



# It's Complicated: Living with a Disability

**Book:** *Strangers Think My Girlfriend is My Nurse and Not So Different: What you really want to ask about having a disability*, by Shane Burcaw

**Description:** The essence of these books is about being honest and vulnerable. Honest about what you really think about a person with a disability and vulnerable to both being asked very personal questions and about being willing to ask uncomfortable questions about bodies and ability.

**Materials:** Adaptive sporting equipment such as a hockey sled, a basketball wheelchair, a standard manual wheelchair.

**Estimated Cost:** \$0 - \$100 for Ice Rink tickets or snacks depending on the size of the group.

## Instructions:

These activities could be done with an on school campus book group, a public library TAB group, or even a school class that is working on a unit around ADA Law and Social Justice Issues.

Create an experience for teens where both able bodied and disabled teens have an opportunity to ask honest questions, get a little vulnerable, and to try on life as a person living with a disability.

- Main stream teens to read Shane's books and then meet with students from the Special Day class (who read the book for younger readers perhaps) at their own high school. Set up a book group where everyone discusses Shane's books and has a chance to ask honest, real questions.
- A follow up activity might include an outing to a joint lesson where the mainstream students and the Special Day class work together on a mural or setting up a school event like a dance. The idea is to normalize disability and not only include the Special Day students into a classic high school experience, but for the mainstream students to begin to see the Special Day students as normal teens who want to have the same kind of experiences as all teens.

The culminating experience involves local disabled veterans or a friend of a friend who is both disabled and willing to talk to teens about disability. Borrow a couple of wheelchairs (from a hospital perhaps) or even invite the teens to the local ice rink if there is a sled hockey team who plays there. Ask if the class can meet with the team to talk about their experiences and maybe even try the hockey sleds out on the ice. The goal here is to allow teens to try out wheelchairs or hockey sleds to get a glimpse of what's it's like to move through life in a seated position.

## Learning Objective for all teens:

Learn greater empathy for people with disabilities. Make friends. Feel included.

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ALA-CBC Joint Committee  
YALSA Symposium 2017, Louisville, KY