



Good Different

by Meg Eden Kuyatt

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GOOD DIFFERENT

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The Story

Selah knows her rules for being normal.

She always, always sticks to them. This means keeping her feelings locked tightly inside, despite the way they build up inside her as each school day goes on, so that she has to run to the bathroom and hide in the stall until she can calm down. So that she has to tear off her normal-person mask the second she gets home from school, and listen to her favorite pop song on repeat, trying to recharge. Selah feels like a dragon stuck in a world of humans, but she knows how to hide it.

Until the day she explodes and hits a fellow student.

Selah's friends pull away from her, her school threatens expulsion, and her comfortable, familiar world starts to crumble.

But as Selah starts to figure out more about who she is, she comes to understand that *different* doesn't mean *damaged*. Can she get her school to understand that, too, before it's too late?

This is a moving and unputdownable story about learning to celebrate the things that make us different.

Reading Group Questions

1. What were some of the challenges the main character, Selah, faced in this book? Who and what helps the main character address those challenges?
2. It's estimated about 1 in 5 kids is neurodivergent—that's a lot of neurodivergent kids! There are also lots of other unique needs and disabilities in your classroom and world. How can we show respect and consent for different types of people and needs?
3. Do you feel that there's something that makes you different from others? How does that make you feel? How can your difference be your strength?
4. Selah has lots of rules she thinks she has to follow—in how to interact with others, what she can talk about, and how she thinks others view her. What rules do you believe you have to follow? Which are true, and which might not be true or important? What NEW rules might you write for yourself to live a healthier life?

About the Author



Meg Eden Kuyatt is the author of *Good Different*, a Schneider Family Book Award Honor book. She is a neurodivergent author and creative writing instructor. She is a 2020 Pitch Wars mentee, and the author of young adult, middle grade, and poetry books. When she isn't writing, she's probably playing *Fire Emblem*. If she could be a Pokémon, she'd be Charizard. Find her online at megedenbooks.com or on Instagram at @meden_author. Please visit Meg's website at megedenbooks.com/good-different-classroom-resources for more discussion questions, poetry prompts, autism resources, and more!

Author Q&A

What inspired you to write *Good Different*?

I started writing this character in the worst of 2020, when my autism and anxiety felt so overwhelming in this world where people were (are) not being considerate of each other's space and safety. I felt so overwhelmed, attacked, and scared, and as I wrote, I dug up an old memory of a classmate braiding my hair without my consent. But as I continued to write, the speaker was no longer me but became this other girl, Selah. And Selah took action. She hit her classmate! I was in shock, but then also I knew I needed to write a novel to figure out why she did this and what would happen from there.

What inspired you to use verse to tell Selah's story and how did that approach impact the message you wanted to get across?

We come to poetry when prose is inadequate, when the content can only be in verse. There's that saying for musical theater, that the characters sing when the emotion's too strong for spoken word. They dance when the emotion's too strong for music. Poetry's like that. The emotion has to be so strong that it comes out organically in poetry. And my feelings about being neurodivergent in a neurotypical world, all the exhaustion and overstimulation and confusion of not being able to keep up—the feelings were too big for prose. So Selah's story just popped out in poems for me! I've also found that the verse helps readers who are different than Selah better understand an autistic perspective. The verse allows us to more viscerally feel what Selah's feeling. And that feeling, that helps create empathy for readers. My hope is that the verse helps readers, especially neurotypical readers, increase in empathy and understanding of different autistic experiences.

Selah takes great comfort in poetry. What is it about poetry that appeals to Selah—and, by extension, to you?

Poetry is about big feelings. It's also about the little moments and details that often go overlooked. Like Pablo Neruda's *Ode to Common Things*—in poetry, even the small things can be in the spotlight. As an autistic person, I really resonate with the possibilities of poetry, and the space for those big feelings over things the neurotypical world will often call "small."

What do you hope readers will take away from this story?

I hope neurodivergent readers can see a place for themselves in the world. I hope they can see characters like Selah and go—*hey, that's me! And there are tools that can help me succeed and be my best self!* Books are what brought me to discover my autism in the first place, and I hope that my books in turn can help others. But I also hope neurotypical readers can gain greater empathy for neurodivergent folks and see how all of us can be better allies.

Author Q&A (continued)

When and how did you come to realize that you were on the autism spectrum?

I think I first realized I wasn't like everyone else in college, when I was living away from home, with people who liked to leave the lights on and be loud late at night. I had a complete meltdown at my roommate, who kept her desk light on all night, making it impossible for me to sleep. I couldn't believe it—who does that, I wondered? It just seemed obvious to me that you don't do something like that. But that's when I realized people are different, and that just because something's obvious to me doesn't mean it is to someone else, that just because it bothers me doesn't mean it bothers other people. I was shocked it didn't bother anyone else. I think that was the first clue to me that maybe I'm different in how this sensory stuff impacts me.

I've always known I'm different, but in my family that was always celebrated (my parents are incredibly amazing, supportive people). College was the first time I wondered if that difference was something that was more than just “quirky.” I learned about autism from a book and actually made my own major where I focused on trying to understand the brain, and especially autism. The culminating project was a novel from the perspective of an autistic girl, where I mined my early memories. It was very cathartic to write and made me realize I really identified with this whole autism thing. As I hit my twenties, I particularly noticed that I couldn't keep up with “normal” and had a bit of a crisis. How was everyone else able to hold full-time jobs, clean their house, cook, and see people in their spare time? I began to wonder if the reason I felt like I understood autism is because I was autistic (amazing how that works), but it was only during the pandemic that I got formally diagnosed and confirmed as on the spectrum—as well as having an anxiety disorder.

In the acknowledgements, you thank God for making your brains the way they are, which is such a powerful example of acceptance—something everyone can learn from. Do you have any advice on how to quiet the negative voice we all have inside?

I love this question! The negative voices are still there, unfortunately! But they get quieter, or perhaps I'm learning how to push them to the background a bit. I am learning that reminding myself what is true is critical. I know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I know that what I've been given is a purposeful, intentional choice. I don't always understand why, but if I try to focus on what I know—instead of the doubts, insecurities and fears I at times feel—this encourages me to persist. I have potential and possibility. I have a job to do in just living out who I am. And what a cool job that is!

Selah loves dragons, especially *How to Train Your Dragon*. What is your special interest?

Special interests are things autistic folks love that help them better understand the world and connect to those around them. One of my special interests is Pokémon! The Pokémon world is where I always escaped when I was around Selah's age, and it still feels like a fantastical safe space. Imagine being able to carry super-powered monsters in your pocket that can help you do just about anything and are also your best friends? Yes, please! I felt like everyone was leaving at that time in my life, and that no one really got me, but I felt like Pokémon would get me; that was a huge comfort. Pokémon trainers have so much more control over their world than the typical kid and seem like they really belong as part of a team.