

Questioning Inclusion and Empathy: Autism in A Boy Called Bat

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Summary:

This research presents a critical and cultural analysis of the novel A Boy Called Bat by Elana K Arnold, discussing the issues of Autism and how it is represented in contemporary American children's literature. this research starts by discussing how autism and disability are situated within the broader context of American culture, especially with identity, empowerment, and the intersectionality of race and disability.

The critical analysis focuses on the protagonist of the novel Bixiby Alexander Tam (Bat), through examines the medical and the social model of disability. The research investigates how Bat's autism is portrayed, whether it is medicalized or socially constructed. Also showing Bat's style of communication that illustrates his emotional expression, behavioral patterns, and sensory sensitivities. The analysis explores Bat's interactions with family members, classmates, and his pet skunk (Thor), showing how these relationships can support or challenge his self-identity and social development, the effect of communication, and examines whether Bat is verbal or non-verbal and how this affects the narrative structure of the novel.

Introduction:

This research paper aims to present the intersectionality of autism and cultural diversity in American fiction. The research shows how Elana K Arnold's narrative presents neurodiversity in American children's fiction. Through her writings, Arnold shows Bat's interaction with his family and school as an autistic child. This research shows the effects of societal expectations and how cultural values shape Bat's experiences as an autistic child. The goal of this research is to change the perspectives of representations of autistic characters in literature.

The research produces a portrayal of autism in children's literature. Exploring the symptoms of autism in children, Arnold emphasizes the role of promoting awareness and acceptance of autistic individuals, underscoring the impact of cultural and domestic settings on Bat's autistic identity. emphasizing the importance

of the environmental factors that affect Bat's identity, shaping his experiences, Arnold uses the narrative technique and literary devices that attract the readers and enhance the depth of the story. Through this multifaceted approach, the research underscores the importance of representing autism in literature.

The research explores how American literature has historically portrayed people with disability, particularly autism. The research shows a biographical and critical overview of the author, Elana K. Arnold, discussing her aim for writing this novel. The research includes the novel's genre and its publication history. Also, it embodies Arnold's inspiration and background, and her aim to choose a child to represent autism.

Autism in children:

This research examines autism spectrum disorder (ASD) by introducing a work of children's narratives, *A Boy Called Bat* by Elana K Arnold, and critiques the autism representation through the protagonist "Bat". Also, investigate the author's reasons and goals for writing this novel.

Autism spectrum disorder (autism) is a heterogeneous group of neurodevelopmental conditions characterized by early childhood-onset impairments in communication and social interaction alongside restricted and repetitive behaviors. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is called "spectrum" because it includes a range of symptoms that are different from one person to another. Many factors lead to cause autism, such as genetic factors, environmental factors, and brain development (Lord, C., & Bishop, S. L. 2010). Reports record that 1 in 31 children in the USA are diagnosed with ASD (Shaw, K. A. 2025).

Unfortunately, there is no cure for autism. Still, various interventions may help people with ASD develop their skills, such as behavioral therapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, social skill training, and medication. Some children benefit greatly from intervention and support, which leads them to show early significant developments, while others still need assistance to live their lives. There are various symptoms in kids that make it harder to diagnose autism spectrum disorder, such as trouble with social communication, repetitive behavior, and restricted routines. These signs appear through problems in social interaction and communication. New studies show early warning signs in babies, particularly those with high risk in the family, to recognize the paths that lead to diagnosis. Early signs can show small changes in communication and social interactions, such as less need

to engage socially or make eye contact (Zwaigenbaum *et al.*, 2015). Knowing these signs early is important to help find early therapy that could be more effective for people with ASD. understanding autism spectrum disorder requires recognizing different forms of ASD.

The signs of ASD show in three main areas: issues with social communication, repetitive actions, and limited interests. Kids with autism spectrum disorder suffer from difficulties with social communication; some of them are verbal, while others are nonverbal. Additionally, repetitive actions are signals of kids with ASD, and hand-flapping, also, strict routines, are common symptoms. There are different treatments available that are discussed in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) that are supportive and effective. kids with ASD struggle socially; they fail to interact and form relationships, showing unusual social behavior, leading to loneliness and confusion among their peers (Miller *et al.*, 2017). These social interactions create stress and tension for parents. There is a connection between sensory sensitivity and repetitive behaviors, meaning that children who are more sensitive to sensory input might display these behaviors more often (Schulz *et al.*, 2018).

Recognizing these differences early creates a supportive effect on children with ASD. This means that children with ASD are more sensitive to sounds, gestures, and lights. They repeat their behaviors more than other children with ASD. Repetitive behaviors include repeating phrases, rocking, and hand-flipping. In such cases, repetitive behavior can provide a sort of relief and comfort for a child with autism. In recent years the number of people who diagnosed with ASD has increased leading to find criteria that is used in clinical evaluations.

Exploring Autism in A Boy Called Bat

The novel A Boy Called Bat by Elana K. Arnold embodies important themes about childhood, acceptance, and identity. the story presents a boy named Bixby Alexander Tam, nicknamed Bat. The boy is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Bat's mother is a veterinarian, and he has a deep love for animals. his mother brings an orphan baby skunk to the home, the mother asked Bat to take care of it temporarily. The strong bond of the relationship between the skunk "Thor" and Bat explores the theme of acceptance.

The animal "Thor" represents a source of relief and comfort for Bat; this animal provides the stability that Bat needs in a world that often becomes overwhelmed.

Bat takes care of Bat, which becomes a therapeutic approach that helps Bat to depend on himself. By nurturing the skunk, Bat learns how to control his emotions and expresses himself in a way that makes him feel comfortable. The mother's patience plays an important role in shaping Bat's autonomy. Bat's parent is divorced, and the impact of the separation affects Bat's relationship with his father, which makes it more complicated. He hates changes and loves routines, and this belongs to his autistic identity. Bat can't stay away from the skunk, but each Friday, he has to visit his father and stay with him. his father can't understand him because the boy is autistic and understands everything around him differently, for example:

"Hi sport? Said Dad

Bat didn't like being called "sport" because he didn't like playing sports or watching sports. Bat liked being called Bat, because he liked playing with animals and reading about animals and watching videos about animals. But Dad didn't like calling him Bat. When he wasn't calling Bat "sport" he always called him Bixby alexander." (35)

This quotation from the novel shows how Bat's father misunderstands his needs, and also explores themes of acceptance and communication. Bat's nickname reflects his love for animals and his strong sense of self. The father's insistence on calling him Bat shows a lack of understanding of Bat's identity and a lack of awareness of Bat's autism, which creates a gap between the father and the son. This moment aligns with scholars like Murry (2008) who claim that autistic individuals experience identity removal when neurotypical figures disregard their personal choices. Moreover, Arnold's portrayal of Bat's emotions supports the idea that an autistic individual advance a deep connection to naming and language. And insists on respecting autistic identities, the story of this novel critiques the societal norms, especially for boys, and their interests in sports, and their being accepted for their interests.

"be careful, sport," said Dad, which was a dumb thing to say because the host chocolate was already spilled and being careful now wouldn't unspill it. Bat couldn't enjoy the taste of this drink at all because the only thing he could thing about was the wet, uncomfortable stain on his shirt." (75)

This quotation explores the characteristics of autism, such as literal thinking and sensory sensitivity. Through this quotation, Arnold explores how Bat spilled the hot chocolate and feels uncomfortable with the wet stain on his shirt, which made the moment unenjoyable. Through this accident, readers can understand the increasing

sensitivity of autistic individuals. This accident reveals how Bat deals with the world differently; this moment increases the reader's awareness, which helps to understand and empathize with the autistic individuals differently. Bat translates his father's speech into literal meaning, no need for more attention because the hot chocolate has already spilled, and the father's words are illogical.

In this quotation, Arnold explores the importance of increasing the awareness of autism, which can be obvious through how the father responds with the phrase "Be careful, sport." The sensory sensitivity of autistic individuals makes Bat lose the pleasure when the hot chocolate has spilled on his shirt.

The novel shows the importance of verbal skills, which shape themes of neurodiversity. Arnold shows Bat's conversations, which are simple and literal, and this is common for an autistic individual. Bat's style of speaking shows his wish to communicate with others, and also shows his difficulty in navigating society.

The role of educators is important in developing kids with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Arnold allows readers to see the influence of educators on autistic lives. In the novel *A Boy Called Bat*, the character of the teacher, "Mr. Grayson," plays an important role in developing Bat's identity.

"Mr. Grayson was a good teacher for lots of reasons: he let kids eat snacks at their desk if they were hungry. He didn't make students ask permission to go to the bathroom. He didn't believe in making people apologize. ("you can't make someone be sorry," he always said.)

And he believed in class pets. That's how he put it. "I believe in class pet," he had said on the first day of class when he introduced them to Babycakes, the class rabbit. (29)

In this quotation, Arnold shows Bat's inner feelings and thoughts about his teacher, Mr. Grayson. The existence of educators is important for neurodivergent kids. Mr. Grayson is supportive, and increased awareness helps in developing Bat's personal growth; his teacher helps to create a comfortable environment for learning. For example, Mr. Grayson allows Bat to share his animal facts with his classmates, and he understands Bat's love for animals and presents appropriate support. Mr. Grayson uses an empathetic teaching approach, which helps Bat develop his adaptability and self-assurance. Also, he respects Bat and treats him kindly, and helps him to communicate and cooperate with his classmates. He respects his differences. This indicates the importance of mentorship, which serves as a strong force to transform neurodivergent children. Allowing Bat to share his information

about animals with his classmates makes Bat feel confident, which enables him to navigate the social expectations. A healthy and comfortable environment develops Bat academically and socially.

Navigating Bat's autistic Identity: Medical Forces and social- Environmental

The novel shows the social and emotional issues in Bat's daily life, and the story of this novel presents autism in a way that fits with the aim of literature education. Arnold makes the readers recognize the lives of neurodiversity individuals and encourages readers to accept differences. Also, highlighting autistic experiences with social interactions reveals the family dynamics.

Creating a supportive environment helps autistic individuals build empathy and acceptance, allowing them to communicate with larger ideas of neurodiversity in society. Moreover, modern literature reveals the social system that provides awareness and inclusion for different families. The representation of family dynamics serves as an important way to discover the complexities of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). By diving deep into Bat's personality, Arnold skillfully challenges the readers to rethink conventional narratives of autism, and presents it as a different framework and not as a deficit, which makes the readers engage with this world by revealing disability and the ways to deal with it. Arnold shows themes of hope by presenting the characters who support the autistic kid, by showing respect, love, and patience. Providing them relief enables them to communicate with others without judging them.

"Bat went to private school. It had smaller than the public school, and his parents though it was a "better fit for him," which was fine with Bat. "(24)

The quotation shows how Bat went to a private school, and it also shows the significance of Bat's education. The supportive environment respects Bat's uniqueness as chilled with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), autistic individuals prefer a structured and low-stimulation environment. Bat prefers to study in a private school rather than in a public school, which allows Bat to engage with their education without becoming overwhelmed, providing Bat a relief, which enhances the social and academic development. The correct decision of Bat's parents reflects awareness and understanding of Bat's needs as an autistic person. By selecting a private comfortable school, they encourage Bat to express his thoughts and feelings, which offers more support and less social pressure. The specialized schools can provide the attention that is required for neurodivergent children.

Selecting a private school shows the medical model that explores Bat as having an impairment that requires diagnosis and treatment. Bat suffers from mental impairments; this symptom serves as significant evidence that can be classified under a medical diagnosis of autism.

The novel shows Bat' character with social norms and his personal experiences. Bat struggles to navigate societal norms, he faces different challenges such as misunderstanding and loneliness. This reflects the importance of understanding the complexity of Bat's emotions and the influence of the environment on his character. Readers can understand that Bat is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from his behaviors and interactions, which prove his disability. These symptoms need behavioral therapy, such as Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), helping Bat adapt to neurotypical expectations (Matson & Sturmey, 2011). Bat's struggles with eye contact and also misunderstanding social norms, which involves viewing his disability as an impairment rather than a cognitive variation (Frith, 2023). Moreover, the medical model advocates following an educational plan (IPEs), speech therapy, and social skills training to help Bat adapt to mainstream society (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Critics emphasize the knowledge that autistic people adapt to neurotypical people's expectations rather than being accepted as they are (Milton, 2012).

The story challenges the medical model by revealing Bat's experiences, diving deep into his emotions and thoughts. Arnold shows Bat's different ways of communication. Through this novel, Arnold shows her agreement with modern discussions that advocate for not considering autism as a kind of deficit but focus on its strengths (Baron-Cohen, 2000). Moreover, Bat's deep connection reveals how an autistic individual sees and analyzes things around him differently.

"Mom had tried to recognize his dresser drawers because she thought he could "use some help", she said, I'm sorry, Bat, but your drawers were just a mess. Your hats mixed in with pants and sweaters. I don't know how you find anything." (4)

This quotation shows the significance of understanding and respecting the neurodivergent perspective, particularly with the frame of family relationships. Through this conversation, readers can understand the relationship between Bat and his mother. In this scene, Bat organizes his stuff in a way that is different from other individuals. Bat follows a logical system, which his mother tries to disturb with his usual routine. The novel shows the challenges of autistic individuals face in a world

where neurotypical standards neglect their needs. This scene shows the difference between the neurotypical's thoughts and the autistic's thoughts. The mother sees that the drawers are messy, but Bat sees this arrangement for a specific purpose, which serves to organize things in the autistic's mind. This scene reflects how autistic individuals struggle to achieve their autonomy, underscoring the importance of understanding the different thinking perspectives of autistic people.

Explaining how individuals understand disability according to Mike Oliver, who is an influential figure in developing the social model, and advocated for reshaping how people understand disability. The social model emphasizes the barriers that are imposed by society; a person with impairment is not caused by disability, instead, it is caused by society's structure that prevents autistic individuals from engaging with society.

"There was also the way he sometimes flapped his hands, when he was nervous or excited or thinking about something interesting. Some of the kids at school seemed to think that was hilarious. And, of course, bats have wings, which they flap." (1)

In this quotation, the author shows the protagonist's behavior and interactions with family, especially with his classmates in the private school. This shows the effect of the social environment and its way of supporting or hurting autistic individuals. This scene shows the symptoms of autism, such as flapping hands and literal thinking. Flapping hands is an example of the social model of disability, and when the children laugh at the flapping hands, this reflects the prejudice that arises from misunderstanding the neurodivergent behaviors.

"Make me a snack," Bat demanded.

"Make me a snack, what?"

"Make me a snack now." (3)

While this quotation shows another symptom of autism, such as the repetition of the phrase *"make me a snack."* this scene explores how Bat uses direct, literal communication with his sister without using flattering words such as "please". His way of communication is described as being rude in a social context. Also, shows how Bat navigates the societal expectations. This moment shows the relationship with his sister and how she understands his needs. Through this quotation, Arnold reveals the theme of empathy and acceptance, and also the role of family dynamics in autistic individuals. Ultimately, the narratives emphasize the importance of recognizing diverse ways of communication and acceptance, and this shows how

modern literature portrays autism and societal expectations. The novel shows the role of family dynamics and cultural views, which can help and hinder Bat's self-image and identity development. These details help readers to understand the complexities of autistic individuals.

Conclusion

The novel *A Boy Called Bat* by Elana K. Arnold reveals profound insights into the dynamics of autism within the broader social context. The novel explores the inner thoughts and emotions of an autistic individual, as well as the ways of communication of Bat, who challenges other autistic stereotypes. Bat verbally communicates with others, navigating societal expectations. The author skillfully shows the relationship between autistic individuals with people, underscores the importance of empathy, acceptance, and support.

This creates a sense of belonging for autistic individuals. Also, emphasizing the identity is not solely a personal issue, but is connected to the cultural and domestic settings. Bat's personal experiences shaped his identity. The novel shows the effect of the medical and social model, exploring the sufferings of disabled individuals in society. People with impairment suffer from being marginalized in a neurotypical environment.

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مسألة مفهوم الإدماج والتعاطف: التوحد في رواية ولد يدعى بات

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الكلمات المفتاحية: التوحد، التقاطعية، دراسات الاعاقة

الملخص:

يقدم البحث تحليلاً نقدياً وثقافياً لرواية ولد يدعى بات للكاتبة الانا ك أرنولدو حيث تناقش قضايا التوحد وكيفية تمثيله في أدب الأطفال الأمريكي المعاصر. تبدأ الدراسة بمناقشة كيفية تموضع التوحد والاعاقة ضمن السياق الثقافي الأوسع في الولايات المتحدة، لاسيما فيما يتعلق بالهوية، والتمكين، والتقاطع بين العرق والاعاقة. يحلل هذا القسم كيف تؤثر السرديات الثقافية الأمريكية في تصور المجتمع العام للأشخاص المصابين بالتوحد وحالات النمو الأخرى. يركز التحليل النقدي على بطل الرواية بات، من خلال دراسة النموذج الطبي والاجتماعي للاعاقة وتتناول الدراسة كيفية تصوير التوحد لبات، وما إذا كان يتم التعامل معه كمسكلة طبية أم كانشاء اجتماعي، كما تسلط الضوء على أسلوب بات في التواصل، والذي يعبر عن مشاعره، وأنماط سلوكه، وحساسيته الحسية. يستكشف التحليل تفاعلات بات مع أفراد عائلته، وزملائه في الصف. وحيانه الأليف (الظربان المسعى ثور)، مينا كيف يمكن أن تدعم هذه العلاقات أو تتحدى هويته الذاتية وتطوره الاجتماعي، بالإضافة إلى تأثير التواصل، وما إذا كان بات يتواصل لفظياً أم لا، وكيف يؤثر ذلك في بنية السرد في الرواية.