

Lauren 00:06

Welcome to the LDA podcast, a series by The Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our podcast is dedicated to exploring topics of interest to educators, individuals with learning disabilities, parents and professionals to work towards our goal of creating a more equitable world. Welcome, everyone to the LDA Podcast. I'm here today with Monica Berg and her daughter Abigail, who both wrote the gift of being different, which outlines Abigail's journey with dyslexia. Thank you both so much for being here.

Monica Berg 00:34

Thank you for having us.

Abigail Berg 00:35

Thank you so much.

Lauren 00:37

Of course! So I'll start with Monica here. Could you share a little bit about your background? And then Abigail, I'll give you a chance to tell us a little bit about yourself.

Monica Berg 00:46

I do many, many things. So when I get asked that question, I'm not really sure where to start or end. I am a teacher, author, mentor, sister, wife, mother. I speak to 1000s people around the world in the intention of helping people really make sense of their lives and live one that they feel is working for them, where they seek to transform and change because they understand that that is the way to true happiness and fulfillment. And as a mother, I'm very inspired by my children. So segwaying into writing children's books was a natural next step as well.

Lauren 01:33

All right, well, and Abigail, what is it that you like to do? Do you have any favorite subjects in school or any activities you like to do?

Abigail Berg 01:42

Well, I really enjoy math as one of my subjects in school. But outside of school, I have like hobbies and writing this book.

Lauren 01:57

Well, for those of us who haven't gotten the chance to read The Gift of Being Different, can you share a summary with us?

Monica Berg 02:04

So actually, we started writing a different book first. But then, in the midst of that Abigail was having trouble in school. And the teachers were a bit perplexed, because on one hand, she was struggling with reading and writing in the second grade, on the other hand, she was able to excel in critical thinking and actually abstract thought well beyond her peers. So we finally got her tested. And we realized that she had dyslexia. And I was trying to find a way to share that with her. I really wanted to pose it in a

way that I saw it as it's a gift, you just have to learn how to use it. And this is information that you are having about yourself, which is so great, because now that you're learning more about yourself, then you can help grow, learn, be in those ways. So before I was able to share with her, she came and asked me that question that's in the book, "Mommy, do I need so much help, extra help, because I'm stupid?" And I said, of course, you're not stupid, you're exceptionally intelligent. And then basically, that conversation was so powerful, where I was able to help reframe this for her, within 48 hours, she had already identified it as her superpower. And she ran around to everybody that she saw, saying, I have a superpower. It's called dyslexia, what's yours? And I thought, wow, if she was able to do this, which is a testament to who she is, and also, I think, the way that my husband and I parent, then we could really share this with the world. So the writing of this particular book, because it's a series of 10 books total, but this was rather quick, because it was so personal for us.

Abigail Berg 03:45

But I think another thing is, when we were I don't know...I just find this interesting. But when we were picking the name, like you said, like we started out, like thinking about the book differently. And then we changed it a little bit. So the name was going to be like "Kindness is my Superpower," or something like that. It had the word kindness in it, then we decided that we wanted to change it, because we switch the book, and we switch words about and we're going to do just Dyslexia Is My Superpower, but now the book's name is the Gift to Being Different. And the reason for that is, when we were just doing the whole process and everything, obviously, at the beginning, we thought like how many kids feel this way, and still feel this way, and they don't have a book. So that's why it's the Gift of Being Different, because everybody's different and not everybody knows. So say, like, dyslexia is my superpower. It would mean like, that's my superpower. And like, it's only like...

Monica Berg 04:49

It's limited.

Abigail Berg 04:50

It's limited, yeah.

Monica Berg 04:51

We, actually, the second book, which was the first book, is kindness is super powerful, and even that now is a different title. So, and then it was the gift of dyslexia. And we thought, wait a second, the real message, the bigger message that we wanted readers to understand is that we are all different. And if we stop trying to create a world where everybody has to conform, and think they have to be exactly like everybody else, because if not, you'll be ostracized or ridiculed, or you will feel alone. And we play this game, this facade, right? And how boring really would it be if everybody was the same? First of all, it's an impossibility. Second of all, they would be boring. So I think this book became much bigger than dyslexia, I think to Abigail's point.

Lauren 05:34

Yeah, that's a great point. I want to touch on a little bit, you mentioned a bit of how you decided to start writing. Could you talk to us a little bit of what that process was like? Abigail, what was your role? Versus Monica, what was your role?

Abigail Berg 05:47

Well, I feel like in the book, it also says on the cover, that I am the co-creator, or the inspiration, because what, we both have very different parts in the book, but also very similar. Like, our personalities and stuff, and we work through this book together. And it was my story, but you (Monica) helped me reframe it for what it was. And so I think that I helped with like, looking over it and like, helping put the book together. But you wrote the book. But I was the inspiration. I had a story, but you...

Monica Berg 06:33

I really love seeing things through the eyes of children, especially this one here. And I like, you know, when I would say something, or I asked her opinion, I'd like that she would challenge that sometimes. Or she'd ask a further question. And I'm like, well, we need to unpack that a bit. For me, again, I've written two other adult books and this is my first children's book. This is much funner. Like telling the story this way. It's short. It's concise, it's fun. And of course, you can rely on illustrations to tell parts of the story that are better seen rather than heard. And then other things need to be said, right? And so it's that great, kind of like marriage between the two, which was really fun for me. And also being on the tour now with Abigail. It's an extension of that writing process. I think we really are a great team. Of my four children, I think she's most similar to me, but we're also so different. And it's that difference that is also very exciting for me, I love, again, just seeing things through her lens as well.

Lauren 07:39

Well and Abigail, this is your reading debut too, isn't it?

Abigail Berg 07:41

Yeah.

Lauren 07:42

All right. That's so exciting. So what was that, like going through all this for the first time?

Abigail Berg 07:46

Well, definitely exciting. And I really enjoy it. Because when we like, we also go to schools and stuff and, and the book there. I like seeing how the kids like, well, like if they ask questions, or I see how their reactions are to the book. Because they're always different, right? Because everybody's different. And I like seeing that. And it's very exciting for me, because I like seeing how they're like, they're starting to realize it. And it makes more sense and now they're like "oh." And also just, I've heard stories and things about, like about people who just received the book and they're like, I wish I had this when I was a kid, and stuff like that. And it makes me really happy that they have the book now.

Lauren 08:48

Well, we touched on this a little bit, but I'd love to go more in depth. So Abigail, what were you thinking when you were first diagnosed with dyslexia? And then Monica, what were your thoughts during that?

Abigail Berg 09:00

Well, when I first found out, I was absolutely, like, believing that like I was smart, and this I feel like we had to go more into it. And then I was like, it says in the book, I was like, Oh, this is my superpower. But I didn't really think it was yet. And so I feel like I was like, "I don't know," and then I was like, "this is my superpower."

Monica Berg 09:32

I think part of it is, you know words take different forms and meanings from when they were created to you know, that thousands and hundreds of thousands of years later. So "difference" has kind of a negative connotation. Disability for sure, references an inability, usually. So, for me, the most important thing was to frame it exactly as I saw it, that this is something unique about her, it's information she now has access to. That's really powerful. And by the way, it's pretty extraordinary. We just need to find the right people to teach her, and not everybody knows how to teach somebody extraordinary like her, right? And then of course, we can take that to everything. So it's a life lesson. And it's something that I wanted to teach her, you know, in so many ways. For me, also, you know, my second son was born with down syndrome. So, I had a whole schooling in differences way back then. He's almost 20 now...he is 20. And I remember at the time, you know, especially the doctors, they said really horrible things like, you know, you should just not expect very much, he won't be able to do this and that, and the list was very long. They never said all the things that he could do. And so what I decided when he was about a year old is that I didn't want to hear anything negative. I said, unless it's harming him, or I need to know something I need to do, I don't want to hear it. And it turned out to be the best thing because I've raised him like I raised all my children, and he's exceptional. So whenever Abigail got this diagnosis, I was like, okay, there's no way that this is going to anything other than what it is, which is again, information about you and how you learn. And it's not a limitation at all. I mean, I see so many people who are typical, neurotypical, and they limit themselves all over the place, right? Like low self-esteem, I can't achieve that, I can't do this. So you don't need a label to be able to do something or not be able to do something. Both positive and negative.

Lauren 11:35

Well, I wanted to touch on that a little bit more, so how would you recommend that parents can go about framing a learning disability diagnosis, so they can help, like you, to see the positive and not hear the negative as much?

Monica Berg 11:47

Yeah, I love that question. Because I think, for sure, it starts with how the parent feels about it, right? And a lot of times parents struggle when they learn anything other than normal, you know, or perfection. And then they hear these things and they become frightened. So if the response is fear-based, then the child's response is going to be fear-based. And then instead of focusing on the solution, you're only seeing it as a problem, or an issue, or an obstacle. So I would say to any parent, first you have to really reframe what you think about it. Often, you probably have to go back to your own childhood experiences and think about how you feel about yourself, right? I think only really somebody who is fully healthy and loving themselves. And that's a life lesson, right? That's not something that we're, well, we're born with it, we lose it, we need to find it again. But I've done that in my life. So I think that's the first place. So I was super clear with what the message I wanted to give her, and really what I believe, which was very positive. I also wanted to hear her negative thoughts around it, so then I could help

provide a different voice for that. But again, one that I believed in, if I just gave her, you know, saccharine words that didn't have much merit behind it, then she wouldn't believe me anyway. So I think the person first has to really become clear on it in a positive way, and then they can help their child.

Lauren 13:06

I think that's great advice. So Abigail, you were able to find your superpowers pretty quickly, can you tell us about what your superpowers are and how you got to find them?

Abigail Berg 13:15

So my superpower is dyslexia, but we're gonna go into what dyslexia is, it also says in the book, but what it is, first off, it's thinking everything in like...oh, you have a very good imagination. And if you look at a letter, like a W, let's say, then for me, I'd see it as maybe an M or an E, like that, or with numbers. So like that. And another thing is, so I'm very imaginative. I think with pictures instead of words. And there's also like a level, like, not level, but like a scale, kind of, like where you are like on dyslexia, it's kind of what it is. And how I found my superpower is me and my mom have very interesting conversations and personal. And so I think that really helped me to talk to my parent. And then when she knew how I was feeling, she could help me.

Monica Berg 14:31

So we also did some research, you know, I wanted to learn about how she learns, I didn't know, right, so I researched it. And then when she started to question how this was a superpower, it's like, well, look, these are all the great things that...this is what they say about dyslexia. And we referenced a book called The Gift of Dyslexia. And we found other really great innovators and thinkers that had dyslexia. So I wanted her to be able to see that it's whatever she wants it to be. She's very curious, she is able to see solutions to problems most don't because she learns differently. And also, she has to work extra hard to grasp the things that come naturally just in terms of even reading, right, or letter recognition, or restructuring sentences. That extra effort and steps that she needs to go through actually makes her more prepared for problem solving. So it is, it is absolutely a superpower. It's not you know, anything less than that.

Abigail Berg 15:30

Like thinking about a superpower, it's the thing that we thought we were the worst at. And then somebody or the self redefines that for yourself, and realize it as the thing like, for superpowers, it's like, people think of it like magic. Like let's say you're super good at soccer, or something like that, you might think that's your superpower. But you have to really think about it. And think about it as what you thought negative about yourself. And think of that as your superpower.

Monica Berg 16:08

Right, so whoever, you know, when we've gone to different schools, children asked us, How do I find my superpower? Or they asked me, What's your superpower? We know what Abigail's is. And I said, I think my superpower is being able to help people recognize their own superpower, right? But I didn't come into the world like that. I had to really learn to appreciate that about myself. When I shared with kids that it's usually, to Abigail's point, the places that you hide about yourself, your uniqueness, you know, sometimes where we feel shame, because again, we want to fit in, that's usually an indication

that there's something really powerful for you there. And if you again, can reframe it, own it, personalize it, then you'll be able to find the strength in it and really shine.

Lauren 16:51

Really true. So what advice would you give to parents whose child has recently received a learning disability diagnosis? You had a great explanation on how to help explain it to your child, do you have any other advice that you'd like to share?

Monica Berg 17:04

I think, research, you know, research, get them the support that they need. And there is always support, there's always a solution. So you are, first you're empowering them conscious wise, right with their mind. And then you're giving them the tools on how to actually grow into the superpower.

Lauren 17:22

I'll get answers from you both on this question. So what do you hope people will take away from The Gift of Being Different?

Abigail Berg 17:30

Yeah, I'll go first. I think that the main message was definitely that, well, I want for everybody to realize from the book is that every single person in the world has a superpower. And they can have more than one, there was one girl that said she had two, what was it? And another thing that I want everybody to know about the book, when they read it is that, when you think about the word differences, you probably think like, that girl has red hair, and I have brown hair or like something like that. But differences, it's something that makes...it's not something that you think that everybody else is the same and you stick out because you have that. It's because everybody is different. And this is the thing that makes you different from everybody else, which is why it's your superpower.

Monica Berg 18:31

I would say that...So I think another really powerful message in the book is that Abigail was able to co-create, author a book before she could read or write. So it really starts with an idea with a belief in yourself with getting the support you need and anything's possible. So really often, the only thing that stands in our way is our limited beliefs about ourselves. So again, it doesn't matter if you haven't named how you feel different. Allow yourself to reveal your true potential.

Lauren 19:03

Well it sounds like this message is already reaching people already, people who said they wish they had this book when they were younger when you guys were on your tour. So that's really awesome. Abigail, you're still so young to be able to create this impact, it's so inspiring. So you guys had mentioned that there was another book that you started to write. Do you both plan to write any future books either about dyslexia or other than dyslexia? Another topic?

19:30

Well, it's actually a series of 10 books "on being," the second book, "Tale of the other Glove" is at the illustrator as we speak. So, and we have all 10 written and identified, six of them are written, four outlined. Yeah, we plan to keep on, you know, keep sharing our message.

Lauren 19:49

Yeah, that's great. So how can people find The Gift of Being Different to buy, and where can they get updates about when your new books come out or what you two are up to?

Monica Berg 19:59

So you can go to Amazon. And it's also sold at many local bookstores. You can visit rethinklife.today. You can also purchase it there. That's my blog, and all of our information about future books will be there as well. And also you can follow me, I'm [MonicaRBerg74](https://www.instagram.com/MonicaRBerg74)

Lauren 20:26

Thank you for listening to the LDA podcast. To learn more about LDA and to get valuable resources and support, visit Idaamerica.org