



TEACHER'S RESOURCE BOX

There's a Dwende in My Brother's Soup!

The autism that affects Caloy in the story is a developmental disability that afflicts a number of children. This guide will help enrich your discussions about the book. **BY BAMBI SY**

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a brain disorder that usually becomes apparent within the first three years of a child's life. It affects the child's ability to communicate, form relationships, deal with change or respond appropriately to the outside world. The definitive cause of autism is still unknown, but we do know that the brains of autistic people seem to be wired differently. The disorder makes it hard for them to communicate, relate with others, or even take part in play or leisure activities. They may exhibit repeated movements like hand flapping, rocking, spinning things; unusual responses to people around them; attachments to certain objects; and resist any changes in routines. Because they live in a world they don't know how to control, autistics are typically withdrawn.

ENTER THEIR WORLD!

This work by autistic poet Karen Halabura shows us the often confused and isolated world of autistic people.

A Bird Trapped in a Cage

By Karen Halabura

I once was a bird
Trapped in a cage
Until...I found a true way out
I grew lively
I grew freely
I tried to fit in with all the rest
But they would not let it be
I was different as they said
I was not like them
I did not look right
But I thought I was just me
So I became tangled in the web they wove
I tried to become what was expected of me
I fought so hard to fit in just right
But they would not just let it be
And I was not being me
Because I was different
They were forced to let me in
All I wanted was to be me
To be different
Not to be treated different
I wanted to be liked for who I was
Not what I appeared to be
I thought I was free
I cannot believe what I see
I am a bird trapped in a cage
Does anyone understand?
Does anyone care?
Does anyone listen?
I AM NOT FREE
I AM NOT FREE
I AM NOT FREE
PLEASE SET THE BIRD FREE
I am a bird trapped in a cage

AUTISTIC SAVANTS

Autistic savants are individuals with autism who have extraordinary skills. Some are even considered geniuses. About 10% of all autistics show savant abilities in areas such as math, memory, art and music. A number of autistic individuals, for example, have calendar memory. If asked, "what day of the week was July 20, 1968?" they can determine the answer within seconds. Others can multiply and divide large numbers in their head and even cal-

culate square roots and prime numbers easily! On the other hand, examples of savant memory feats include: remembering everything about presidents, memorizing streets or maps, and knowing all the birth dates of classmates.

STORIES ABOUT AUTISM

At age three, an autistic child named Nadia knew how to draw beautiful pictures of horses that have been compared to those of the 17th century painter Rembrandt. Interestingly, she lost her drawing abilities when she learned to speak at the late age of six.

On the other hand, many musicians with autism have perfect pitch and also have a great memory for music. In some cases, a person can hear a classical piece once and play it back in its entirety.

FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

Many celebrated artists and scientists are thought to have had autism. They include:

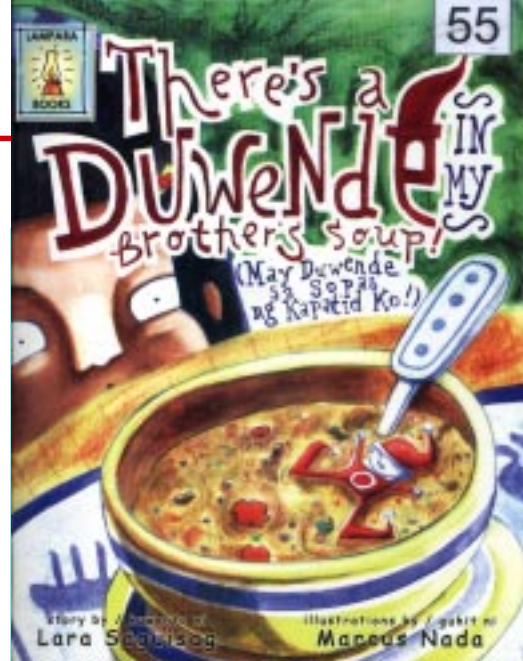
- Jane Austen, author
- Isaac Asimov, author



Richard Wawro (left), an artist with autism, is legally blind and draws using crayons. His works (top and bottom) sell for up to \$10,000, and even the Pope owns one of his paintings!

PHOTO COURTESY OF LAURENCE BAKER

For more information, visit Richard's website at: www.wawro.net or send an email to his representative, Laurence Baker: rbecker64@aol.com



BOOK INFORMATION

Author: Lara Saguisag
Illustrator: Marcus Nada
Publisher: Lampara Books

- Ludwig van Beethoven, composer
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, composer
- Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone
- Albert Einstein, physicist
- Isaac Newton, mathematician and physicist
- Vincent Van Gogh, painter
- “Bobby Fischer, chess champion
- John Nash, mathematician portrayed by Russell Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind*

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Siblings

Ginny and Caloy are siblings in the story. Have the children reflect on times they have been upset, jealous or frustrated by a sibling of their own. These can be written down in journal form. Afterwards, the teacher or guidance counselor can work with the class to talk about ways they can express their feelings resolve conflicts with siblings positively.

Make a Mobile

Have the students bring in clothes hangers (or two barbecue sticks tied together in the center to form an X) and provide them with paper, coloring pens, and string. The students then illustrate three to four of their chosen scenes from the story with a short explanation at the back of the drawing about the scene and why it made an impact on them. They then cut these out and tie them to the hanger or sticks to make a mobile. When they're done, the students may share their work in small groups, and the mobiles may be hung around the classroom for everyone to enjoy.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Bambi Sy is an early childhood educator who taught elementary children for several years at Brent International School Manila. She now shares her passion for progressive, experiential, constructivist, and individualized education with the future teachers who are now her students at De La Salle University.

SEASON'S READINGS

Their titles say it all. Enjoy these novels this holiday season!

BY MARY AN K. GONZALEZ

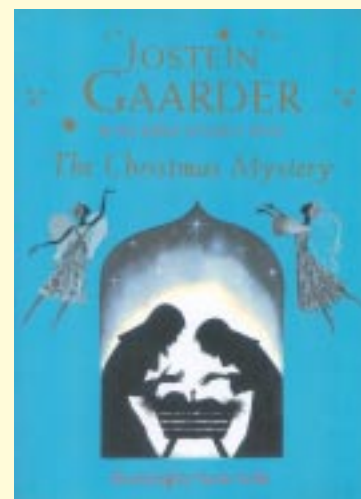
THE CHRISTMAS TRAIN By David Baldacci

When David Baldacci was interviewed regarding *The Christmas Train*, he described it as “a runaway screwball comedy on a train, separated by intense moments of personal strife, quiet introspection, romantic mayhem and puzzling mysteries. It’s the classic travel adventure tale.” This light, feel-good novel does have a little of everything: comedy, drama, some suspense, and romance.

The novel centers around Tom Langdon, a journalist who rides the train to meet his girlfriend in time for Christmas. But while riding the train and amidst his musings over what has become of his life, he crosses paths with a former love who left him for reasons he still can’t understand. Several unexpected twists and turns pepper the novel, making it an entertaining read altogether.

Although it does not pretend to be anything else, the novel does have morsels of wisdom like “It takes spirit and faith and passion to really believe. Like most things worthwhile in life, you get back what you put into it. Only with faith you get back a lot more...” Still, it cannot compare with O’Henry’s famous story “The Gift of the Magi” or Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, which have become classics and favorite Christmas stories over time.

—Both books are available at National Bookstore.



THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY By Jostein Gaarder

The Christmas Mystery is not a “whodunit” in the tradition of Agatha Christie or Arthur Conan Doyle. Rather, this novel by the Norwegian philosopher Jostein Gaarder, who’s best known for his philosophical fiction *Sophie’s World*, is a mystery in the magical sense.

Set in Norway at the present time, the novel (illustrated wonderfully by Sarah Gibb) tells of Joachim, a young boy who opts for a faded, handmade Advent calendar in a bookstore over ones with chocolates or plastic toys. His decision leads to a daily dose of a continuing narrative written on tightly folded pieces of paper that fall out of the calendar windows. The narrative is about a young girl named Elisabet who unwittingly journeys back in time and space to the birth of Jesus accompanied by a cast of characters in her quest.

Elisabet’s story engrosses Joachim, who looks forward to finding out what would happen next, since he and his parents eventually realize that there is a mystery in the Advent calendar waiting to be solved. Together, they develop a fresh sense of wonder at the first Christmas.

About the writer: Mary An K. Gonzalez graduated with a BS Management Engineering degree from the Ateneo de Manila University. Prior to joining the corporate world, she went out to fulfill her childhood dream of being an English and Algebra teacher. Now a wife and mother, she tutors students and does editing work for various clients at home. She is wheelchair-bound.