



# IBBY UK and books about disability

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Choosing the **IBBY** List of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities, by **Rebecca Butler**

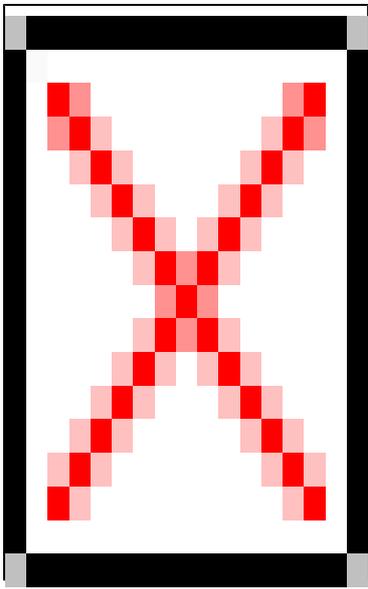
Every two years the **International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)** organises an international review of books for children which will help young readers to a better understanding of disability and disabled people. There are eighty national or regional sections of IBBY. Each section has the right to nominate up to twelve books across three categories to support understanding of disability. The categories are (1) books in specialised formats such as Braille or with tactile features. Such books are designed specifically for children with sensory or learning disabilities. Category (2) is picture books published within the general circulation featuring characters with disabilities. Category (3) is longer novels featuring characters with disabilities. Nominated books must function as narratives. They must also portray disability in a positive and non-discriminatory manner. No one will recommend a book that is worthy but unengaging for young readers.

The public library of Toronto is the home of **IBBY's** disability archive. For this reason the evaluation of the entries from all the different sections is in the hands of the Canadian branch of **IBBY**.

Those learning about the **IBBY** process for the first time may ask themselves why such an international review is necessary. It is a valid criterion of a civilised society that its citizens should have a positive and non-discriminatory attitude towards disability and disabled people. Adults are most likely to have such a view of disability if they are encouraged to develop that view as children. Those who develop such a positive view in childhood are unlikely to grow up as prejudiced adults. The **IBBY** list helps adults ? teachers, parents, librarians and older siblings ? to see books as a vital tool for opening discussions about disability. Books have the advantage over elaborate teaching aids. They are cheap and widely available.

**IBBY UK** [3] nominated books for consideration in the second and third categories, picture books and full-length novels. The whole list of UK nominations for 2019 is available on the [IBBY UK](#) [3] [website](#) [3]. We failed to make any nominations, however, in the category of special format books. Such books are a rarity in the publishing world. While there must be understandable commercial reasons for such a lack, IBBY would commend any publisher who takes this deficiency seriously.

There is a further question influencing the choices made in the **IBBY** process, a question to which no definitive answer has yet



been found. How do we define disability? **IBBY** defines disability as any condition which affects the life of a young person and restricts the freedom of that young person to live life as he or she wishes. This definition is wide, as perhaps any such definition needs to be. But is it too wide? There was among the **IBBY** members a serious debate about how such a definition might apply to mental health. Additionally one of the books nominated by the UK section had a character who wears glasses. To what extent is needing spectacles a genuine disability? The answer to that question depends to some extent on whether the respondent has ever worn glasses.

The process by which books are nominated is inevitably quite complex and demanding. Publishers need to take the process seriously and make the necessary effort to provide background information. Most publishers are getting better at meeting the needs of the process, as they become more familiar with it year by year. At the end of the process **IBBY UK** nominated eleven books. We expect the result of the international assessment to be announced at the Bologna book fair in April 2019.

Leading this project for [IBBY UK](#) [3] was a privilege for me, and gave me the pleasure of reading many excellent works. Among the books the UK section nominated, my personal favourite was **The Christmasaurus**, written by Tom Fletcher and illustrated by Shane Devries, published by Puffin. It is the story of a boy who is a wheelchair user and who receives a dinosaur as his Christmas present. It is rare to see a wheelchair user as a central character in a fantasy, and where the author resists the temptation to end the narrative with a miraculous cure, an infuriating conclusion for disabled readers.

The **IBBY UK** nominations follow:

**A Storm of Strawberries**, Jo Cotterill, Piccadilly Press (category 3)

[Running on Empty](#) [4], S. E Durrant (ill Rob Biddulph) Nosy Crow (category 3)

**The Christmasaurus**, Tom Fletcher (ill Shane Devries). Puffin (category 3)

**Night Shift**, Debi Gliori, Hot Key Books (category 2)

**Summer's Story: Living with Epilepsy**, Andy Glynn & Salvador Maldonado, Franklin Watts (category 2)

**Proud to be Deaf**, Ava, Lilli, & Nick Beese (ill Romina Marti) Wayland (category 2)

**State of Grace**, Rachel Lucas Macmillan (category 3)

**Zeki Can Swim**, Anna McQuinn & Ruth Hearson, Alanna Books (category 2)

[Optimists Die First](#) [5], Susin Nielsen, Andersen Press (category 3)

**Ava's Spectacular Spectacles**, Alice Rex (ill Angela Perrini) New Frontier (category 2)

**Frida Kahlo**, Isabel Sanchez Vegara(ill. Gee Fan Eng), Frances Lincoln (category 2)

### **Touring the international list in the UK**

An exhibition of the books on the **2015 international Disability List** toured several venues in the UK earlier this year, visiting **The Story Museum**, Oxford; **The Hive**, Worcester; **Seven Stories**, Newcastle; and **Brighton University School of Education**. The 2017 collection will be touring in the UK in autumn 2018. For further information, please contact **IBBY** Committee Treasurer, Sue Mansfield e-mail: mansfield37@btinternet.com

**Dr Rebecca Butler** writes and lectures on children's literature.

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