



TRUEMAN BRADLEY, *Aspie Detective* by Alexei Maxim Russell

Note to teacher:

Even though Asperger's syndrome is no longer categorized as a separate disorder and is now listed under autism spectrum disorders (high functioning autism), many still refer to the condition as Asperger's syndrome.

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders lists the following symptoms. Decide what your class knows or should know about Asperger's before reading the book *Truman Bradley*.

The author embeds many symptoms in his story:

- May lack ability to modulate the volume of voice to match surroundings
- May have poor social skills and narrow interests
- Will gather enormous amounts of factual information about a favorite subject and talk incessantly about it
- Conversation may seem like a random collection of facts or statistics, with no point or conclusion
- May approach other people but make normal conversation difficult by eccentric behaviors or by wanting only to talk about their singular interest.
- May be highly active
- Often awkward and poorly coordinated
- May fail to demonstrate empathy with peers and have trouble understanding idioms, expressions, social cues
- Finds social situations and personal relationships challenging
- May have sensory integration problems or poor motor coordination

Pre-reading aloud/introduction:

This book can be used as a follow-up to The Cromwell Center's presentation, as an introduction to Asperger's/autism, or as a tool to help build better understanding of particular students in your school/class.

1. Discuss with students their knowledge of Asperger's syndrome. Create a two-column chart with the headings What We Know and What We Learned. List students' thoughts under What We Know.
2. Read the full title. Have them predict what the words "Aspie Detective" might mean in context of the story.
3. Explain to students that this book is about a character who has Asperger's syndrome. Throughout the story they will hear Trueman explain to people what that means for him and his life.

4. Remind students that only a professional can diagnose any disability, including autism. "We are reading this story so that maybe we can learn something we didn't know about people with this condition. We will hear about the challenges that Trueman faces and what he and the people he meets learn from each other."

During reading:

At the end of each chapter, allow the students an opportunity to add to the What We Learned column on the chart.

Post-reading:

Look at the chart created and discuss what they learned:

- Has this changed your understanding about Asperger's, what it is like to have Asperger's and maybe disabilities in general?
- Do people with disabilities have the same feelings, hopes, dreams, and aspirations as everyone else?
- Did Trueman have to work hard to prove to himself and others that he could be a good detective?
- Do we often have to work hard to prove to ourselves and others that we can do something?
- Is it worth the hard work? Was it for Trueman?

Extension activity:

To build awareness of disabilities, have students do a short research project about a specific disability, either individually or as small group. The goal is for them to learn, and then share what they have learned, about what the disability is, what challenges a person with that disability faces, and how others can help make life for that person better. Possible topics: autism, ADHD, Down syndrome, depression, anxiety, dyslexia, blindness, deafness, etc.

Remind students:

- This is a serious topic
- All information needs to be treated with dignity and respect
- Only a professional can diagnose a disability
- Having a disability is just one part of who a person is
- We want to focus on abilities and feelings, and we also want to understand challenges that people with disabilities can face.

Research project:

- What is the disability called?
- What are the signs/symptoms?
- What challenges does this disability present for the person who is diagnosed?
- What accommodation/help is available for someone with this disability?