



My Friend Suhana

Shaila M. Abdullah , Aanyah Abdullah

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A simple tale of love and friendship to warm your heart

Award-winning author and designer Shaila Abdullah teams up with her 10-year-old daughter Aanyah to bring you this heartwarming tale of a little girl who forms a close bond with a child with cerebral palsy. The girl finds that through her art, she can reach her special friend Suhana.

"*My Friend Suhana* is a delightful read for a children's book. Very well illustrated with respect, friendship, and advocacy all in mind at the same time."

--Dawn Cruzan, President, Camp Craig Allen for all abilities

"This is the story of a seven-year-old's first attempt at unconditional love. Tough but tender, inspirational yet utterly real, this is a small gem of a tale. Highly recommended for anyone in the position of mentoring a beloved child through the hard places of life."

--Paula Huston, author of "A Season of Mystery" and "A Land Without Sin"

"*My Friend Suhana* is a charming and perceptive book that will draw its readers into empathy while allowing them to enjoy this heartwarming story of two uncommon friends."

--Chitra Divakaruni, author of "Grandma and the Great Gourd"

Learn more at www.MyFriendSuhana.com
From the Growing With Love Series at www.LHPress.com

My Friend Suhana Details

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Fran says

My Friend Suhana: By Shaila Abdullah and Aanyah Abdullah

Friendships are formed in many different ways and children often cherish the simplest gesture, movement, smile or hug from someone that cares about them. Not all children can respond with words, movements or can even walk. Many will never play hopscotch, throw a ball or even say hello. Imagine not being able to communicate with words. Children with cerebral palsy, like Suhana, the special 7-year-old child in this book, might never take a first step, say their first words or even do the same things other kids can do. But, they can understand kindness, love and true friendship. This is a story about two young 7-year-old girls whose friendship will span a lifetime and whose love will never die.

One hour each week our young narrator gets to spend some special time hugging and rocking Suhana in her arms letting her know that she is special and loved. The picture of the two girls is priceless and the smiles breathtaking. Suhana and her young friend see each other at the community center where her mom helps out with children with special needs. Cerebral palsy affects many babies and young children every year. You cannot catch it. It is not contagious. This illness affects the brain and causes the person with the illness to have, as the word palsy is defined weaknesses or problems moving his/her body. Children such as Suhana as you get to know her better within the beautifully illustrated pages of this book that tell the story even without the words, have trouble controlling their muscles. This illness affects the brain as Suhana like so many others with CP might not be able to walk, talk, eat or play like other kids.

Suhana goes to school and loves making friends with other children. She enjoys playing, rolling on her back and tummy and often as our young narrator relates to readers screams and squeals which shows she is able to express her emotions even if it is with these types of sounds. Our young narrator with the help of her mom learned to understand when Suhana is happy, sad or angry. When Suhana bumps her head find out when you read the book what happens and what are young narrator learns.

Pictures are special and our narrator loves to draw and paint. Painting a special picture for her friend was her way of trying to cheer her up. Drawing is her way of cheering up her friend and other kids hoping to make them feel happy and take away some of the anger. Just look at the pictures that she draws and the beautiful happy faces that would make anyone smile.

Suhana loves doing many things but the colors of the rainbow hold a special place or meaning for her. The colors are "just like her many moods." If you want to learn what Red, Blue or any other color means to Suhana you are going to have to read the book and see the faces she makes when seeing each color for yourself. But, something happens that makes our narrator's heart go all spaghetti inside and you might say give her a warm glow and great feeling. What does Suhana do to let her know that she loves having her around? You won't believe it until you see it for yourself.

Suhana hopes to be able to stand up and learn to walk. But, she has a long way to go because her legs might not be strong enough. When will that day come? Well only our two creative authors can answer that question if they continue her story and we learn more about Suhana and her special friend.

There are so many themes that are brought to light in this wonderfully illustrated book. Friendship,

understanding, love, kindness and trust are just some of the themes brought out in this book. Explaining to young children about CP very important. Understanding why some children cannot move about as they can paramount. Children are special and all kids are really the same. Children with CP might have to overcome greater obstacles in life and face challenges that others might not but with the help of wheelchairs, computers to help them communicate with words they can do the same things that other kids can do but in their own special way. Patience is a true virtue that our young author relates to readers as this mother and daughter have presented well written, special, colorfully illustrated book that is definitely a must read for children in the lower grades, read aloud in every classroom, hospital groups, book store book signings and even at centers with children who have CP who can learn that they can do anything all they need to do is try. Our young narrator relates it perfectly: I hope Suhana knows that I will always be the star dancing around her kite." If you want to understand the meaning of what she says: Read this outstanding Five Twinkling Golden Kite Star book for yourself.

James Potts says

This is one of the most beautiful books I have ever read. It's about a girl and her friend. But Shaila cannot go out and run, jump, and play like all the other kids in her class can. Shaila was born with a disease called Several Palsy. This is a disorder of the movement of one's muscle tone. The story goes on to tell a reader about the twos friendship. It can tell and show the students that inclusion is okay. It tells the students that the world is different. It shows the students that it's okay to be different and its okay to have friends that are different. One thing that I LOVED about this book is in the back of the book it gives the reader some insight on what Several Palsy is. So, the reader can become more informed on the muscular disease. I would recommend this in the classroom setting because it is such a beautiful book and it shows students many different things. The pictures are amazing and the message is even more amazing.

Megan Majewicz says

The genre of this book is an Autobiography NonFiction and the intended audience is for Primary grade levels. Autobiography Nonfictions are stories of a real person's life that is written by that person.

1. Text-to-self: I would connect this to a personal experience of mine because I had a classmate in elementary school that had an older brother with cerebral palsy. I would notice how him and his sibling would interact. Although he was not able to talk, his expressions showed how he was able to connect with his family.
2. Text-to-text: I would connect this to any book or movie that includes siblings, friends or any person working with and connecting with those who have disabilities.
3. Text-to-world: I would connect this to similar events that happen in our world because there are children out there with this disability. This story is based on the true event of the author's child's close bond with her friend that has this disability and how she can reach her. Many people in our world today are helping people with any disabilities and finding new ways to reach to them, especially through art, just like the little girl in the story.

Erik Olson says

Honestly, being a Special Ed. Teacher, a father, and someone who sees God in everyone, this book is hard not to like and to want children to read. Suhana isn't super. She doesn't Save the day. She has a disability but she can communicate through art. And she is loved by a little girl who understand that other can be different and still be your friend. This book has great pictures and would be great at home or in class for teaching kids that differences in others can be embraced and loved.

Lynnae Young says

My Friend Suhana: A Story of Friendship and Cerebral Palsy is one I was able to relate to because I have a friend who suffers from Cerebral Palsy. In this picture book, Suhana has cerebral palsy but has a friend who loves her just the same. Suhana is unable to talk, walk, stand or play but her friend finds ways that they are able to interact with each other. Her friend supports her in every obstacle she tries to overcome, such as walking and standing. I think this book was great. This book explains cerebral palsy in a way that is easy to understand and even has a section at the end called "About Cerebral Palsy and Special Friendships" that explains the hardships of this disability a little more in depth. I'm glad the author added this part because the book itself would leave you to think that all people with Cerebral Palsy experience the same symptoms and obstacles as Suhana. What I like most about this book is it teaches children that even though someone may be different than you and not able to do the things you can, they can still be your dearest friend. The book also had a light tone for such a tough subject. My Friend Suhana was the winner of the 2016 Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and is recommended for children age 3-10.

Morgan Lenigan says

The genre of this book is realistic fiction. It is realistic fiction because the story is told with made up characters, but characters that resemble real life scenarios. The target audience for this book is primary students (k-3).

A text-to-self connection that I had with the book was that I volunteered at a school once sequentially and I had a student that had cerebral palsy. In the book the girl has cerebral palsy, and makes noises, but not all of her noises are cries. When I first met this student of mine, I had to learn to differentiate the sounds being made. One fun thing that we did towards the end of class was blow bubbles, that's when the student smiled the most, and even giggled which indicated that they liked it. In the book there is a friendship that is just as special.

A text-to-text connection that I had with this book was the online youtube celebrity Zach Anner. Zach Anner has cerebral palsy and is a self advocate for the misconceptions that people think about people that have cerebral palsy. Zach likes to make people laugh and make connections with people. In the book, there's a friendship that is heartwarming just like Zach, who warms our hearts just as much.

A text-to-world connection that I had with this book is the misconception that people have about people that

have disabilities as a whole. The author writes this story as a real life event that happened in her life. This book is a great way to show students that friendships can be made no matter what. As a teacher this is a great book to teach students about cerebral palsy.

Renee says

My Friend Suhana is based on the true story of 10 year-old Aanyah Abdullah (one of the authors) and her friendship with a young girl who has cerebral palsy, Suhana. Aanyah and her mother Shaila volunteer on a weekly basis at a community center in a special needs class attended by Suhana. It is here where Aanyah and Suhana have forged their special friendship.

The reader is introduced to Suhana through Aanyah's eyes who describes how Suhana is different from other girls her age in that she cannot stand, walk nor speak, nor does she communicate through language. However, what is so beautiful about this book is that the authors describe what Suhana IS capable of such as waving her arms and legs, rolling around, squealing with delight, clenching her fists in anger, and in a tender moment, Suhana reaching out to touch Aanyah's hair – a small gesture but one with great significance.

I love this focus on highlighting for children all the ways a child with cerebral palsy has “abilities” rather than focusing on the “disability” and the things that are wrong. The other important consideration is teaching children the ways they can interact with and/or communicate with children who have a disability. My Friend Suhana does this so well. In the book, Aanyah describes how she hugs and tickles Suhana, draws pictures for her, and even is her cheerleader as she learns new skills. There is also an excellent section discussing how Suhana reacts to colors rather than words with certain colors associated with specific emotions (e.g., red for anger, blue for sad, etc.).

I really enjoyed the cheery, bright, and colorful illustrations. I really love the imagery in the text and pictures of the kite surrounded by stars as a metaphor for Suhana (the kite) and the people in her life who care for her (the stars). It was very touching. Finally, at the end of the book, there is a section discussing cerebral palsy and some basic facts about this condition as well as a note encouraging children to reach out to a child with a disability and forge new friendships. It was a great way to end the book!

My Bottom Line:

My Friend Suhana: A Story of Friendship and Cerebral Palsy is the heartwarming account of a special friendship forged between the young co-author (10 year-old Aanyah Abdullah) and a little girl, Suhana who has cerebral palsy. The book does a great job of focusing on the “abilities” of Suhana and provides guidance for children with regards to facilitating friendships with children who have a disability. This book would be a great resource in early elementary classrooms or in a school or public library. I highly recommend this book for ages 3+.

** I received a copy of this book free-of-charge from the author in exchange for my honest opinion. All opinions expressed are my own.*

Lauren says

This story is a great picture book for the primary and elementary school readers. This book discusses two friends who are about 10 years old. One student has cerebral palsy and the other friend gets to know her and understand more about her and her disability. The illustrations in this story are very warm. Each page is full of beautiful pictures which help shape and share the messages of friendship and love. This is a great story to discuss differences and understanding how to talk with others who may not be able to speak with their words but in other ways. I feel that any classroom could benefit from having this book and even listening to this book being read as a read-aloud. I also think this story is a great way to allow students to understand more about students who are unlike them.

Shannon says

Genre-Fiction

Target Audience- Early Elementary

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Text to text- There is another book called My Friend has Down Syndrome. It is neat how children's books have been made to bring awareness to disabilities. This one is about a little girl who attended a camp and a little later in the week a new friend would join their camping group. This little girl had down syndrome.

text to self- In the story the main character is diagnosed with cerebral palsy. This prevents her from doing all the things that her friends may do. I have had a few extended family members who had cerebral palsy. They were also prevented from doing much and it even led to death with some of them.

text to world-It is nice that over time we have moved from those with disabilities not being able to attend school with those who are without disabilities. Now we work towards an all-inclusive classroom which allows for kids with special needs to be in the class and participating with the other kids while still getting the individual needs that they have.

McKenna Friesen says

Genre: Realistic fiction because although it this story didn't actually happen, it could very likely happen. It discusses friendship and love which is true in our daily lives.

Audience: 2nd grade because the pictures are geared more towards early readers along with the content. The reading is too complex for 1st grade but too easy for higher level readers.

Text to text: I connected this piece of literature to the book we read in class, "Ghosts." In "Ghosts", Maya is a young girl with cystitis fibrosis trying to fit in and enjoy life as much as she can. In "My Friend Suhana", Suhana is 10 year-old with cerebral palsy who is not like her friends but the narrator does her best to include her in normal activity the best she can.

Text to self: I related this to myself in that I currently work in a special education with many students who do not interact with the mainstream classroom on a daily basis. A normal day for these students are so different than those in a mainstream classroom. However, I try my best make life as 'normal' as possible for these

students; now 'normal' is not assimilation but accommodation. I love each and every student; they are so special to me so I want to celebrate their abilities along with their disabilities.

Text to world: I connected this to the world because there are so many people in this world with mental and physical disabilities. Many kids in the mainstream classroom can either be exclusive or inclusive to this students with disabilities. Books like, "My Friend Suhana" are amazing examples of inclusion to mainstream students. It shows how to love and create friendships with people who are not like them.

Laura says

Suhana has Cerebral Palsy, but it's okay. This book shows the little ones that it's okay to be different and it's okay to have friends who are different. It is filled with great ways to show students about inclusion. I would highly suggest this book if you have students with disabilities in your class. Even if you don't it's a great talking book with grades pre-k to 1st.

Laura West says

My Friend Suhana is about a little girl who has cerebral palsy and ultimately includes such an important message, making it my favorite book from this category. It tells us that it's okay to be different, it's okay to want inclusion and it's okay to have friends who aren't the same as you. The words were equally as beautiful as the illustrations, neither was stronger than the other. I particularly enjoy the page that features Suhana's feelings and emotions but includes the associated colors, putting tone into feelings. At the end of the book, there is also a little page called "About Cerebral Palsy and Special Friendships" which I think was a nice touch to finish because cerebral palsy may be a disability that not a lot of children have seen. It's natural for them to have questions and for adults to need some support to know how to talk about the subject.

Ally Harrison says

"My Friend Suhana" is a heart-warming story of a special friendship between two seven-year-old girls. This realistic fiction book was written and illustrated by the mother-daughter team of Shaila and Aanyah Abdullah.

In this story, a community center brings together this young girl and Suhana. Their friendship grows through weekly play dates. However, Suhana is not a typical girl. She has cerebral palsy and cannot walk, talk or play like typical children. Despite Suhana's disability, the young girl loves Suhana like any other dear friend. The young girl takes the time to care for Suhana and is able to form a close bond with Suhana and begins to identify and understand her emotions through art and colors.

"My Friend Suhana" is a great book for grades k-3. The storyline is sweet and easy to follow and the illustrations are bright and beautiful. This book would be most powerful as a read aloud with a follow-up discussion. I would read this book aloud to my students at the beginning of the school year or during our Special Needs Awareness week. "My Friend Suhana" is a great text to introduce disabilities and inclusion. This is a WOW book because of their uncommon friendship and sweet message. It teaches children about friendship, empathy and inclusion. I also recommend this book because it includes a brief informational section about Cerebral Palsy and how to explain it to children.

Haley Hergenrader says

Genre: This is realistic fiction because while it is a made up story it contains events that could happen in real life.

Target Audience: I think the target audience would be primary elementary students because the words and pictures are simple to read and comprehend.

Connections

Text-to-self: The connection I made to myself while reading this was that I hope to be a special education teacher and this book shows that inclusion is a good thing and that all students can learn and grow alongside each other.

Text-to-text: I connected this text to the book and movie Wonder. While Suhana and Auggie don't have the same exceptionality, they face similar challenges but their peers overlook their differences and become friends.

Text-to-world: This book shows that being different is okay and is being friends with someone that is different from yourself and others. This is an important message to share with the world today because people's differences are being used as excuses to see them as less of a person.

Brandi Balzer says

My Friend Suhana is a book about two young girls who form a beautiful friendship although they have differences. Suhana is a young girl who has cerebral palsy, her friend is a young girl named Aanyah. They met when Aanyah was helping her mother at a community center. The remainder of the book discusses the way in which Suhana and Aanyah have found ways to communicate with each other and enjoy each others company even though Suhana can't walk, or talk, or play like other young girls there age. The illustrations in this book compliment the story well. They are digitally designed but detailed and help the reader better create an image in their head of the text and what is happening within the story.

I rated this book a four. I loved that this book did not just focus on what Suhana couldn't do. Many times it talked about how she could laugh, and experience a range of emotions just like any one else. Although she expressed her feelings and communicated in a different way, the book points out that she was capable of it. I also loved that this book showed that the character Aanyah appreciated her and cared for her despite their differences and encouraged her when she learned new things. The relationship described between the two characters was beautiful. The only thing I did not like about the book was the lack of consistent story. The relationship was the main focus however, because of this the narrative was sometime lost in the description of Suhana and Aanyahs differences and how they coped.
