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Clarion Review ★★★★☆ PICTURE BOOKS

Mike Nero and the Superhero School

Natasha Carlow
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Reflecting a wide spectrum of experiences, Mike Nero and the Superhero School *is a compassionate and informative picture book about children's disabilities.*

In Natasha Melissa Carlow's empowering, uplifting picture book *Mike Nero and the Superhero School*, a boy with cerebral palsy overcomes his anxiety on his first day at school.

Mike, who wears leg braces, stands at the front door of his new school, riddled with worries about what awaits him on the other side. He's met by the principal, Mr. Joseph, who takes him on a tour of the school. The book pronounces that it's a school for children with disabilities—or, as the principal says to Mike, for superheroes.

As Mike and Mr. Joseph walk through the halls, Mike encounters new classmates whose behaviors and appearances are foreign to him. One boy walks with a beeping stick in front of him, another motions with her hands, and a third wears headphones. Mr. Joseph encourages Mike to ask the students about what they're doing; thus, Mike learns how these students—who are blind, deaf, and autistic—use different tools to manage the challenges of their daily lives. From Mr. Joseph's perspective, the students have superpowers—not only their unique abilities to navigate the world, but more importantly, in their kindness and eagerness to help each other.

In the course of the text, the school's students come to life: they have natural exchanges, are described in clear terms, and are fleshed out via accessible information about their disabilities. Indeed, each student's eagerness to explain who they are—and Mike's awestruck reactions to their explanations—makes it clear that their disabilities aren't sources of shame. Further, they, too, grapple with familiar challenges, including insecurity, anxiety, and self-confidence during new experiences.

The illustrations are warm and detailed. At times, they function as step-by-step explanations, showing how one student moves his cane to make sure his walking path is clear, or how two deaf students say hello to each other in sign language. In this way, they promote openness and curiosity about children who are different. And the book closes with a more detailed description of cerebral palsy and a list of insightful discussion questions. Its reigning message of kindness as a superpower is universal and inspiring, emphasized by Mike's growth from self-doubt to pride.

Reflecting a wide spectrum of experiences, *Mike Nero and the Superhero School* is a compassionate and informative picture book about children's disabilities.

ARIANNA REBOLINI (September 23, 2022)

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