

## **CCS / ELA / SS Alignment for *The Invisible Boy***

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### **Life Lessons – Addressing & Reaching Out to the Socially Excluded, Invisible Child**

This delicately illustrated picture book appears, on the surface, to be a book best shared with elementary school readers. Yet, as the reader ponders the title, *The Invisible Boy*, the universality of this feeling and experience of life for almost all readers of any age, immediately hits home. Who has not felt invisible in a group even though present? Who has not suffered the unspeakable anguish of waiting to be chosen for a team or a group and NOT been selected? Who has had to listen to others in close proximity talk about a great party they've attended, while being fully aware that he or she, the listener, was NOT INVITED to this party? Who, even as an adult, still bears the emotional scars of this invisibility?

This story, written by Trudy Ludwig and illustrated by Patrice Barton, not only makes these shared life experiences authentic through this simple narrative of a friendless child, it also teaches pivotal life lessons in dealing with invisibility. While feeling invisible in some settings or social situations may be an inevitable consequence of life, Ms. Ludwig, through the optimistic and talented character of Brian, teaches key life lessons for all who, at any age, find themselves in similar painful situations. Given the simplicity of a story of a boy who goes from being invisible in his class to being a joyous included student at the end of the book, this work also lends itself to use by teachers of special needs students and teachers of ELL/Newcomer students. Brian's invisibility is inherent for many of these students as part of their class designations as separate entities or even as "CTT" inclusion members in regular education classes. For their teachers and for them as readers and listeners the lessons of this story can offer real life strategies for living with invisibility and becoming visible as well.

### **FOR GRADES 3-6**

Teachers can use *The Invisible Boy* to make Reading, Writing (including narratives, memoirs, explanatory, critical/comparative text analysis, research), Speaking and Listening (small group, whole class and individual presentations) and Language (including a focus on multicultural, book craft, and special domain words) vocabulary skills.

Use of this seemingly simple picture book can serve as a platform for independent student research into online and print informational books about popularity, friendship, and self-esteem. Students in the upper elementary grades can begin by examining the informational and fictional recommended reading for kids' selections Ms. Ludwig includes in her back material. They can compare and contrast as part of their range of reading and writing the insights and ideas of these works on invisibility. They can also talk about or present, using charts and drawings, the ways in which Brian's strategies for dealing with exclusion and methods of making friends tally with those suggested in the story. This represents the range of reading and text complexity Reading Standards for Informational and Reading (CCSS ELA) as well as addressing the presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (with posters, graphics, music, sound) to accentuate facts and details from research as part of the Speaking and Listening CCSS ELA Standards. Following this research whose results can be charted or displayed or presented as multimedia short infomercials, students have the opportunity to use insights gained through their discussion of Brian's

transformation as the inspiration for a variety of written explanatory projects including a personal toolbox for becoming visible to others (*CCSS Writing Standards short research, informative/explanatory texts, arguments to support claims, narratives to develop imagined experiences and real experiences*), a list of ways to help others and a list of fun activities to do solo.

### **Before reading *The Invisible Boy***

*(CCSS ELA Speaking and Listening- Comprehension and Collaboration- CCSS Reading Craft and Structure to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text and analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone)*

1. Begin by asking the children, have you ever felt like you were invisible to others? Where and when did it happen?
2. How did others “mean” to make you feel invisible or perhaps not “mean” to make you feel invisible? How did you react to this feeling?
3. Do you enjoy being alone or are you only happy when you are talking, playing, or being with others? Can you be happy being on your own and also with others? Explain your feelings and how you are on your own and/or with others.
4. Do you prefer or want to be alone or do you prefer to be among others and share with them? Talk about your feelings.

Given the age and speaking/writing capacity of the various classes, teachers can direct the students to: develop cartoons or graphic arts to represent themselves as invisible or visible to others; do role play scenarios; or share their reactions to the word *invisible*. They can develop poems or lists or T-Charts of ways they feel happy or sad when they are alone and explain using a chart or perhaps a Venn diagram whether, on the whole, they prefer being on their own or with others. Everyone likes some time alone and some students enjoy being alone while others prefer group settings.

As the students share their responses, emphasize to them that the full range of reactions to feeling invisible is to be expected and indicates their diversity and the key thing is to be able to be comfortable and to address those situations where invisible students want to be included by others. Some students are naturally shy and would not want to be included.

With special needs students and ESL/Newcomer students, these issues are particularly pertinent. Often these students’ seeming shyness or reluctance / inability to be included by others or feelings of invisibility is a result of deliberate exclusion by regular education students or by American born students. However, sometimes their invisibility to regular education peers or English speaking American students comes out of lack of social skills and differing cultural ways of connecting with peers. The frank pre-discussion questions in this section can help these students truly benefit from Brian’s experiences in the manuscript and apply them to their own school and social situations.

### **During the class reading of *The Invisible Boy***

Questions to ask-ROUND ONE: (*CCSS ELA Reading for Ideas, Details- Craft and Style- Presentation of Knowledge and Research, CCSS Speaking and Listening- CCSS Language use of Nuanced Words*) Make certain

all students focus on the way that the Patrice Barton’s illustrations are intrinsic (essential) to telling the narrative. In particular, go from the illustrations to the text as a way of engaging spatial, special education, and ESL/Newcomer learners in the story immediately.

1. What do you notice on the first two pages of the story about Patrice Barton’s use of color in her illustration for sketching Brian and his classmates? (Have the children notice that the class students are drawn in color, but Brian is sketched in black and white.)
2. With what type of a sentence does Trudy Ludwig begin her story? Why does she begin it that way? (The question draws the children in and focuses on the use of the word *invisible*.)
3. In what ways is it bad that Nathan and Sophie are so visible to Mrs. Carlotti?
4. What does Mrs. Carlotti mean when she says that Nathan needs to work on volume control? (Have the students focus on the nuance use of *volume control* meaning to keep one’s voice down).
5. Ask the children to look at the illustrations of the large Nathan screaming and Sophie whining and contrast them with the small black and white sketch of Brian. Have them use this contrast to explain what Ludwig means in the story text: “Nathan and Sophie take up a lot of space. Brian doesn’t.” (***CCSS Reading for ideas, details and figurative language use. CCSS Speaking and Listening –engaging in whole group student centered discussions***)

**BIG QUESTIONS:** Is it a good goal to be visible like Nathan and Sophie so that the teacher pays attention to you because you “take up a lot of space”? If yes, why? Support with at least three details. If no, why not? Support with at least three details. (***CCSS ELA Reading for Information-Key Ideas and Details, CCSS Speaking and Listening, CCSS Writing Persuasive Essay – for grades 3-4, argument writing for grades 5-6***)

**OR**

Is it a better idea to be quiet and not cause trouble, like Brian, so you don’t take up space and often are invisible—even to the busy teacher? If yes, why? Support with at least three details. If no, why? Support with at least three details.

For special needs students: Do you ever feel as though your assistive devices or your movements or way of reacting to the lessons “take up a lot of space” and call attention to you? In what ways? How does the teacher react to you and how do the students? How do you cope?

**OR**

Do you feel in your class or when you go to lunch or share art class with other students or a music class that you are invisible to others and, like the sketch of Brian on the wall, do not take up much space at all? Explain or draw or share your answers in talk or movements.

**For Newcomers or ESL students:** When you go to lunch or the yard or gym or music, do you feel that, by the fact you do not yet speak English fluently or appear “American,” you are either invisible to other students or that you are being gossiped about and are all too visible as being different in a bad way? Explain or draw or write and talk about this in your own language. (THIS CAN and will lead to rich and self revealing/needed frank student centered rigorous and responsive discussions which align with student-centered, student-engaged conversations in the Danielson Framework.

**BIG QUESTION:** Beyond making friends in the class or having the teacher pay attention to you, is it good to be a quiet student or person? Explain why you think it is good to be quiet and give two reasons to persuade others to accept your idea. *(CCSS ELA Speaking and Listening-delineate a speaker's argument-CCSS ELA Writing Make an argument)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** In what ways is Justin, the new boy, being treated in the same way as Brian? In what ways is Justin being treated differently? Explain by using details about how the class reacts to Justin. *(CCSS ELA Reading for Information- Analyze in detail how a key individual is introduced, illustrated and elaborated in the text-)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** Have you ever been the new student or child in a class or in a group? How were you treated by the others? How did that feel to you? *(CCSS Writing Explanatory- Speaking and Listening)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** What happens to Brian when the selection process is done by Micah and J.T. for the kickball teams? Do you feel that the ways Micah and J.T. use to choose new team members are fair? *(CCSS Writing – Argument)*

How might the story be retold from Micah and J. T.'s perspectives? Do they realize the pain they are causing Brian? How could they change their way of choosing teammates in a way that isn't hurtful to others? *(CCSS Collaborative Speaking and Listening Collaborative Discussions reviewing key ideas of text and demonstrating multiple perspectives through reflection – CCSS Writing – Write narrative to develop real or imagined events)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** What part of the story comes next after Brian is invisible in the playground? How does the scene at the cafeteria serve as a good follow up to the playground treatment? *(CCSS ELA Reading for Information- Craft and Structure)*

**For ESL or Special Education Students:** When you are in the playground with students from other classes, do you feel that they are ready to make friends with you or do they treat you as if you are invisible? Draw or tell what you would say to them about being invisible if you could.

Retell or enact the scene at the cafeteria if Fiona and Madison knew how they were hurting Brian by talking about a party they had not invited him to. Do you think they would have spoken that way if they knew how he felt? There is no single correct answer. Create or retell the story in a way that makes sense in terms of the printed and illustrated story. *(CCSS ELA Writing and Reading through Multiple perspectives)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** What happens during Choosing Time in Brian's classroom? How does Brian react to not being chosen or invited to play Board games with the other kids? Why do you think Brian does this? What does he produce that is beautiful during Choosing Time? *(CCSS ELA Reading: Key Details and Structure)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** In what ways does Justin's lunch of Bulgogi call attention to him and make him very visible to the students in his class? How do the students react to his eating lunch with chopsticks? *(CCSS ELA Reading: Key Ideas and Structure- Language Academic and Special Domain Vocabulary Acquisition)*

**BIG QUESTIONS:** As Brian observes the other kids making fun of Justin’s lunch and eating habits, he wonders “which is worse—being laughed at or feeling invisible.” Which do you feel is worse for you and why? There is no single right answer. You need only answer the question telling the truth about how you feel. Just tell or draw or act two reasons why you feel it is worse to be laughed at or worse to be invisible. **(CCSS ELA Writing- Argument Writing)**

**BIG QUESTIONS:** How does Brian use his art and writing talents to reach out to Justin? In what ways does this reaching out help Brian with his main problem of being invisible to the others in his class? How does Justin react to Brian’s note and drawing? **(CCSS ELA Reading- Key Ideas and Structure)**

**BIG QUESTIONS:** Look at the details in the illustration of Brian after he leaves the note in Justin’s box. How does Brian’s illustration change after he starts talking with Justin? (Brian becomes visible and in color as he starts to socialize with Justin- all students can be facilitated to see this color change.) How does Justin show kindness to Brian in exchange for the kind note Brian left him about his Bulgogi? **(CCSS ELA Reading Craft and Structure)**

### **Activities after reading *The Invisible Boy*:**

Oral History- Parent Outreach:

**CCSS Writing- Research to Build and Present Knowledge-Culminating Activities:**

Interview a parent or a close neighbor or other adult. Have the students share with these adults what they have learned about acts of kindness, feeling invisible, or being the new kid in this book. Ask them whether they have ever been the new kid in class or felt invisible. Write down or draw pictures of the stories shared by the adults being interviewed for the oral histories. In addition, students in grades 4-6 may want to ask the adults how they changed from being invisible to being visible and accepted, or they can ask the adults for advice in dealing with the students’ own social problems. **(CCSS ELA Speaking and Listening Conversations- CCSS ELA Writing a Narrative or an Oral History)**

**(CCSS ELA Reading for Information- Range of Reading)**

Students can read and compare and contrast other works by Trudy Ludwig which focus on students trying to make friends. Among these would be *Sorry!*, *Too Perfect*, *Just Kidding*, and *Confessions of a Former Bully*. Have the students grades 4-6 compare and contrast the criteria for judging and making friends these books suggest with that of *The Invisible Boy*. As part of an author study they can make Venn diagrams, detailing the ways these books share pointers for making or being good friends and for treating others with kindness. They can also create signs or posters, using quotes from a range of Trudy Ludwig books on the topic of making friends and responding to bullying. Students can illustrate these posters as well. Schools with media capacities- even a video camera- can have students film or even podcast or on the public address system do 30-60 second sound bites/infomercials on how to make friends and include others in their circle of friends. They can enact Ludwig characters like Brian and other students or the Guidance Counselors or Parents in the story. School Guidance, Principals, deans, and PTA/Security Officers can join or be interviewed in these daily digital doses of “visibility” for all. ESL Coordinators and staff not born in USA can support this by interviews on air or online about how they

made friends when they came to America. ESL and Special Education students should be an integral part of this project. **(CCSS ELA Writing-Short Research Paper )**

The recommended readings for kids at the back of Ludwig's book include informational and fictional works which also address tips on invisibility and inclusion. Students can do short book reviews or compare and contrast the informational works strategies with those suggested in this book. They can also consult with an onsite expert- the school psychologist, dean, guidance counselor, or teacher to get another expert review of the ideas to include in their reports. Students can also hold a Becoming Visible- Making More Friends book club session at lunch with one or more of these works as featured works. *Out of My Mind* about a wheelchair-bound unable to speak but brilliant 11-year-old girl and *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lait about a Vietnamese newcomer going to school in America are two other works that can offer another dimension for this book club that fosters literacy and promotes friendship and inclusion for all. ESL Students can read Norma Dresser's *Multicultural Manners* and present ways of making friends in other cultures which compare, contrast or even contradict US style. This research can break down or explain barriers which may seem like overt insults, but only represent a knowledge gap that can be filled.

***CCSS ELA Explanatory Writing- CCSS ELA Reading for Craft and Structure- CCSS Speaking and listening – Presentation of Knowledge and Research using graphic Illustration and digital media plus text***

In the beginning of *The Invisible Boy*, we see the black and white sketched drawing of lonely Brian, drawing a circle with chalk on the interior insert. At the end of the book, Brian is in vivid colors, drawing fringes on a classmate's carpet. Although Brian is a quiet child, he consistently takes joy in his art throughout the story and draws when not selected at Choosing time or left out by others. Even if one has friends, it is important to have joys, skills, and capacities to be alone and to be content.

Conclude this book by challenging students to list and celebrate things they love to do alone and perhaps might also enjoy sharing with others. Odes to friendship and to being alone happy on your own can be authored.