

ALL BRAINS WELCOME

Embracing ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, and More

An Educator's Guide

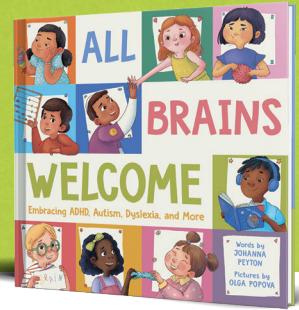
created by Marcie Colleen based upon the picture book
written by Johanna Peyton and illustrated by Olga Popova



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ALL BRAINS WELCOME

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JOHANNA PEYTON

Author, *All Brains Welcome*

Johanna Peyton writes stories filled with playfulness and heart. She is also a dyslexia and literacy advocate. Johanna lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband, their three children, and a lively collection of animals. All Brains Welcome grows from her interest in creating joyful spaces where children can understand, appreciate, and celebrate the many ways brains work.



OLGA POPOVA

Illustrator, *All Brains Welcome*

Olga Popova trained as an architect before bringing her creative talents to children's book illustration. Originally from Russia and now based in Cyprus, she finds inspiration in the real world—the people, places, colors, and small details she notices while walking through town or by the sea.



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Curriculum Writer

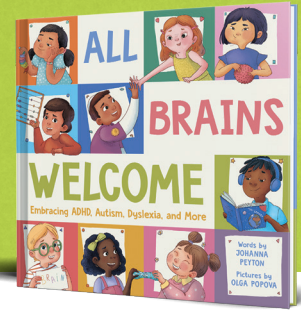
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

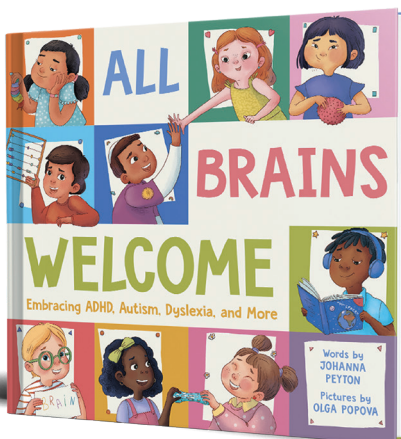
This classroom guide for *All Brains Welcome* is designed primarily for students in kindergarten through third grade. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs, interests, communication styles, and abilities of their own learners.

The guide offers activities to help integrate *All Brains Welcome* into English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, social studies, and social studies. Art, drama, discussion, movement, and hands-on exploration are used as teaching tools throughout the guide.

All activities were created in conjunction with relevant content standards in ELA, math, science, social studies, art, and drama.

AN INCLUSIVE, NON-OTHERING APPROACH

Every classroom is already neurodiverse. These activities are designed to invite all students into the conversation without positioning neurotypical children as the audience and neurodivergent children as the lesson. Do not ask students to disclose a diagnosis, identify themselves as neurodivergent or neurotypical, or speak on behalf of a group. Avoid simulations that ask children to “experience” a disability. Instead, focus on listening, access, multiple ways to participate, and the understanding that people may need different things to learn and feel comfortable.



ALL BRAINS WELCOME: EMBRACING ADHD, AUTISM, DYSLEXIA, AND MORE

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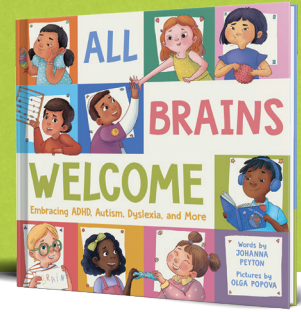
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IT'S TIME TO PARTY!

All Brains Welcome brings neurodiversity into the spotlight, following a class of kids who throw a "brain party" to celebrate their awesome brains and their favorite ways to connect with each other. Each character speaks directly to the reader, sharing how conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and Down syndrome impact their daily lives. As the brain party unfolds, readers gain insights into communication challenges, different learning approaches, and the importance of respecting each other.

A joyful celebration of difference, *All Brains Welcome* helps build acceptance and spark important conversations in schools and at home. Discover how every brain brings something special to the party!





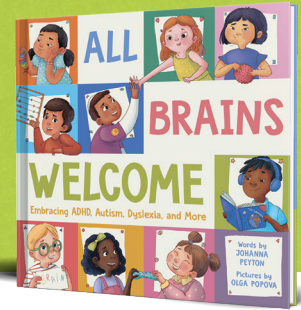
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

READING COMPREHENSION

Before reading *All Brains Welcome*, help students identify the basic parts of a picture book—front cover, back cover, title page, endpapers—and discuss the following:

- Look closely at the cover. Describe what you see.
- What words stand out in the title?
- What do you think it means for all brains to be welcome?
- The endpapers show illustrated brains holding signs. What do the signs say?
- The book opens with an invitation to a “brain party.” What do you imagine a brain party might celebrate?

Now read or listen to the book and discuss:

- What is a brain?
- What does the book mean when it says that all our brains are neurodiverse?
- Why is it important to remember that meeting one neurodivergent person means you have met exactly one neurodivergent person?
- Name the different ways at least 3 of the students contribute to the brain party.
- What tools or supports do you notice in the book?
 - How do these tools help some of the students participate, learn, or feel comfortable?
- The final spread says that each unique brain adds something important to the class and the world. What do you think that means?
- Create a ten-word description of the book. Use your ten words to make a bookstore or library poster.

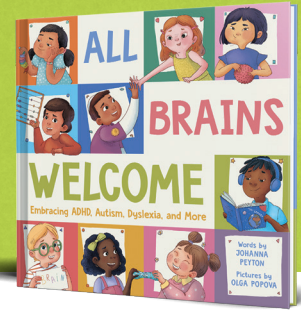
TEACHER NOTE



Keep discussion open to all students. Children may recognize parts of themselves in the book whether or not they have a diagnosis. Avoid inviting students to identify or explain their own diagnoses in front of the group.

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Now look at the two names on the cover.

- Who is the author? What does an author do?
- Who is the illustrator? What does an illustrator do?

Can you find the following?

- Two pink earrings
- A purple party hat
- A blue teddy bear
- An orange balance ball
- A green jellyfish
- A book about zombies
- A blue caterpillar
- Four cupcakes
- G47
- A pencil pouch with a cat on it
- Two dogs
- A drawing of a firetruck
- A star curtain
- Five swirly lollipops

WRITING ACTIVITIES

My Brain's User Guide

Every person has preferences, strengths, interests, and things that help them learn or feel comfortable. Students can create a short "user guide" for their own wonderful, one-of-a-kind brain. No diagnosis or personal medical information is needed.

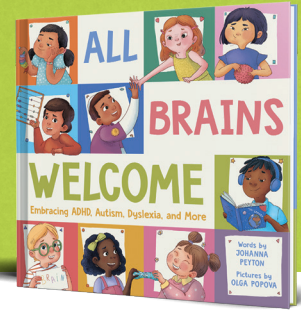
Provide several ways to complete the activity: writing, drawing, dictating to an adult, using speech-to-text, recording audio, or choosing from picture/word cards.

Possible pages or prompts include:

- My name is _____.
- My brain loves learning about _____.
- Something I am really good at is _____.
- I learn well when _____.
- When I need to concentrate, it can help me to _____.
- When I need a break, I like to _____.

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- I like to communicate by _____.
- Something I want others to know about me is _____.
- Something I am proud of is _____.

CHOICE MATTERS

Students should be free to skip any prompt that feels too personal. Sharing should always be optional. A student may choose to share the whole guide, one page, a drawing, or nothing at all.

Bind the finished pages with yarn, staples, or rings. These guides can remain private, go home with students, or—only with the student’s permission—be used to help teachers understand classroom preferences.

Brain Party Invitation

The title page includes an invitation to Ms. Shepard’s brain party. Invite students to create their own invitation to a celebration where everyone can take part.

WHAT are you celebrating?

WHERE will the celebration happen?

WHO is invited?

WHAT choices will guests have?

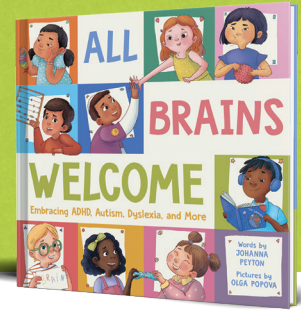
HOW will guests know what to expect?

WHERE can someone go if they want quiet or a break?

Decorate the invitations with words and images. Compare the different ideas students include to help a wide variety of guests feel welcome.

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LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

NEW VOCABULARY: NEURODIVERSITY

Write the following words where everyone can see them: neuro, neurodiverse, neurodivergent, neurotypical.

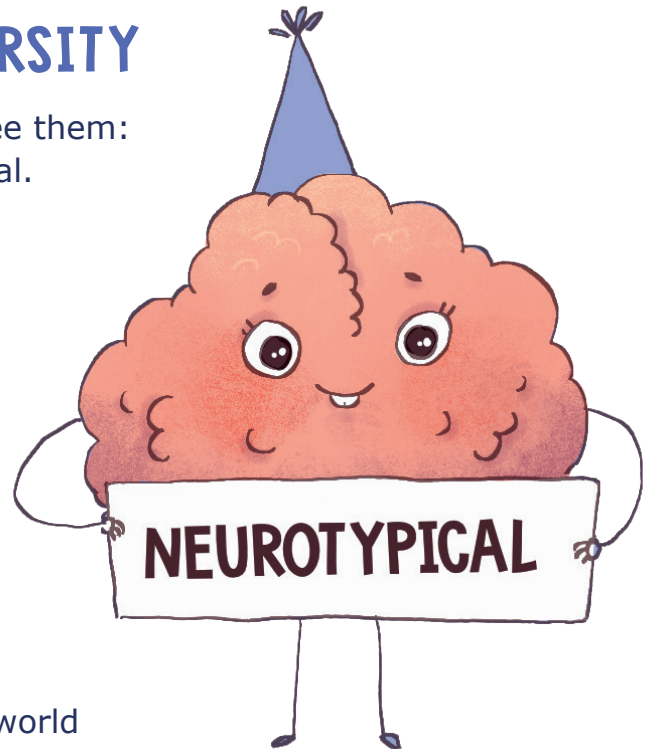
Revisit the “Words to Know” section in the back matter and build kid-friendly meanings together.

neuro—relating to the brain and nervous system

neurodiverse—describing the variety of ways human brains work; all of us together are neurodiverse

neurodivergent—describing a person whose brain processes or experiences the world in ways that diverge from what is considered typical

neurotypical—describing a person whose brain processes information in ways like the majority of people

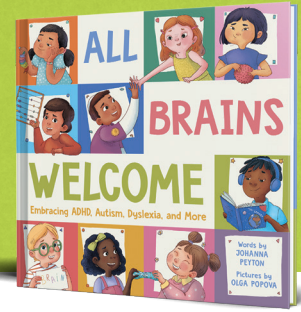


Then ask students to use the words in new sentences.

Emphasize that neurodiverse describes a group containing varied brains, while neurodivergent and neurotypical describe individuals or groups.

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WHAT DOES “TYPICAL” MEAN?

All Brains Welcome compares neurodiversity to trees. Many trees lose their leaves in the winter, while some do not. One pattern may be more common or expected, but every tree is still a tree. In the same way, brains can work in many different ways.

Look up the word typical in the dictionary. (Depending on the level of your students, a student volunteer can do this, or the teacher can.)

- Read the definition.
- Explain that typical describes something that is common or expected. It does not mean that everyone is the same.

As a class, brainstorm things that might be typical or common but are not true for everyone. For example:

- Many people write with their right hand, but some write with their left hand.
- Many students sit at a desk while they work, but some work better while standing or moving.
- Many people read a printed book, while others listen to an audiobook or use both.
- Many people like parties, while others prefer quieter activities.

Discuss:

- Why is typical different from normal?
- Why might words such as normal and abnormal make people feel judged?
- Does the most common way of doing something have to be the best way for everyone?
- How can we talk about differences without deciding that one way is better than another?

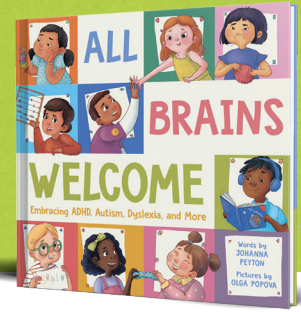
Choose one example from the class brainstorm.

For example: It might be typical for students to sit at a desk while they work.

Now challenge students to think of as many other possibilities as they can. Someone might stand, sit on the floor, use a wobble seat, take movement breaks, or change positions throughout the day.

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- Can all of these students still be learning?
- Why might different things work for different people?
- What might happen if everyone were expected to work in the same way?

Typical tells us what happens often. It does not tell us what everyone should do or who everyone should be.

MANY WAYS

Create a class chart titled Many Ways. Choose everyday topics and brainstorm as many possibilities as students can think of.

For example:

Many ways to...

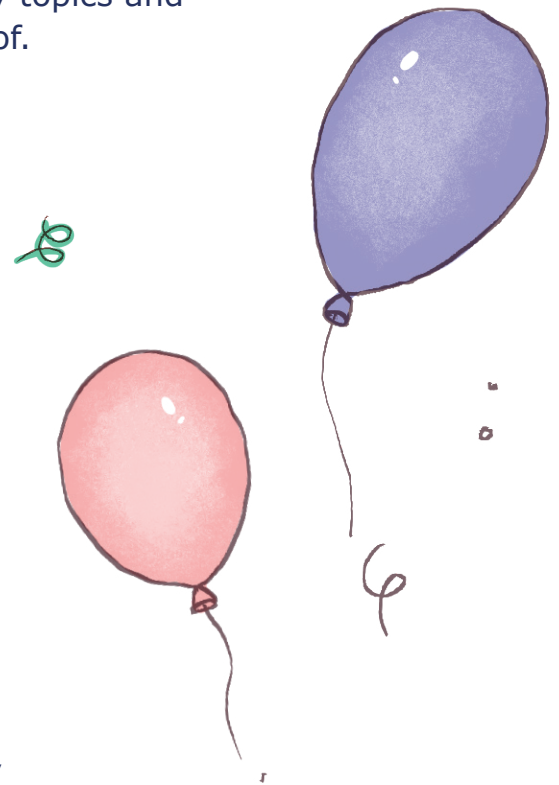
- get to school
- read a book
- solve a problem
- communicate an idea
- show what you know
- take a break
- relax
- be a good friend

Encourage students to keep adding to the chart as they discover new ways of doing and experiencing things.

To close the activity, return to the tree comparison in All Brains Welcome. Invite students to complete the sentence: **There are many ways to be a _____.**

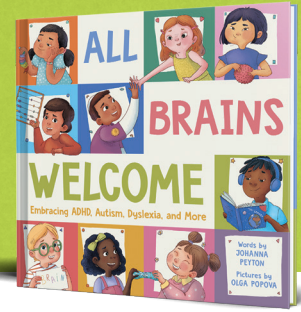
Possible answers might include student, reader, learner, friend, artist, or problem solver

Discuss how people can do things differently, need different things, and still fully belong.



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WORDS MATTER

Language can create belonging, but it can also make assumptions about other people. Sometimes we see a behavior and quickly decide what it means. But we cannot always know what another person is thinking, feeling, or experiencing just by watching them.

As a class, discuss the difference between what we know because we can observe it and what we are guessing.

For example: Sam is tapping a pencil and looking around the room.

What do we know? Sam is tapping a pencil and looking around.

What might we be guessing? That Sam is bored, distracted, or not paying attention.

Explain that our guesses may sometimes be right, but they may also be wrong. Sam might be listening carefully while moving. Sam might be thinking about the lesson. Sam might need movement to concentrate. Instead of deciding someone else's story for them, we can describe what we notice and remain curious.

Read the statements below. Which statements leave more room to understand the individual? Why?

"Sam is not paying attention." / "Sam is moving while listening."

"Riley is lazy about writing." / "Writing seems difficult for Riley today."

"Jordan is rude because they did not answer." / "Jordan did not answer. I do not know why."

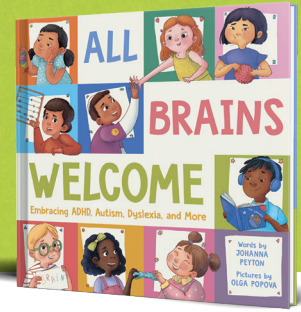
"Everyone likes hugs." / "People have different preferences about touch, so I can ask first."

"Kai is being difficult." / "Kai is having a hard time joining the activity right now."

"Morgan does not want to be my friend." / "Morgan wants to spend some time alone right now."

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Discuss:

- Which statements describe something we can actually observe?
- Which statements assume we know what someone is thinking or feeling?
- How can assumptions sometimes be unfair?
- What could we do instead of guessing?
- How can asking, listening, or giving someone time help us understand them better?

Give students several everyday scenarios. For each one, practice three steps:

NOTICE: What can you see or hear?

WONDER: What are some possible explanations?

ASK: Is there a respectful question you could ask, or would it be better to simply give the person space?



For example: A classmate covers their ears during a noisy activity.

NOTICE: They are covering their ears.

WONDER: The sound might feel too loud. They might need a break.

ASK: "Would you like me to turn the music down?" or "Do you need some space?"

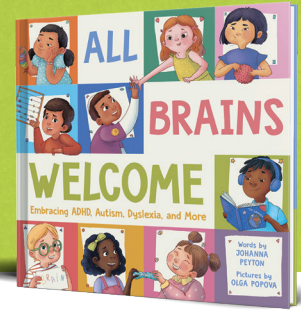
Remind students that they do not always need to know why someone does something to respect what that person needs.

Next, invite students to rewrite additional assumption statements using neutral, respectful language.



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For example:

Instead of: "She is being dramatic."

Try: "She seems upset. I do not know what happened."

Instead of: "He is weird because he keeps doing that."

Try: "He is doing something differently than I would."

Instead of: "They should be able to do this by now."

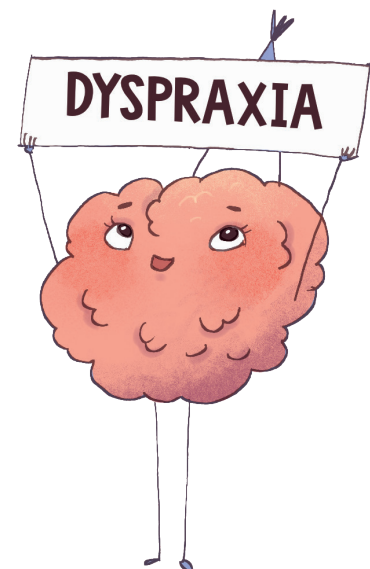
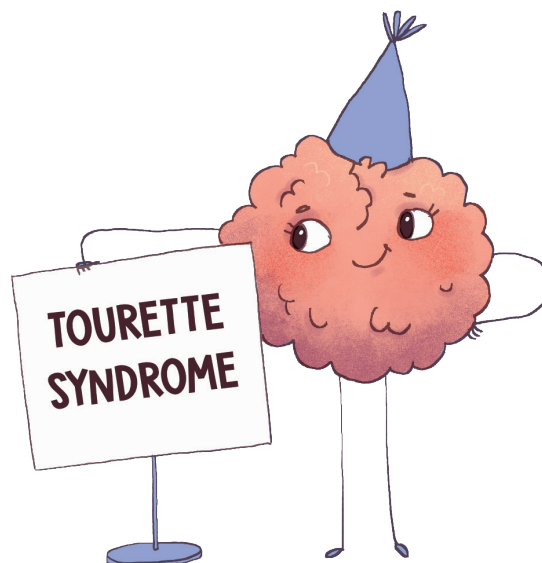
Try: "This is difficult for them right now."



The goal is not to guess a diagnosis or figure out why someone behaves a certain way. It is to practice noticing without judging, remaining curious, and allowing people to explain their own experiences when they choose to.

RESPECT SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Some people prefer identity-first language, such as "autistic person." Others prefer person-first language, such as "person with dyslexia." Follow the language a person uses for themselves rather than insisting that one form is correct for everyone.



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SPEAKING AND LISTENING ACTIVITIES

LISTEN AND TRUST

Sometimes being a good friend starts with listening and allowing others to share their experiences in their own way. All Brains Welcome reminds readers that listening to and trusting what someone tells us about themselves is an important part of creating a community where everyone belongs.

Have students sit in a circle and introduce a small “listening object.” Explain that the person holding the object can share while everyone else listens. When that person is finished, classmates may respond with a kind comment, question, or affirmation before the object moves to the next person.

Participation can look different for different people. A student may speak while holding the object, pass without sharing, show a drawing, point to a response card, or contribute in another way that feels comfortable.

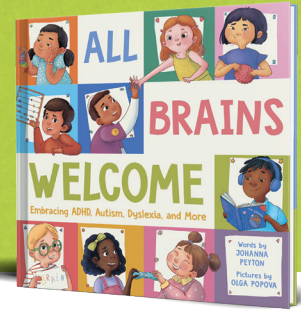
Use the Listen, Share, and Trust activity to invite students to learn more about one another. Possible prompts include:

- Something that helps me learn is...
- A place where I feel comfortable is...
- Something that helps me feel calm is...
- One way I like to participate is...
- Something I enjoy learning or talking about is...
- Something that is easy for me is...
- Something I sometimes need help with is...
- Something I wish people would ask instead of assume is...



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After everyone who wishes to participate has had a turn, discuss:

- Did everyone have the same answers?
- What did you learn about someone that you did not know before?
- Why is it important to listen when someone tells us what they need or prefer?
- How can we make room for people to communicate and participate in different ways?

Remind students that listening does not always mean solving a problem or giving advice. Sometimes the most important thing we can do is believe what someone tells us about their own experience and respect what they say they need.

MANY WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

Choose a simple question connected to the book, such as “What makes a classroom welcoming?”

Give students several ways to answer:

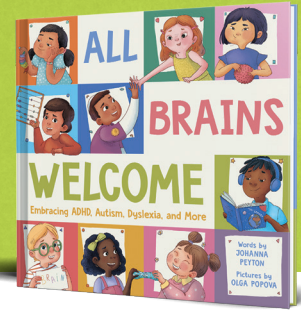
- say an idea aloud
- write or draw an idea
- choose from picture or word cards
- tell a partner who can share it
- use gesture or movement
- pass for now

Afterward, discuss: Did everyone have to participate in the same way for the class to gather many good ideas? How did offering choices change the activity?



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BRAIN PARTY FREEZE

Invite students to look through the illustrations in All Brains Welcome and identify different actions taking place at the brain party, such as greeting, reading, dancing, drawing, planning, listening to music, using a fidget, resting, playing bingo, sharing food, and more.

Call out one action at a time. Students may act it out in place, use a seated version, make a gesture with their hands, or simply watch.

When you call “Brain freeze!” everyone pauses.

For a guessing-game variation, one volunteer chooses an action from the book and acts or gestures it while the group guesses.



KEEP IT INCLUSIVE

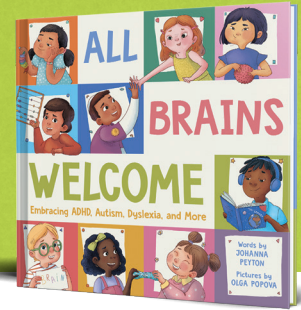
Movement activities should always include seated and non-movement options. No student should be asked to imitate a tic, stim, speech difference, sensory overload, or any feature of a diagnosis for entertainment or simulation.

DRAMA: WELCOME TO OUR BRAIN PARTY!

In small groups, create a short commercial inviting people to an imaginary brain party. Include at least three details showing how the celebration welcomes different preferences and ways of participating. Write a script, use puppets, perform live, or record it.

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MATH

BRAIN PARTY WORD PROBLEMS

For younger students, pictures, counters, party hats, paper balloons, or other props can help make word problems concrete. Use these examples as inspiration to create additional problems based on the book's illustrations.

1. Ms. Shepard puts 5 party hats on one table and 4 party hats on another table. How many party hats are there?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

If 3 students choose hats, how many hats are left on the table?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

2. Xavier has 5 bingo cards. He makes 5 more bingo cards to bring to the party. How many bingo cards does he have?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

If he gives 6 cards to classmates. How many cards does he still have?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

3. Miguel and Sophia make 7 snacks in the morning and 2 more snacks before the party. How many snacks do they make?

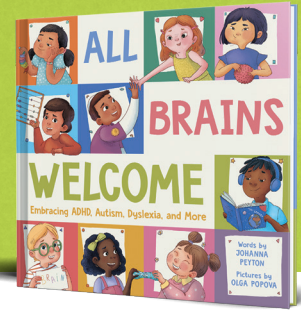
Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

The class eats 6. How many snacks remain?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

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4. There are 3 pillows, 2 books, and 4 sensory tools in the calm corner.
How many items are there in all?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

If 4 items are being used, how many items are still available in the calm corner?

Write the equation: $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

Challenge: Ask students to create their own brain-party word problem.
A classmate may solve it using any strategy that works for them.

MANY WAYS TO SOLVE

Write one problem on the board, such as $8 + 7$. Demonstrate how to solve it using many different strategies: counters, fingers, a number line, a drawing, mental math, breaking numbers apart, or a written equation.

Discuss:

- Did each strategy start with the same equation?
- Did different strategies lead to the same answer?
- Was one strategy automatically “better,” or might different strategies work better for different people or problems?
- How can seeing someone else’s strategy help your own thinking?

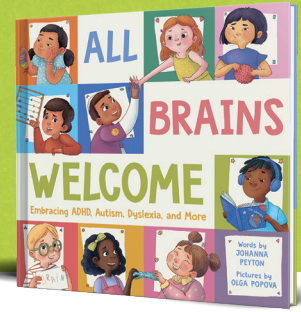
Repeat with a new problem and invite students to try at least two different strategies to solve it.

OUR CLASSROOM, BY THE NUMBERS

Collect anonymous class data about preferences, not diagnoses. Explain that preferences can change from day to day, so the graph is a snapshot rather than a permanent label.

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Possible survey questions:

- Which helps you understand a new idea: hearing it, seeing it, trying it, or a combination?
- When reading for fun, what do you sometimes choose: print, audio, reading with someone, or more than one?
- When working, what can help: quiet, soft background sound, movement, or different things at different times?

Create a bar graph or picture graph. Then compare the categories. Which has the most? The least? How many more? How many altogether?

PRIVACY REMINDER

No student needs to explain why they chose an answer. Offer an “it depends” or “prefer not to answer” option whenever appropriate.

BRAIN BASICS

All Brains Welcome explains that the brain takes in information from the senses and sends messages throughout the body. These messages help us move, think, feel, remember, and experience the world.

Create a simple class model of the information pathway:

1. **SENSES** take in information.
2. The **BRAIN** receives and processes information.
3. The **BRAIN** sends messages.
4. The **BODY** responds.



Try the model with everyday examples:

- You smell popcorn. What information comes in? What might your brain notice? How might your body respond?
- You hear your name. What happens next?
- You touch something cold. What message might your brain send to your body?

Students can draw a simple body outline and use arrows to show information traveling from an eye, ear, nose, mouth, or hand to the brain and then to another part of the body.

BRAIN FACTS, QUESTIONS, AND ANSWERS

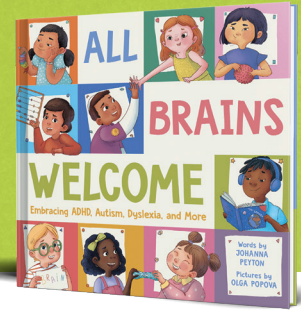
All Brains Welcome is filled with information about the brain, neurodiversity, and the many ways people experience the world. It also reminds readers that scientists are still learning about the brain.

While reading *All Brains Welcome* aloud, create a three-column chart:

Things We Learned (Facts)	Questions We Have	Answers We Found

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Pause throughout the reading to invite students to add information to the first two columns.

Things We Learned might include facts or ideas directly stated in the book.

Questions We Have might include questions inspired by the text, such as:

- Why can two people with the same neurodivergent condition experience it differently?
- Why might one person enjoy a sound, light, texture, or touch that another person finds uncomfortable?
- How do tools like fidgets, headphones, audiobooks, or speech-to-text help different brains learn and participate?
- Why can something be easy for one person's brain and difficult for another person's brain?
- Can a person have more than one neurodivergent condition?
- Why are some people diagnosed as neurodivergent earlier than others?
- How do scientists learn more about the ways different brains work?
- Why might someone hide or "mask" parts of themselves around other people?
- What makes a classroom or community welcoming to many kinds of brains?
- How can people with different strengths and needs help one another?

Once the book has been read, return to the Questions We Have column.

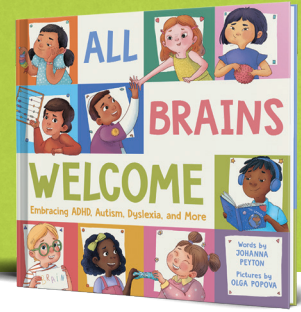
- Were any of these questions answered later in the book?
- Can students find the answer within the text or illustrations?
- Is there additional information in the back matter that helps answer the question?

Record any answers students find in the Answers We Found column.

Some questions may remain unanswered. Explain that this is an important part of scientific thinking. One book cannot contain everything there is to know about a subject, and some questions about the brain are still being studied by scientists.

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Choose several remaining questions for students to research using books, trusted websites, or other reliable sources.

- Where might we look for an answer?
- How can we tell whether a source is trustworthy?
- Can we find the same information in more than one source?
- What should we do if two sources give us different information?
- How can new research change what we understand about the brain?

Assign individuals, pairs, or small groups a question to research. Have students record what they discover in the Answers We Found column and share their findings with the class.

Afterward, discuss the research process:

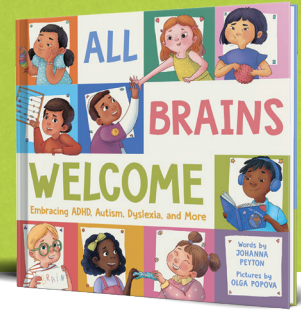
- What was easiest about finding information?
- What was most difficult?
- Did every question have one simple answer?
- Did researching one question lead to new questions?
- What tips would you give someone beginning a research project?

Next, explore the back matter in All Brains Welcome. Discuss how the main text introduces readers to individual children and their experiences, while the back matter provides additional information about neurodiversity, diagnoses, overlapping conditions, masking, and other topics.

- What information appears in both the main text and the back matter?
- What new information did you learn from the back matter?
- Why might an author choose to put some information in the main text and other information in the back matter?
- How does the back matter help readers continue learning after the main book is finished?

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Remind students that research about neurodiversity should help us learn more about a topic, not make assumptions about individuals. Knowing facts about a neurodivergent condition does not tell us everything about a person who has that condition. When we want to understand another person's experience, the best source is the person themselves.

Extension: Create a classroom Brain Research Wall. Students can design and illustrate cards representing a Fact We Learned, a Question We Asked, and an Answer We Found. Leave space on the wall for new questions, reminding students that learning often begins with wondering.

SENSATIONAL SENSES

Sensory processing is the way our brains organize information from the senses. People can experience the same sound, texture, smell, light, or movement differently.

Set up optional sensory observation stations. Examples include:

- Different fabric textures to touch
- Quiet sounds played at a comfortable volume
- Objects with different weights or shapes
- Scented items only if classroom allergies and sensitivities allow
- Images with different patterns or brightness levels

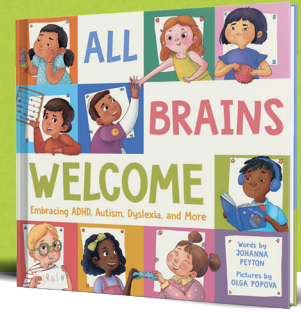
At each station, students may observe, participate, or skip. Invite them to record responses privately with words, drawings, or a simple scale such as LIKE / NEUTRAL / NOT FOR ME.

Then discuss the class findings in general terms:

- Did everyone respond to every sensation in the same way?
- Can something feel pleasant to one person and uncomfortable to another?
- What can we do when someone tells us that a sound, light, texture, or other sensation is too much for them?

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IMPORTANT

This is an observation activity, not a simulation of sensory processing disorder or autism. Do not intentionally overwhelm students with loud noises, flashing lights, confusing directions, or uncomfortable sensations.

Extension: Design a “sensory menu” for the classroom with optional choices such as quiet, movement, headphones, fidgets, stretching, or a calm space. Emphasize that different choices may help different people at different times.

BE A BRAIN RESEARCHER

The book introduces many named ways that brains can process and experience the world. It also reminds readers that no book can represent every person or every kind of neurodivergence.

Choose one question about the brain or neurodiversity to investigate as a class or in small groups. Possible topics include:

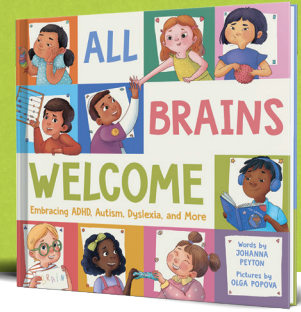
- How does the brain learn new skills?
- What do neuroscientists study?
- Why do people use assistive technology?
- What is a fidget and how can it help some people focus?
- How do audiobooks make reading more accessible?
- What is universal design for learning?

For each topic, practice a simple research routine:

1. Ask a focused question.
2. Gather information from more than one reliable source.
3. Write or draw three things you learned.

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4. Record one new question that came from your research.
5. Share your findings in a format that works for your group: poster, oral report, slideshow, comic, model, or audio recording.

RESEARCH WITH RESPECT

When learning about a neurodivergent condition, include information created by people who have that lived experience whenever possible. Avoid framing a condition only as a list of deficits, and remember that no source can tell you exactly what every person with a diagnosis is like.

Create a class “Brain Wonder Wall” where students can continue adding questions throughout the unit.

SOCIAL STUDIES / SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

FAIR IS NOT ALWAYS THE SAME

Write the words SAME and FAIR on the board. Ask: Are they always the same thing?

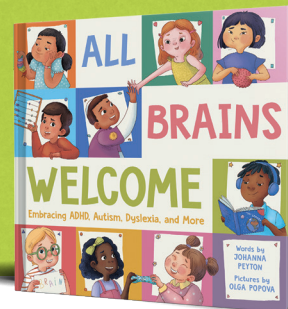
Discuss classroom examples:

- One student reads a print book while another listens to the same book.
- One student sits in a chair while another stands at a desk.
- One student writes an answer while another says it aloud.
- One student wears headphones during independent work.
- One student takes a short movement break and then returns.

In each example, the students may be working toward the same goal while using different tools or approaches. Discuss how fairness can mean giving people access to what helps them participate—not requiring everyone to do everything in the same way.

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SAME GOAL, DIFFERENT TOOLS

Create stations that ask students to complete the same type of task in different ways. For example, to learn about an animal, students might read a short article, listen to information, study labeled pictures, or handle a model. To show what they learned, they might write, draw, speak, build, or act.

Afterward, ask:

- Did everyone use the same tool?
- Did everyone still work toward the same learning goal?
- Which tools helped you? Did you choose the same tools as everyone else?
- Why is it useful for a classroom to have more than one pathway to learning?

ASSUMPTION OR UNDERSTANDING?

All Brains Welcome repeatedly reminds readers not to make assumptions about people. Turn that idea into a class sorting and discussion activity.

Read each statement. Decide whether it is an ASSUMPTION or an invitation to UNDERSTAND.

- "That paper is messy, so the student did not try."
- "I do not know how hard someone worked by looking at the finished page."
- "Everyone with the same diagnosis likes the same things."
- "Two people can share a diagnosis and still have very different experiences."
- "If someone does not join a game, they must not want friends."
- "There are many reasons someone might choose not to join a game right now."
- "A tool that helps someone learn is a shortcut."
- "People can use different tools to reach the same goal."

Next, invite pairs to write two new statements: one that assumes and one that leaves room to understand. Trade with another pair and sort.

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A HELPFUL QUESTION

When you catch yourself making an assumption, try replacing “I know why” with “I wonder what I do not know yet.”

NO ONE IS THE CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

Discuss a class agreement: We learn about ideas from books and reliable sources, not by putting classmates on the spot. A student is never responsible for teaching the class about a diagnosis, culture, disability, or identity simply because it is part of their life.

Together, create one or two respectful phrases students can use when they are curious, such as “Would you like to tell me what helps?” or “It is okay if you do not want to answer.”

WHAT MAKES A BRAIN-WELCOMING CLASSROOM?

In small groups, brainstorm what a classroom can do to welcome many ways of thinking, learning, communicating, moving, and participating.

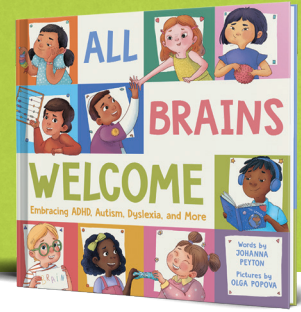
Bring the groups together to create a class list.

A brain-welcoming classroom might:

- Offer more than one way to participate
- Make instructions available in more than one form
- Provide quiet and movement options when possible
- Allow useful tools without teasing or shame
- Ask before touching
- Respect breaks and personal space
- Avoid assuming that one behavior means the same thing for everyone
- Believe people when they explain what they need

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Walk through the classroom together and ask how easy it is for different people to participate. Focus on the environment rather than asking which students “need” particular supports.

- Can students see important instructions as well as hear them?
- Is there a quieter place to work or reset?
- Are there different seating or movement options?
- Can students ask for help privately?
- Are there different ways to show learning?
- Can students use helpful tools without being singled out?
- Are classroom routines predictable and clearly explained?
- What is one realistic change that could make the room work better for more people?

Choose one class improvement to try for a week. Then reflect: Who benefited? Did anyone benefit who did not expect to? What might you change next?

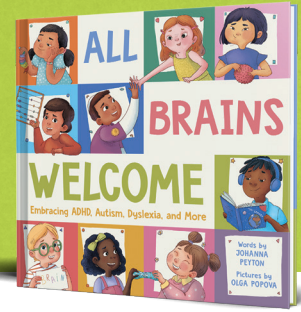
Host Your Own Brain Party

Use everything students have learned to plan a celebration inspired by Ms. Shepard's class. The goal is not to assign students diagnoses or ask them to represent a condition. Instead, create a party with many ways to belong.

- Offer both active and quiet choices.
- Post a simple visual schedule so guests know what to expect.
- Make every activity optional.
- Provide more than one way to join games or share ideas.
- Create a calm space that anyone may use.

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- Invite students to contribute based on interests and strengths.
- Celebrate the fact that no two people bring the same combination of ideas, needs, talents, and perspectives.

End with a class reflection. Students may write, draw, dictate, or discuss:

- One thing I learned about brains is...
- One assumption I want to question is...
- One thing that can make a space more welcoming is...
- One way my own one-of-a-kind brain adds to a group is...

THE BIG IDEA

Belonging is not asking everyone to be the same. It is creating communities where people can show up as themselves, use the supports that help them, and contribute in their own ways.