



In the Company of Books

There is Something About Ginny

Reviewer: Sharoon Sunny

There is Something About Ginny is a heartwarming tale of a young girl who embraces her differences and finds acceptance from those around her. Written by Vinita Krishna and illustrated by Suvidha Murthy, the story subtly introduces eight-year-old Ginny's physical challenges. This book is a translation from Hindi titled *Kuch Alag si Ginny*. Born with a radial club hand, nine fingers instead of ten, wearing thick glasses, and a wrist brace, Ginny faces obstacles that might seem insurmountable. However, her cheerful spirit and unique talents allow her to forge friendships and bring joy to others.

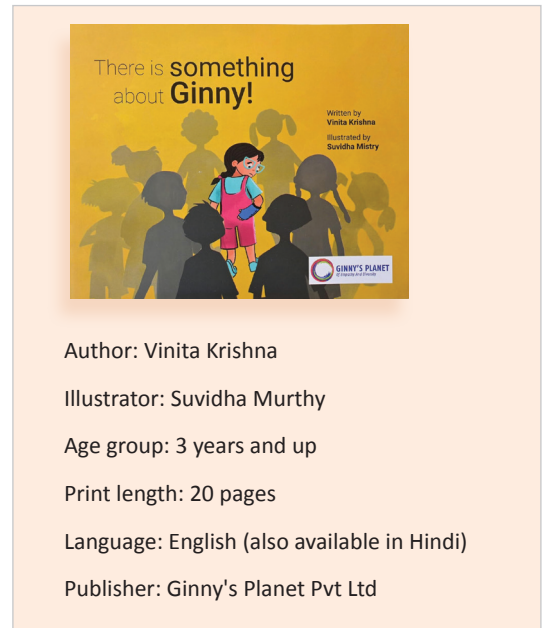
The book beautifully portrays the role of empathy, acceptance, and gentle humour in creating an inclusive environment. Ginny's physical differences do not hinder her interactions with others, and this is a powerful takeaway for young readers. The illustrations are striking and capture the moods of the characters superbly.

From playing dress-up with her collection of hairbands to building a model of the Qutub Minar, Ginny's creativity and enthusiasm shine through. She encourages her friends to embrace the joy of playing in the rain, demonstrating her ability to see the positive in every situation. The delightful description of the children playing in the rain highlights the power of imagination and the joy of embracing life's simple pleasures. Teachers can highlight this in the conversations following the storytelling to help children recognise that having fun is essential.

Teachers can use this book to initiate discussions about differences, both physical and in learning. Questions like 'Why do you think Ginny felt confident despite being physically different from the others?' or 'How did her friends make her feel accepted?' can encourage students to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives. It could even help children recognise that we live in a world full of differences and it is these differences that make this world beautiful. Bringing these conversations into the classroom will raise awareness and sensitivity around how children and even adults deal with differences.

While the cover suggests a target age of 3 years and above, the language might be more suitable for children aged 6 years and older. Some words, such as 'slight,' 'bent at an unusual angle,' and 'slung,' might be unfamiliar to younger readers. Additionally, while the title and blurb hint at Ginny's differences, the story could benefit from more explicit explanations of her physical challenges. There are slight transition issues between scenes and teachers might need to prepare for this to help children follow the story easily.

Overall, *There is Something About Ginny* is a heartwarming and inspiring story that celebrates individuality and the power of acceptance. It is a valuable resource for parents and educators looking to foster empathy and understanding in young readers towards others, especially those with physical and learning differences.



Author: Vinita Krishna

Illustrator: Suvidha Murthy

Age group: 3 years and up

Print length: 20 pages

Language: English (also available in Hindi)

Publisher: Ginny's Planet Pvt Ltd

Sharoon Sunny is an ELT professional and teacher trainer. As a creativity researcher and teacher of writing, she tries to find the thin line that brings together creativity, elegance and simplicity. She teaches at the Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.

Chuskit Goes to School

Reviewer: Dhruva Desai

C*huskit Goes to School* is a story about a young Ladakhi girl with a disability who has always wanted to go to school. Her family has supported her in every way, including getting her the incredible chair-with-wheels. However, the route to school - an uneven, rocky path with a small stream to cross in the middle - is not one that she can navigate in her wheelchair, and so until the age of 9 years, she has not been to school. One day a boy from her village talks to her about it, and seeing her eagerness to attend school, he speaks to his headmaster about trying to find a way to get Chuskit to school. The story opens on an exciting day for Chuskit!

One of the lovely things about this book is the insights one gets into the Ladakhi culture and language - several common words and salutations in the text are in Ladakhi, with a glossary at the end. However, the narrative context is set so well that it is not difficult to make out the meanings of unfamiliar words. Along with this, the brilliant illustrations also offer a peek into Ladakhi lives. While deftly depicting the story, they also show the Ladakhi landscape, architecture, and other details that help the reader visualise the setting.

The main idea of this story is introduced gently and honestly. While the reader gets to know about the challenges faced by Chuskit and her family members, there is an overall tone of inclusion – nearly every character in the story is working towards a more inclusive society in general and for Chuskit in particular. There are also voices against such attempts in the form of some of the teachers at the school - who are (as in all societies) not necessarily against Chuskit's participation in school but are perhaps unwilling or unable to envisage/do the work required to make it happen. These characters are addressed firmly, and the plot of the book responds to their objections.

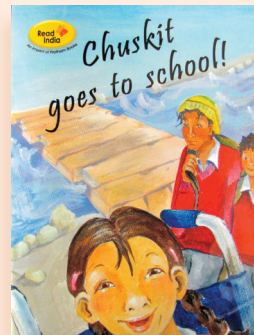
All of these aspects make it a wonderful book to engage children with questions of disability, diversity, and inclusion. There is a tendency among educators and parents to avoid 'difficult' conversations with young children, however, sometimes forgetting that they too inhabit the same world. Reading books like this in the classroom helps introduce these ideas and start these essential conversations in subtle, interesting, and fun ways.

Chuskit and her family also help demystify the idea of disability and diversity - they are not self-pitying characters; they are joyful and multi-faceted characters for whom this challenge, while real, is just one aspect of their lives. Like all good books, this book also acts as both a mirror and a window for readers – displaying a new and different world, while also resonating with the familiar in their worlds.

The story can come across as slightly heavy-handed in some parts, such as when Chuskit's young friend talks to the headmaster and connects his efforts to the 'fundamental rights of citizens', but it does not take away from the narrative. Nor do the many complex aspects of the resolution of the story (like the bureaucratic processes) that are fast-forwarded.

Pratham Books targets this storybook at level 3 readers, that is, readers who can read independently. In our country, with the complexity of languages in the classroom, levelling uniformly is always difficult. This story can be read aloud to younger children as well, who with the help of a teacher/librarian/parent would certainly be able to engage meaningfully with the story.

Dhruva Desai is part of the teacher education team at Azim Premji University. He spends most of his time either playing and thinking about physical education or reading and thinking about children's literature.



Author: Sujatha Padmanabhan

Illustrator: Madhuvanti Anantharajan

Pages: 22 pages

Language: English (also available in Hindi)

Publisher: StoryWeaver by Pratham Books

Gappu Can't Dance

Reviewer: Nisha Nag

It is well known how children, especially those with special needs – often referred to as ‘special’ – navigate an unequal society. Generally, it is assumed that a special child is someone so different physically, socially, and emotionally or their intelligence is so different from regular students that they are unable to make efficient use of regular programmes of schools; that they need special education or supplementary teaching.

The fundamental base of inclusive education is equality. The feeling of equality ensures that every student gets equal opportunities for learning and taking part in class activities despite their diverse abilities. In an inclusive education setting, special children are given education along with the other children without any discrimination. This thought is the result of the idea that these children must have the right to grow up and get an education alongside the other children so that they do not feel isolated or disconnected from society.

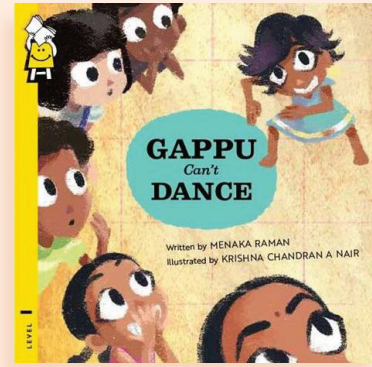
The equal participation of every child in classroom activities is important. But what if, there is a special student in the class who has some difficulty with the left leg and arm and does the exact opposite of what has been instructed by the teacher for classroom activity? How do we make these children feel inclusive within the classroom? *Gappu Can't Dance* is an appropriate answer to such a situation.

Gappu is a child with an orthopaedic difficulty. The bones, joints and muscles of her left hand do not function properly. Knowing the limitations of Gappu, Gappu's teacher asks her class to cooperate with Gappu. She uses the personal differences of Gappu as a resource in her classroom. Finding solutions to problems is this teacher's skill. Instead of letting Gappu be isolated from the classroom, the teacher thinks about solving the issue differently. She boosts the morale of Gappu by asking the class to coordinate with her. She changes the dance structure according to Gappu's needs, which helps her to develop group activity skills along with other students. This initiative by the teacher helps develop skills, like positive thinking, acceptance, patience, friendship and endurance in students. The teacher's effort to include Gappu in the classroom brings out a different perspective of inclusion in the practice of learning.

This short story of 130 words is an excellent example of experimenting with inclusion within the classroom. Rhythmic word structure is the speciality of the story. Skimming through it, the entire scene of Gappu's class pops up in front of me. Where the teacher is instructing '*tak dhimi tai*, put your left hand up!'

'Oh no! Gappu puts her right hand up. Gappu Can't dance!' The sentence 'Gappu Can't dance' along with other actions occurs three more times in the story. Similarly, when students are instructed to twirl with speed, Gappu twirls slowly. The reason for this is her physical limitations. When the teacher instructs, 'Drip, drip, drop, everyone jump fast!' Gappu sits down, and when the teacher asks students to put their right leg in, Gappu takes it out. When Gappu does everything opposite to her teacher's instructions, her classmates point towards her and laugh. Seeing this, her teacher changes the instructions, and says, '*Tak dheemi tai*, some children keep your hand down and some keep it up.' She changes the instruction of twirling and says, 'Move around the room quickly or slowly or jump however you feel like. Just join in without overthinking.' This change in instruction to twirl allows Gappu to dance, as she no longer feels constrained by her physical limitations. The credit for this solution goes to the teacher. The teacher gives one more message along with this – how students with disabilities should be included in the classroom activities.

This storybook has attractive print. The cover and the inner illustration immediately catch the eye. A distinctive feature of the artwork is the use of colours – the teacher's expressions stand out as well as the children's eyes because the wonder



Author: Menka Raman

Illustrator: Krishna Chandran

No of Pages: 13

Language: English (also available in Hindi)

Publishers: Pratham Books

and curiosity reflected in them seem to bring childhood to life. The book is not only for reading but also integrates activities, making it interactive.

It also carries an underlying message that in a child's learning process, nothing is wrong. Breaking away from rigid conventions, the story emphasises that children can learn a great deal through alternative activities as well.

Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal

Nisha Nag is a senior lecturer at Miranda House, University of Delhi, where she has been teaching for 26 years. Her reviews, articles, and stories are regularly published in various literary magazines.



Storybooks within easy access of children at a government primary school in Uttarakhand.

Stories are a particularly good medium for learning about social relationships, ethical choices, understanding and experiencing emotions, and becoming aware of life skills. While listening to stories, children learn new words, thus expanding their vocabulary, sentence structure, and problem-solving skills. Children with very short attention spans concentrate for a longer time when engrossed in a story.

National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023, 1.5.2.2. Storytelling. p.204