be placed upon you in the educational setting simply because you have a visual disability would not be allowed today. In fact, now we make a point of helping students with visual disabilities get services that will help put them on an equal footing with their sighted peers. Dr. Paulus continues this discussion by letting Cathy know that if she is not satisfied with her work in the clinic regardless of her other grades Cathy will be removed from the program. To her credit, Dr. Paulus later comes to realize that Cathy is a good therapist and fights to keep her in the program when Cathy makes the decision to switch to special education.

Dr. Paulus’ concerns regarding Cathy’s abilities came from the mother of a clinic client who exhibited her own prejudice towards Cathy. The mother was concerned that a blind therapist was working with her child. In fact, she questioned Cathy very thoroughly about whether or not she would be doing everything that the other therapists do including the use of tongue depressors. She declared their conversation to be “very inspirational” (8-9). Unlike Sister Bernard the child’s mother does not practice what she appears to preach when she describes speaking with Cathy as inspirational, as she then demanded that Dr. Paulus switch her child to a different therapist. Clearly this woman could not see past the fact that Cathy is blind. No law will help her get passed that. This is the type of person who in real life will be helped by reading about positive experiences with visually impaired people.
Another character who treats Cathy in an unsavory manner is her former high school friend, Joan Norton. Joan is planning her wedding and asks Cathy to be one of her bridesmaids not because she really values Cathy, but because having a blind bridesmaid will surely make her wedding unique enough to be written up in the newspaper and besides Cathy obviously owes her for all the help Joan gave her in high school.

And don’t think I’m asking you so that the wedding will be different enough for them to write it up in the paper. That’s my cousin Olive’s idea. Although, of course, how many brides are there around who’ll be having a blind bridesmaid?” (72).

This sentiment turns Cathy’s participation in the wedding into nothing more than a novelty act that will gather attention for the real stars, the bride and cousin Olive.

Throughout the events leading up to the wedding Cathy is shown as a burden to the other members of the wedding party who feel they must be responsible for Cathy and lead her around rather than allowing her to use her guide dog, Trudy. This is evident in the author’s choice of words such as when the bride, mother of the bride, and bridesmaids go shopping for dresses.

Cathy suspected that Mrs. Norton was just as well pleased not to be hampered by her presence on the shopping trip. A blind bridesmaid was very nice as a conversational item to be submitted to the newspaper, but she was an awkward nuisance to have to pilot from store to store on a shopping tour. (79)

The use of words such as “hampered,” “conversational item,” “awkward nuisance,” and “piloted” give the reader the impression that the visually impaired character is unable to get from place to place by herself and constantly needs help and watching as though she were a small child. Later in this scene upon entering the second dress shop “Olive steered Cathy to a small wrought-iron chair placed against the wall.” She said to Cathy “Why don’t you sit down? You’ll be out of the way here” (84). This only serves to reinforce the
character’s attitude that a visually impaired person is a problem to have around and
should be neatly placed out of the way, so as not to be under the feet of the sighted
people.

Cathy’s rights are further intruded upon by the bridal party at the wedding
rehearsal as Cathy is not allowed to bring Trudy with her for the evening nor will Trudy
be welcome at the wedding the following day.

“Or you could just step out into the aisle here and walk around like anybody else.”
Steve’s hand cupped her elbow, drawing her out beside him. “I’ll do the best I can
to fill in for my pal Trudy. How come you didn’t bring her tonight?”
“A dog in a church?” Olive shrilled.
“Why not?” Steve asked. “Trudy’s no stranger to the inside of a church if I
remember correctly.”
“That’s true,” Cathy nodded, “but she’s not a member of the wedding party.”
“That’s all we need,” Olive said........”This wedding’s going to be bizarre enough
if Joan has her way, without adding a dog to it.” (167-168)

This passage illustrates the inability of some characters to see the importance of Trudy’s
job in terms of Cathy’s mobility. Olive is more concerned with the impression Trudy’s
attendance would give other people than Cathy’s right to be independent.

The ADA does give Cathy the right to use Trudy at church and from Steve’s
statement I gather that Cathy did take Trudy to church with her. Later in the story Cathy
is given the chance to accompany her boyfriend, Greg, to Hawaii. Cathy questions the
logic of this trip as she would not be able to take Trudy with her.

“What will we do about Trudy?” she heard herself saying instead. “You can’t take
a dog into Hawaii just like that. I read somewhere once that there’s a quarantine
of four months or more.”
“So leave Trudy behind,” he said gaily. (200-201)

This is an aspect of the law that has changed since the writing of this book. As a result of
a United States Supreme Court decision in the late 1990’s, today one would be allowed to
take a guide dog to Hawaii and return to the United States mainland with the dog without having to put the dog in quarantine.

The fact that Cathy is shown to have a boyfriend with whom she regularly goes out as well as an old high school friend who is interested in dating her helps to break the myth held by many people that those with visual impairments cannot or do not date and will never be married. This aspect of the story would be highly beneficial to a visually impaired reader who needed to see a positive example of someone like herself living through normal life experiences.

However, Greg’s attitude towards elements of Cathy’s life is not always positive. This attitude is demonstrated when Greg makes fun of Cathy for studying too much, changes plans without consulting her, and suggests that she won’t need Trudy in the future. Most examples of this attitude simply show that Greg was an inconsiderate boyfriend and were not at all related to Cathy’s visual impairment. His comments about not needing Trudy, however, were related to Cathy’s vision.

“So leave Trudy behind,” he said gaily.
“Give her to your brother. You won’t be needing her in a little grass shack, anyway. Or in Los Angeles, either.” His voice softened to a caress. “I promise you that.” (200-201)

These statements show how little Greg understood about how Trudy aided Cathy’s mobility. Of course, during the book he had few chances to observe the pair working together as Trudy was regularly left at home when the two went out on a date.

Cathy is observed during the course of the book reading by listening to recorded letters from a friend and her recorded school books on tape. It is also noted that Cathy updates her own teaching materials for clinic sessions by placing Braille labels below the
pictures, so she knows at which picture the boys are looking. All of these methods are correctly used and are appropriate for the time in which the book was written.

During the shopping trip with Joan and her bridesmaids Olive initially grabs Cathy by the elbow in order to propel her down the sidewalk, but Cathy is quickly able to get Olive to switch her guiding method to the preferred one of Cathy holding Olive’s arm just above the elbow. Later during the wedding rehearsal one groomsman also grabs Cathy by the elbow to lead her down the aisle, but is corrected by the preacher. In that same scene Steve correctly guides Cathy to the back of the church.

*Gift of Gold* scores an overall score of eight based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section (Table 4). Overall, *Gift of Gold* provides the reader with many issues to discuss and ponder in regards to how a visually impaired person should be treated. As a teaching tool this book offers many opportunities to discuss how a situation could be better handled in order to allow the visually impaired character to be more independent and to keep her dignity. The book also offers many positive examples of a visually impaired person’s capabilities in terms of advanced learning and job opportunities. The title provides the reader with the opportunity to see a visually impaired person doing things that a teen may be concerned about such as dating. Of course, the changes in technology that have made a difference in the way visually impaired people communicate with friends and family, take notes in class, and read books could also be discussed.
Americans with Disabilities Act | Common Stereotypes | Auxiliary Aides (Assistive Technologies and Techniques) | Jernigan’s Themes
---|---|---|---
3 – excellent

Cathy’s inability to take Trudy to the wedding (although based on Olive or Joan’s personal preference after the ADA Cathy would have more reason to insist on being allowed to use Trudy)

Dr. Paulus’ treatment of Cathy (may have been more affected by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 than the ADA)

At the clinic the patient’s mother is unable to believe that Cathy is capable of safely doing everything that a sighted therapist could do with her son.

Twice Cathy is guided by a sighted person in an incorrect manner, once by Olive and once by Andy.

Cathy is treated as though she were helpless during the shopping trip for bridesmaids’ dresses

2 – adequate

1 – poor

Table 4: Evaluation Score for Gift of Gold

Listen for the Fig Tree – 1974

Sharon Bell Mathis’ book *Listen for the Fig Tree* published in 1974 presents the story of an African-American girl named Marvina who is trying to hold everything together for her family as her mother falls apart with grief at the loss of her husband. Marvina takes care of every day household tasks such as grocery shopping, cooking, and sewing as well as keeping her mother from taking prescribed medications when she is drunk or high. Marvina does all of this despite her blindness which is not a major focus of the story.

Marvina has a boyfriend named Ernie and daydreams about marrying him and having children (37). This breaks a stereotype that disabled people do not get married and are not attractive to the opposite sex. For this reason this book can serve as a positive
example to visually impaired teenage readers that it is possible to date and have a relationship despite having a disability.

Marvina’s mother, during one of her drunken moments, expounds on Marvina’s visual appearance in terms of her eyes. “She been going blind since she was born but she ain’t got no nasty-looking eyes… Marvina’s eyes look gooder than yours!” (20). This element of describing the visually impaired character’s looks in terms of her eyes was not included in any of the other titles. The focus on the beauty of her eyes despite their uselessness implies a need on the mother’s part to show that her daughter is still just as good as or better than the next person.

Marvina tells the reader of rocking, swaying back and forth without moving the feet, a common trait among the visually impaired that she previously exhibited but was taught by a therapist to stop. She says that at times it is easier to think when she rocks (30). This too was an aspect of the visually impaired that was not mentioned in any of the other titles.

Marvina acknowledges that “people stare at [her] all of the time” (86) sometimes because she is blind and sometimes because of the way her mother is acting. Most of the time this does not bother her, but when people are staring because of her mother’s antics at the store Marvina has to will herself not to scream. “Scream once. You’re blind, you can’t see. People will allow you to scream. Scream once. Scream loud. Scream! But she didn’t scream” (50-51). Marvina is not embarrassed by her blindness. She is embarrassed by her loud mother who drinks too much and gets high.

Marvina’s mother says to her, “You do everything just right like your father and I’m real proud cause you can do more blind as a bat than a whole person.” Marvina
replies, “I am a whole person, Momma.” This is a message that many people of all abilities need to hear. A person with a disability is a whole person not a partial or a percentage, but a whole person. These two lines also send the reader a powerful message about the power of words and how words have the ability to hurt people.

When Marvina prepares to go grocery shopping she uses a “stylus…to punch out a grocery list on the small, three-by-five index-card-shaped slate” (28). Marvina uses a Braille watch with a “glass bubble dome” to tell time (9). Marvina carefully folds her paper money in different ways so that she can easily distinguish between a ten, five, and one dollar bill (96). All three of these examples demonstrate Marvina’s proper use of assistive technologies and techniques.

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<th>Americans with Disabilities Act</th>
<th>Common Stereotypes</th>
<th>Auxiliary Aides (Assistive Technologies and Techniques)</th>
<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 – excellent</td>
<td>No problems noted</td>
<td>Blind people have ugly eyes – Marvina’s mother makes a point of saying that Marvina does not have ugly eyes.</td>
<td>The few aides used by Marvina are used correctly.</td>
<td>Marvina’s blindness is not seen in the light of any of Jernigan’s themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – adequate</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1 – poor</td>
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**Table 5: Evaluation Score for *Listen for the Fig Tree***

*Listen for the Fig Tree* scores an overall score of eleven based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section. Overall the book provides the reader with a protagonist who is a character first and a character with a disability second. This is
accomplished due to the lack of focus on Marvina’s blindness as it is not a central element of the story’s plot.

_Half the Battle – 1982_

Lynn Hall wrote _Half the Battle_ which was published in 1982. Blair and Loren Lisky are not twins, but they are in the same grade at Rebano High School. Up through 5th grade Blair attended a special school for the blind, but when he was mainstreamed into the public school system Blair was required to repeat the fifth grade. This put him in the same class with his brother Loren and things have never been the same between them since that time. Loren constantly feels that he lives in his brother’s shadow and resents Blair for that. Blair does not understand why Loren resents him because as he sees it Loren has everything.

The technology that Blair uses to read a book was appropriate for the time _Half the Battle_ was written, but for the most part it has been replaced by technological advances developed in the past thirty years. “He…made his way to the closed circuit television…and slid the opened book onto the surface before him (7). One by one, the much-magnified words came into focus” (9). Today, Blair might use a magnification system on a computer or text-to-speech software on the computer that would read the book aloud to him.

Throughout most of the book Blair is shown working hard to train his horse and doing things right along side of his brother. However, when the family is packing up the vehicles and loading the horses into the trailer for their trip to the Sangre Trek competition Blair is shown sitting in the car waiting while everyone else does the
physical loading of the vehicles (98-102). This gives the reader the perception that Blair is somehow unable to help lift suitcases, hay bales, and camping supplies like everyone else. It is also perpetuating Jernigan’s theme of blindness as helplessness.

Blair’s growth as a character and in terms of how he sees his brother is quite evident at the end of the story.

A slow smile lit Blair’s face, but he was unaware of it. For the first time in eighteen years of an existence centered solely on himself, he was managing to cross over, in his imagination, into the thoughts and feelings of someone else. Suddenly he needed to talk to [Loren], to understand completely the reasons for Loren’s abandonment of him. (163)

This personal growth on Blair’s part enables the reader who originally held Loren’s grudge against Blair as his own viewpoint to begin to like the character of Blair as well. As the reader’s view of Blair changes, so will his attitude towards the visually impaired population.

The beginning of the story takes place at high school where Blair sees himself as “the one everybody feels sorry for” and “groping around every day” (6). He also talks about himself in terms of being “alone in his [own] dark world while everyone around him pushed so fast” (8). These statements express Blair’s feelings of loneliness.

“Groping” also suggests that Blair feels helpless to find/achieve the things he desires thus encouraging the stereotype that the blind are unable to help themselves. Blair’s attitude about himself begins to change as he and Loren train their horses. “Blair felt relief, even pride, at having survived the solo riding” (46). This is the first time in the story where Blair exhibits any positive feelings about himself and his abilities.

Loren’s opinion of Blair remains rather stagnant almost to the very end of the book. Loren sees himself as his “brother’s keeper” as he must always drive Blair to
school and ride his horse in front of Blair’s horse in order to give directions (30). Loren has seen their entire lives as a competition for attention, notoriety, and love whether the boys were making a Mother’s Day present for their mom or giving a book report in English class Loren has always felt second best. Loren felt “he could never really compete with a blind brother. Blair simply got so much more credit for every little thing he did” (49).

Loren’s opinion does not improve leading up to the riding competition as newspaper articles are written about Blair in both the local and state newspapers while Loren’s participation in the Trek is not noted at all in the articles. After the second of these articles appears in the newspaper Loren laments on his lack of status.

Blair and I are doing the exact same identical thing, here. If anything my part’s harder. All he has to do is follow along after me. But who gets the glory? Blair, naturally. Blair is the big hero, just because he’s blind. I could be a hero, too. I know I could. But to be a hero you need opportunity and, damn it, Blair’s life is just one opportunity after another. But I could do it too, if I just had his advantages. Only nobody will ever know that. (64-65)

Note that Loren sees Blair’s blindness as an advantage. Most people would not agree with that sentiment. During the Trek itself Loren refers to himself as the “invisible brother” as the attention of the media continues to be focused solely on Blair. (101)

Overall, Half the Battle does incorporate the stereotype of blindness as helplessness, but Blair is also shown overcoming the theme at the end of the book. This title would be a positive one for encouraging a visually impaired reader and providing a positive example of overcoming feelings of fear, uncertainty, and helplessness. The way the story is written, alternating between Blair and Loren’s viewpoints, it lends itself well to a discussion of how one event can be interpreted differently by each person involved in
the matter. *Half the Battle* scores an overall score of nine based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section (Table 6).

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<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – excellent</strong></td>
<td>No problems noted</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aides used by Blair are used correctly such as the closed circuit television for magnifying his reading material.</td>
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<td><strong>2 – adequate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loren observes that Blair gets credit for every little thing he does – receiving credit for everything helps to perpetuate the myth that a blind person is not capable of doing many things successfully</td>
<td>Shows theme of helplessness = Blair does not help to load suitcases into the car rather sits and waits for someone else to do it – In the beginning Blair considers himself to be groping around everyday</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1 – poor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loren feels that he is his brother’s keeper – perpetuates the myth the blind need someone to constantly take care of them</td>
<td>Blair sees himself as helpless in the beginning when he describes himself as groping around in the dark, which perpetuates the myth that the blind are not able to do things for themselves.</td>
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**Table 6: Evaluation Score for Half the Battle**

**Post ADA**

*Can You Feel the Thunder?* – 1999

*Can You Feel the Thunder?* was published by Lynn E. McElfresh in 1999. This book tells the story of Mic Parsons, a junior high school student, who lives with his parents, four-year-old brother, and fifteen-year-old sister Stephanie who is both deaf and blind. Mic is embarrassed by his family as are most junior high students.
Mic is not only embarrassed by his parents, however, but he is also embarrassed by Stephanie, so much so that he has not had any friends to the house in quite awhile (13). When the new boy on the block stops by to borrow some sugar for his mother Mic hopes to get him out of the house as quickly as possible, so that he will not meet Stephanie. Mic notes embarrassing things about his sister such as how she clomps down the hall and her very nasal and monotone voice which seems even louder to Mic when other people are around (14-15). Embarrassment caused by someone who is different is not an uncommon feeling, but that does not mean that is an acceptable feeling.

Some characters in the book are accepting of Stephanie while others have very different reactions. After the church service one woman, Mrs. Randolph, approaches the Parsons family and Mic notes that, “She held her hand out toward Stephanie, but didn’t touch her” (28). A few minutes later Stephanie stands in the middle of the coatroom and Mic states,

“Everyone was avoiding her like she was poisonous. She’d reach out and touch people as they passed. People always looked startled. Then they’ll smile nervously and look around to see if anyone is watching them” (28-29).

These reactions show how people feel towards Stephanie almost as if they are afraid that by touching her they will contract a disease. Note the use of the word poisonous helps to illustrate the point of catching something from Stephanie that is horrible and possibly deadly.

The following day at school a classmate expresses her amazement to Mic in regards to the things that Stephanie is capable of doing such as “doing most things like normal people,” getting around, and swimming (32). By expressing this amazement at
Stephanie’s ability to do everyday things this classmate helps to deepen Mic’s embarrassment and resentment of his sister. This classmate also helps to show the ignorance of many people in regards to the abilities of the deaf-blind population.

Mic demonstrates his resentment towards Stephanie and the difference he perceives in the way their parents treat the two of them. While listening to his parents fight about Stephanie’s future Mic thinks, “She ruins everything” (74). Mrs. Parsons implies that Mic has no excuse for having trouble in math and has no right to say, “I can’t” as his sister never says “can’t” (12). When Gramps comes to visit Mic says of his little brother, “Poor kid. He was too little to know that only disabled grandchildren got presents. I learned that a long time ago” (88). Mic’s resentment continues to come out when Mic asks his parents for a new baseball glove and is told no.

“We can afford a bowling pin model. We can afford special books and games, but we can’t afford a baseball glove for me,” I said.
Mom stiffened. “Don’t try that,” she growled. “Those items are pertinent to your sister’s development. It’s not—“
“It’s not fair!” I finished for her.
“How can you talk about fair.” Mom glared at me. “Look at your sister.”” (102)

No wonder Mic has so much resentment built up towards his sister. Gramps obviously has a double standard when it comes to showing affection towards his grandchildren. Then there is Mic’s mom using the guilt card on him in terms of Stephanie’s life not being fair.

It isn’t until the end of the book when Mic can finally acknowledge his sister without being embarrassed by her. Stephanie is Mic’s biggest supporter at his first baseball game of the season and Mic recognizes her support by giving her the game ball after he scores the winning run (133). Later, when Wendy asks Mic questions about the
Braille letter on the coffee table (Stephanie has gone to a special school in Boston) he finds he is able to answer her questions without being embarrassed by Stephanie and even suggests that Wendy meet Stephanie when she comes home (138). It does not hurt either that Wendy is impressed by Mic’s ability to read Braille and communicate in sign language, which she expresses an interest in learning.

Stephanie is observed to be a bright student in her interactions with Mic as she helps him learn to add, subtract, multiple, and divide fractions. They accomplish this using a combination of a stylus and plastic manipulatives (91). With Stephanie’s tutoring Mic is able to earn an A- on his next math test.

*Can You Feel the Thunder?* scores a score of eleven based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section (Table 7). Overall, *Can You Feel the Thunder?* leads the reader to some interesting discussion questions based on sibling rivalry. In terms of the book’s ability to present a visually impaired character free of the stereotypes associated with the visually impaired this goal could have been better accomplished with less resentment on Mic’s part. Currently, Stephanie is a secondary character whose function in the book is to be a catalyst for Mic’s growth and development. Had the author given Stephanie a more prominent role in the story, she could have been a more well developed character who would serve as a role model for visually impaired readers. Many readers will feel badly for Mic who always seems to get less positive attention from his parents than Stephanie does.
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<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – excellent</strong></td>
<td>No problems noted</td>
<td>People in church are afraid to touch Stephanie as her disability might be spreadable like a disease. Mic’s classmates are amazed that Stephanie can do things like “normal” people can perpetuating a myth of helplessness.</td>
<td>A variety of aides are used (Braille labels on soda cans, stylus for writing in Braille, plastic manipulatives for figuring math problems, etc.) all are used correctly</td>
<td>Although, Mic is embarrassed by Stephanie that does not place her in Jernigan’s themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – adequate</strong></td>
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Table 7: Evaluation Score for *Can You Feel the Thunder?*

*Mind’s Eye* – 1999

Paul Fleischman published a book written in play format titled *Mind’s Eye* in 1999. This story takes place in a convalescent home where sixteen-year-old Courtney has been sent to live after an accident leaves her paralyzed. Courtney has two elderly roommates, May who has Alzheimer’s and Elva who is nearly blind. Courtney has a very low opinion about life in terms of continuing to live and being able to do anything with her life as a paralyzed person. Courtney does not receive visitors in her new home. It is as if everyone has moved on without her now that she is neatly tucked away in a home.

For Elva the upkeep of one’s mind is highly important. One way Elva and her sister used to expand their minds was to read travel guides and imagine the adventures they would have in those places. Elva asks Courtney to help her take one of these trips in her mind. The problem is Elva needs Courtney to read the 1910 Italy guide for her as she
cannot with her current low vision. Initially Courtney is not interested in this idea, but eventually decides to give it a try. During their imagined adventure in Italy Courtney imagines for herself an interesting man who is also interested in her. She names him Edward and decides that he will be a blind man.

Edward is a figment of Courtney’s imagination. It says more about how Courtney sees herself even in this imaginary world that she chooses to make Edward a blind man than about the character of Edward. It shows how she feels that no one who could see her imperfections/paralyzed limbs would ever want to be with her. Courtney describes her first encounter on the train with Edward in the following lines.

“He reaches into the basket and hunts around a long time for something. The whole time, his eyes are on the floor. It’s weird. His hand is sort of like an elephant’s trunk, searching on its own. Then I see it, up on the rack with his luggage. A white cane. He’s blind.” (80)

The universal sign of blindness, the white cane, is used as a visual signal for Courtney and the reader. Note that Edward is said to keep his eyes on the floor rather than looking into the basket as he searches for his item. This may also serve as a clue to the reader as usually a sighted person would look inside the basket as they searched for their item rather than simply feeling around for it.

Edward is described as having a keen sense of smell and hearing based on his ability to tell that Courtney is an American. He claims to know this because the perfume he smells on her is not an Italian perfume and her petticoats make a different sound than Italian made ones because they are made of different materials (80). This ability to define Courtney as American based on perfume smell and petticoat noise verges on the stereotype that when one loses his sight his other senses become super senses.
Elva’s vision problem is only mentioned once in the story when Elva explains to Courtney why she cannot read the guidebook herself. Other than this one instance the reader would not know that Elva has any sort of vision problem as when the pair are in their imagined Italian world Elva chooses to make herself much younger, so that she can pretend she is taking the trip with her husband who in real life has long since passed.

*Mind’s Eye* scores a score of twelve based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section. Overall, *Mind’s Eye* has little effect on the reader’s views of visually impaired people as the issue is not a focus of the story at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Americans with Disabilities Act</th>
<th>Common Stereotypes</th>
<th>Auxiliary Aides (Assistive Technologies and Techniques)</th>
<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 – excellent</td>
<td>No problems noted</td>
<td>Edward’s keen sense of smell and his extraordinary hearing perpetuate the myth that when one loses their eyesight their other senses will become super senses.</td>
<td>Edward’s white cane is the only aide mentioned.</td>
<td>The characters do not fall into these themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – adequate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – poor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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*Table 8: Evaluation Score for Mind’s Eye*

*The Million Dollar Putt* – 2006

Dan Gutman published *The Million Dollar Putt* in 2006. The book tells the story of Ed Bogard, aka Bogie, who has been blind since the age of four. Bogie like many who have come to be visually impaired since the advancements of technology has not learned to read and write Braille, but relies on technology to help him keep up with his sighted peers.

I made a note on my digital recorder to remind me to pick up the guitar after school.
Back before the days of computers, it must have been a lot tougher for blind kids in school. Braille was pretty much the only way to read or write, and Braille is really hard to learn. I never mastered it myself. I didn’t have to. I’ve got a computer with a scanner and a built-in speech synthesizer. So when I type, scan, or download text into it, it can take the words and speak them to me so I can hear them. There also plenty of books on CD now. A lot of blind kids don’t learn Braille these days. (26-27)

The current trend away from learning to read and write Braille is seen as a decline in literacy by some members of the visually impaired community and is a topic of much debate (Brittain, 2007, para. 3-10). Likewise many people both sighted and visually impaired have a difficult time accepting the act of listening to books on CD as a form of literacy. In these respects this title opens the topic of literacy for discussion by its various readers.

Of all eight books this is the only one that begins to describe for the reader technological advances that enable the visually impaired character to learn alongside his sighted peers. When a sighted person encounters a visually impaired student they inevitably ask questions about how one does the reading, research, and paper writing involved in the educational process. Readers of this book won’t necessarily have to ask how, but rather will have a small basis of knowledge to build from, so they can ask to learn more.

Not all information provided in this book is correct. The technique used in this book for guiding on a sighted person is not considered to be the correct technique by most visually impaired people.

Usually when people lead me somewhere, they put a hand on my elbow to guide me. But Birdie took my hand in her hand and led me across my backyard [.]. (18) Dad grabbed the bag and took my elbow as we walked up to my ball. (153)
When the sighted person holds the elbow of the visually impaired person they are in effect propelling or pushing the visually impaired person around rather than guiding them. The proper technique is for the visually impaired person to hold onto the elbow of the sighted person (American, being a Sighted Guide section, para. 3). In this manner the visually impaired person can follow the movements of the sighted person. Grabbing a blind person’s arm is a mistake sighted people often make in real life. This mistake is not unique to this book as it has been observed in other titles as well for example *Gift of Gold*.

Gutman includes information in the story explaining how Bogie lost his sight at the age of four due to retinitis pigmentosa. This explanation allows the reader to see visual impairment in a different light in that Bogie’s blindness has a medical justification rather than being viewed as a punishment as it would have been in Greek mythology. This explanation also serves as a means of demystifying the circumstances that enable some people to be sighted and others to be visually impaired.

Bogie describes the way his sighted peers usually react around and to him.

Sighted kids never know how to act around blind kids like me. They’re never sure if they should treat us special or not. Should you help us cross the street? Should you open the door for us? Should you tell us when we’re about to smash into something? Should you feel sorry for us, or not? Maybe we’ll be offended no matter what you do. That’s probably why the kids at school pretty much act like I’m a freak and ignore me. I guess I make them feel uneasy or uncomfortable or something. (8-9)

Notice the negative words that Bogie uses to describe the feelings of sighted kids towards him such as “never know” and “never sure” and he feels that others are always questioning themselves “should I.” Thus Bogie believes the kids find it easier to just not acknowledge him rather than to constantly go through those uncertain and questioning
feelings. Bogie describes this lack of acknowledgement as being “ignored” and attributes it to his making sighted kids feel “uncomfortable.” This provides a topic for discussion by readers that can be easily shifted to adjust for all differences found within the members of the discussion group.

Other common reactions Bogie notes include the lack of belief that a visually impaired person can accomplish a particular task as evidenced by the following statements. “Sighted people think blind kids can’t do anything” (13). “People are always amazed when they see a blind kid on water skis or whatever, but it’s really no big deal. Just because you’re blind doesn’t mean you aren’t physically coordinated” (32). Bogie has a conversation with Hunter’s mom on the way to the driving range which illustrates the often misplaced admiration sighted people profess for visually impaired people who do the tasks that the sighted never imagined they could possibly do.

“This will be my first time,” I said.
“Well, I think you’re a very brave man.”
Ugh, I hate when people say that. Some people think blind kids are brave if we can tie our shoes without help. Fighting to defend your country is brave. Running into a burning building to save somebody’s life is brave. There’s nothing brave about going to a driving range to hit some golf balls. (42-43)

Is it possible that Hunter’s mom told him he was brave the first time he went to the driving range? Possible, yes, but highly unlikely. So, why do we attribute bravery on the part of the visually impaired to the performance of everyday tasks that we take for granted when performed by a sighted person?

Overall, The Million Dollar Putt provides readers with a view of a visually impaired teen that will encourage them to stretch their minds in terms of what they currently believe a visually impaired person is capable of doing. The book also provides
readers with discussion topics that can be expanded to include people with varying handicaps.

*The Million Dollar Putt* scores an overall score of ten based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section (Table 9).

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 – excellent</td>
<td>No problems noted</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses many up to date technologies.</td>
<td>Story does not play into these themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – adequate</td>
<td>Bogie notes that people are amazed that blind kids can do things that everyone else does thus mentioning the stereotype of helplessness.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Technique for being guided by a sighted person is incorrect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – poor</td>
<td></td>
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**Table 9: Evaluation Score for The Million Dollar Putt**

*Beanball* – 2008

*Beanball* written by Gene Fehler was published in 2008. This is the story of Luke “Wizard” Wallace a popular and talented high school baseball player who is struck by a pitch during a game with his school’s arch rivals. The book is written in the form of a verse novel which is told from the viewpoints of a multitude of characters.

When Luke’s parents are told that their son will never see out of his left eye again they react with a sense of grief and lose for the dreams they now believe their son will never be able to achieve. On page 56 Larry Wallace, Luke’s father, says,

It took a few hours before I could think straight  
And apologize for how I’d acted, for the thing I’d said  
If I can’t control my rage, what can I expect from Luke  
When he hears those words:
“blind in one eye”?  
We’ll all be there when the doctor tells him.  
We’ll all be there when he learns  
that his life has changed forever. (56)

The fact that Larry believes his son’s “life has changed forever” shows his sense of lose and belief that his son will no longer be able to accomplish the goals he had previously set for his life.

Luke believes that his life has ended when he first learns that he will be blind in one eye.

They acted like it was good news  
When they told me I’d be blind in one eye….  
I had all night to lie here thinking  
about how I’ve lost everything.  
The pills they gave me finally made me sleep,  
but I even dreamed about what blindness would be like.  
While I’m here they might as well cut off an arm or leg.  
Without depth perception, you can’t hit a baseball  
or catch one, either.  
College basketball is out.  
Football? I don’t know.  
With only one good eye,  
is it possible to run the ball  
and sense the exact moment your blocker  
gives you the smallest of openings to shoot through?  
Is it possible to make a crisp block?  
or catch a pass?…..  
What now?.......  
Doesn’t anybody know there’s a big difference  
between being alive and living? (58)

Luke’s sense of lose and pity for himself is evident in his negative thoughts such as “lost everything,” “cut off an arm or a leg,” “can’t hit a baseball,” “basketball is out,” “what now,” and “there’s a big difference between living and being alive.” Note also that Luke only seems to define himself by the sports he is used to playing and does not feel he will be alive if he is unable to play these sports.
Luke’s pity party continues and his aided by the thoughts expressed to him by his visitors.

I almost wish I were deaf instead of half blind.
Then I wouldn’t have to listen
to people’s stupid remarks.
They come to visit me,
and I hear pity in their voices.
Those who don’t feel sorry for me tell me
how thankful I should be to be alive.
They remind me that so many others
have it a lot worse than I do….kids who are completely blind.
But playing sports has been my life,
and now that’s been taken away.
I understand that I should be thankful;
I just can’t feel thankful. (75-76)

Luke again expresses feelings that his life is over now that sports have been taken away from him. Luke also notes that he hears pity in the voices of some of his visitors and that others make “stupid remarks” about how he should feel lucky to be alive. Luke is unable at this point to feel lucky or thankful to be alive as he still feels that without sports he will be unable to “be alive.”

At this point Luke believes the myth that visually impaired people cannot play sports. He needs to have this myth challenged and/or broken before he will be able to grow and accept the blindness in his left eye.

I got an envelope today….full of articles
about athletes who still compete,
even though they are blind in one eye.
I didn’t realize it was possible.
I read them over and over,
until I was too tired to read anymore. (86-87)

Now the myth begins to fall apart as Luke learns that it is possible to play sports with only one eye and that his life may not be as disappointing as he first believed. Notice
Luke’s words, “I didn’t realize it was possible” these words demonstrate the cause of so much despair and pity in this book. If only Luke and all of the other characters had realized from the start what was possible.

By the end of the story Luke has decided to give “being alive” a try as he attempts to play baseball again. On page 110 Luke says, “I was scared to try…But I finally did it: I threw some with Dad.” Then on page 113 Luke has Andy hit flyballs to him and Luke says,

I realize I’ll never have the knack for judging balls the way I did before.
Before, the batter swung and I knew.
Now, the batter swings and I hope.

On the last page Luke’s friend Andy notes that Luke has been working out every day and is improving even if it’s still hard work. All of which shows that Luke has left his feelings of pity and despair behind and is now working on “being alive” according to his definition which involves a deep involvement with sports.

Overall, *Beanball* shows the reader that it is possible to have a visual impairment and participate in sports activities as non-visually challenged people do. The book does seem to be extra heavy on the woe is me side of things. As the story is written Luke receives an envelope which contains the clippings about visually impaired athletes. The story could be more powerful if Luke were to come out of his despair sooner and go looking for those positive examples on his own. The newspaper clippings about visually impaired athletes reflects Kenneth Jernigan’s hope that as “visually impaired people shape [their] lives, …so will [they] shape [the] literature.” These athletes have shaped the
literature about themselves through their accomplishments and now a newly visually impaired teen can read about them and gain inspiration for the promise of his own future.

*Beanball* scores an overall score of ten based on the scoring rubric presented in the methodology section (Table 10).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Auxiliary Aides (Assistive Technologies and Techniques)</th>
<th>Jernigan’s Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – excellent</strong></td>
<td>No problems noted</td>
<td>Luke never uses an aide of any type.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – adequate</strong></td>
<td>Luke believes the stereotype that he will not be able to play sports now that he is visually impaired.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Luke’s reaction and his parents’ reaction play into the theme of blindness as total tragedy. They note that “Luke’s life is changed forever” and that “there is a difference between being alive and living.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – poor</strong></td>
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**Table 10: Evaluation Score for Beanball**
Conclusion

I have found that young adult literature with visually impaired characters does exist. In the best examples the visually impaired character is the protagonist of the story. Even the finest of these titles includes an occasional reference to the protagonist’s life ending due to the change in visual abilities, but I think the text has to include this element in order to show how this negativity is overcome by each of the characters. In the less admirable examples the visually impaired character is a secondary character whose purpose is to enable the sighted protagonist to change and grow.

Books written before and after the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 portray visually impaired characters mainly in the societal norms of the time the book was published. However, some of these titles do make great efforts to show that some long held myths about visually impaired people are incorrect. While some of the titles allow the visually impaired character to wallow in self-pity for much too long and then are only mildly able to show that life as a visually impaired person does not have to mean living a life completely different from the sighted population.

In terms of the nine themes identified by Kenneth Jernigan there are two that are demonstrated in a number of the analyzed novels, blindness as total tragedy and blindness as foolishness and helplessness. In the novels that used the theme of blindness as total tragedy all of the visually impaired characters fared well in the end although some of the novels did initially lead the reader to believe that the characters life was over due to their visual loss. The theme of blindness as foolishness and helplessness was presented in a majority of the analyzed novels. In commonly showed up as a thought the visually impaired character expressed about how he believed others viewed him or in short lived
examples of sighted characters doing various acts for the visually impaired character rather than letting or making the character do the act for himself.

Jernigan hoped that as visually impaired people led productive lives the literature of the day would come to reflect their true abilities. Among the analyzed novels there are examples of literature published both before and after the ADA that does just what Jernigan hoped it would. The six novels which feature the visually impaired character as the story’s protagonist portray the character in a light Kenneth Jernigan would approve of. Literature has started to show its readers visually impaired characters who do things that in 1974, when Jernigan gave his speech, sighted people would not have believed were possible. *Follow My Leader* shows a blind teenager who attends public school before mainstreaming of disabled students was common, holds a job as a paperboy, and fully participates in a scout troop. Cathy in *Gift of Gold* is pursuing a four-year degree in speech therapy despite the lack of support she receives from the school’s director. *Listen for the Fig Tree* depicts a visually impaired character who sews herself a fancy dress and cooks a complete Christmas dinner. In *Half the Battle* the reader meets a blind teenager who competes in an endurance competition on horseback that most sighted people would not consider attempting. *The Million Dollar Putt* showed its readers a blind teenager who attends a regular public school rather than a special school for the blind and who is also an excellent golfer rather than a child sitting on the sidelines of life. *Beanball* also makes use of the image of visually impaired people participating and excelling in sports. Various books in this analysis also showed the reader technologies and techniques used by the visually impaired as those items were appropriate for the setting of the book.
Whether the novel was published before or after the passage of the ADA does not seem to affect the portrayal of the visually impaired character. It is noted that two of the pre ADA titles would have received higher scores had the books not shown characters acting in violation of the ADA, which had not been passed at that time. The portrayal does seem to be affected by whether the character is a major or minor one.
Further Research

This paper has concentrated on the genre of realistic fiction in the area of young adult literature. Fiction for young adult does come in other genres for example: historical fiction, biography, science fiction, mystery, horror, and graphic novel. Content analysis of each of these genres might reveal different patterns as the various themes identified by Kenneth Jernigan may receive different levels of stress by the authors of each unique genre.
Works Cited


Appendix: Plot Synopses


Cathy Wheeler is college junior studying speech therapy. The new speech therapy program director, Dr. Paulus, doubts the ability of a blind student to successfully complete the speech therapy program let alone to become a therapist who is accepted as competent by the world. Cathy feels that Dr. Paulus is determined to see her fail and to subsequently push her out of the speech therapy program. While trying to prove herself to Dr. Paulus Cathy also has to deal with Greg who will not take no for an answer, Joan who wants a blind bridesmaid in order to get a wedding write-up in the newspaper, and the possibility offered by Dr. Rosenthal that Cathy might be able to get her sight back.

Fehler, Gene. *Beanball.*

This verse novel tells the story of Luke “Wizard” Wallace who plays center field on the Oak Grove High School baseball team. He is the type of guy that everyone seems to love and admire both on and off the field. During a game with Oak Grove’s arch rival Compton while at bat Luke is hit in the head with the baseball thus leaving him blind in one eye. The story reflects the thoughts and reactions of Luke and the other twenty-seven narrators as they deal with the accident and its consequences. Some characters react with hope and optimism while others portray stereotypical reactions of a life lost due to a disability.


Sixteen-year-old Courtney was paralyzed in an accident and is now living in a convalescent home. She has two elderly roommates; one who is nearly blind, Elva, and one who has Alzheimer’s, May. This story is told in the form of a play in which Courtney uses her eyesight to read a 1910 guidebook of Italy for Elva while Elva teaches Courtney to use her mind to overcome her disability. During their imagined travels through Italy Courtney meets a blind man, Edward, to whom she is attracted.

Garfield, James B. *Follow My Leader.*

Jimmy Carter is playing baseball with his friends when they discover an unused firecracker from the July 4th festivities. Mike chooses to light the firecracker which explodes in Jimmy’s face burning his skin and blinding him. Jimmy must learn how to do everyday activities in a new way. Eventually Jimmy is able to go to guide dog school where he learns how to be independent and confident as a blind boy thanks to the help of Sirius, Mr. Weeks, and others.

Edward Bogard is a middle school student whose father has encouraged him to do everything other kids do despite his blindness. Edward plays guitar, rides a bike, and enjoys parasailing. The one thing is father will not let him do is play golf. Then the Bogard’s get new neighbors the Andrews family. Birdie Andrews is scared to try most things and spends many hours alone in the basement of her family’s home. Edward and Birdie will teach each other to do things they never imagined possible and to face their individual fears.

Hall, Lynn. *Half the Battle*.

Blair and Loren Lisky have just completed their junior year of high school. This summer they will spend a multitude of hours in the saddle training their horses for a hundred-mile endurance race. Blair wants to compete in the Sangre Trek to prove to himself that he can have a future life away from his family despite his blindness. Loren desperately wants to win the race, so that he can feel what it is like to have people notice him and give him attention rather than always living in Blair’s shadow.

Mathis, Sharon Bell. *Listen for the Fig Tree*.

Marvina Johnson, aka Muffin, is facing her first Christmas without her father. Leola, Muffin’s mother, will not make this task any easier as she is crazed with despair at the loss of her husband. To ease her pain Leola turns to alcohol and drugs. Muffin must attempt to understand her mother’s grief and help her heal while dealing with issues of her own.

McElfresh, Lynn E. *Can You Feel the Thunder*?

Mic Parsons is a seventh grader who finds his family weird and embarrassing. The most embarrassing of all is his fifteen-year-old sister Stephanie who is both blind and deaf. Mic’s one desire is to play baseball. Mic must find a way to earn a passing grade in math or his hopes of playing baseball this summer will not be fulfilled. Stephanie is the one person who can help Mic play ball this summer by tutoring him in fractions. As Mic grows emotionally he comes to realize that Stephanie is not as embarrassing as he originally believed.