

The Key to Acceptance

By Melissa M. Williams

Often we may find that our notion to accept one another for who they are on the inside, comes from being around others who may at first seem to be different on the outside.

Let me introduce you to the main character in my Chapter Book Series, *Iggy the Iguana!* Meet Iggy! He's a Green Iguana, born and raised in the suburbs of Houston Texas. Young Iggy has attended a private "All-Lizard" school his entire life. All kinds of lizards went to his school, geckos, water dragons, chameleons ... you name it, Iggy has seen it. To compare it to human terms, just think of one broad race going to school with a bunch of similar looking people, but maybe not all from the exact same place. Iggy is surrounded by diversity on a very small level.

Everything changes for Iggy in fourth grade, because he is about to move to an "All-Animal" school and has no idea what to expect, due to the shelter of his past experiences. He's heard a lot about other animals (Rumors and Stereotypes) but has never actually met a turtle, cat, monkey, or a guinea pig. His worry and fear of not fitting in has him extremely anxious and worried on his first day of school.

We all understand that we have to leave our comfort zone at times to experience new situations, which then lead to growth and change. Iggy starts to realize this through his journey. The theme inside *Iggy the Iguana* speaks to our empathetic hearts, as the main character understands that first impressions are not always correct and not too judge too quickly, because everyone has a story. His lesson of acceptance and understanding rises multiple times through out the story, as he also starts to realize that not all of the animals at his new school have grown up in the same type of family structure as him, either. Diversity may mean many things, but acceptance and a healthy sense of curiosity is beneficial to our youth as they learn not only through their experiences, but their friends' experiences too.

As an author, I love being able to use personification to place fun and interesting animals into a realistic setting that kids comprehend. During my years in the counseling profession, acceptance of self was always the goal of psychological study and theory. When we accept others entirely for who they are on the inside and outside, we are exercising our own form of self-acceptance. This type of acceptance is a proactive choice, and it may not always come naturally to everyone, so we have to continually make the effort to stay open-minded.

The entire *Iggy the Iguana* series has been written to give adults and children realistic scenarios to discuss together, while reading a story that is still light hearted and full of laughter, drama, and excitement. I would love to hear your thoughts on

childhood acceptance and diversity today! For more information on the books,
check out Iggy on www.IggytheIguana.com