ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

EDUCATION

My Autism
Colette Evangelista
Diane Stone, illustrator
Toot and Moo
978-0-615-62256-9
Five Stars (out of Five)

Colette Evangelista is the mother of two boys; one has autism, and the family's experience is the focus of this charming book written for children of pre-school age to a few years older. The book's central character has autism and reminds readers to "look around. Everyone is different."

Much of what the child in the book says is underscored by colorful illustrations that amplify the child's point of view. The page titled "Sometimes my autism can frustrate me" depicts the child trying to cope with writing, drawing, and other everyday tasks. His hand is on his forehead, and surrounding him on the table are wadded papers and other scattered attempts to solve problems in a conventional way. Like other children, the child with autism can say, "There are times when I feel scared or mad or sad," but he also comes to recognize that "this is ok too. Everyone feels scared or mad or sad sometimes."

The child in this story is also depicted working a jigsaw puzzle. Often children with autism are proficient at solving mechanical problems, and they can derive a sense of satisfaction from continually repeating an action that might seem tedious to others. The child in the story says that he can focus on his favorite things to feel better. These include playing hopscotch with an alphabet chain and playing with his trains. He also takes deep breaths or "can find a quiet place to be" when he is feeling frustrated.

Evangelista's book has several purposes. First, it is a gift to her son, and serves as another means of helping him recognize symbols. One of the most powerful is the symbol of the boy himself, in part because people with autism sometimes have trouble understanding that they are separate individuals who can think about themselves (a function called "theory of mind"). Second, the book is a gift to all children who, by reading it, can gain perspective on what it feels like to have autism. *My Autism* will also help young readers see that we are all different in our own way.

One enjoyable aspect of *My Autism* is the many ways in which it teaches. In almost

every picture, the main character wears different outfits, so the reader can think and talk about colors and patterns. In two of the drawings, and on the cover, he wears a red shirt with a black letter “E”—perhaps symbolizing the child for whom the book is written (the dedication reads: “For Everett, the one who inspires us every day”). Other illustrations incorporate numbers, toys, and games any child would probably know.

There are two other similar books in this genre that target the same pre-school/early-school audience as Evangelista’s text: *My Brother Sammy*, by Becky Edwards, and *Andy and His Yellow Frisbee*, by Mary Thompson. Both of these offerings posit some of the problems that children without autism may experience when trying to understand the disorder. Evangelista has taken a simpler tack: introduce readers to a child with autism and let the child speak for himself. The books aren’t in competition, strictly speaking, since all represent a welcome new initiative to educate children about autism. *My Autism* would make a good addition to a school or public library.

Evangelista successfully combines pride for her son with outreach to all children in this book. One hopes it might inspire her son, in time, to write his own story.

Barbara Bamberger Scott