

Differences Are Cool  
*Childlike Acceptance*

By Melissa M. Williams

Diverse cultures provide our children the privilege to experience life from a different point of view, which has the potential to create an appreciation for others with different backgrounds. There is something incredible that can take place if we are open to the mirroring effect of accepting ourselves thereby accepting others. If we nurture that childlike curiosity for our children by providing a wide range of cultural experiences, we better develop their emotional intelligence.

One of the major themes in Iggy the Iguana is the concept of diversity between the different species of animals. Iggy had never met a box shell turtle before the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Naturally he wondered why a turtle wouldn't just take off his shell if it made him walk so slowly. This was only one instance that Iggy had to learn the background behind animals who were different than he during his school year.

The best part about having a diverse group of friends, peers, etc. is the awesome opportunity to experience different points of view. Not only are children taught to be more culturally inclined through people, but educational opportunities present themselves around every corner. A well-rounded adult will have an appreciation for all different types of music, film, dance, food, subjects, sports ... all the way from football to figure skating. These wide range interests when presented in childhood broaden and open the child's mind. The opportunities we give our children will shape their personalities, intelligence, and self-esteem.

**Outside The Box Experiences:**

- **Cultural Festivals**
- **Outdoor Plays and Skits**
- **Musicals**
- **Travels**
- **The Ballet and Symphony**
- **Museums**
- **Cavern Tours, Camping, Hiking, Beach Days**
- **Vacations out of the country**
- **Volunteering to feed the homeless**
- **Creative learning activities and camps**
- **Authentic Restaurants**
- **Discovery Channel**
- **Road Trips**
- **Sports**

We must remember all of the other opportunities out there besides the obvious computer or video game. Our world has made it very easy to get sucked into the trap of isolating into our computers and TV's. Don't miss the pivotal years of development when the young creative brain is naturally yearning to learn through experience.

I truly believe a child's maturity is heavily shaped by their acceptance of others and other cultures, thereby securing their own identity of self-acceptance. When we become "okay" with others and accept that their brain, body, and soul is slightly different than our own, we then realize how *alike* each one of us really are.

Take it from Iggy ... 4<sup>th</sup> grade was so much more interesting with a new friend like Snap Shell. And by the end of the year, the two best friends had so much in common.

### **Diversity: Lessons from Iggy the Iguana**

As Liz and Iggy continued talking, they suddenly noticed one animal was missing.

"Can you long-legged lizards slow down? These stubby legs don't move that fast!" The box shell yelled from behind.

"Oh, no! Sorry, Snap." Iggy looked back to see the turtle with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, gasping for air.

"Why don't you take off that shell? It looks heavy," Iggy yelled.

"Ha, ha, very funny. Turtles can't just take off their shells, man." Snap Shell caught up to the lizards, and Liz started to giggle at Iggy's remark.

"But don't you change it ... switch it out?"

"You're not kidding, are you? Haven't you ever met a turtle before?"

"Uh, not face to face." Iggy felt silly that he didn't know more about turtles or any animal for that matter. "Only lizards went to my school, Snap," Iggy reminded.

"I bet yesterday was overwhelming then, you know ... seeing all those strange animals walk into our class!" Liz nudged Iggy with her elbow and smiled.

"It was a bit different, I mean, coming from a class full of lizards all dressed in the exact same blue plaid uniform and all."

"You had to wear clothes to school? That's just un-animal, man!"

“And a tie, too!” Iggy added.

“That’s like going to church every day of your life!”

Snap Shell’s eyes bulged out of their sockets.

“It wasn’t so bad,” Iggy didn’t seem to be bothered by it.