

## **Book Review**

**Title:** *The Sibling Slam Book: What It's Really Like to Have a Brother or Sister With Special Needs*

**Editor:** Don Meyer. Foreword by David Gallagher.

**Publisher:** Woodbine House, Inc., Bethesda, MD, 2005

**Cost:** \$15.95 USD

**Reviewer:** Christine Su

While academic and medical textbooks on disabilities abound, and more recently, authors have created children's books to demystify disabilities to youngsters, *The Sibling Slam Book: What It's Really Like to Have a Brother or Sister with Special Needs*, is an innovative work, intended specifically for teenagers who have siblings with disabilities and/or special needs. The format of the book follows what might be a typical "slam" book format: Each individual receives the slam book, a simple notebook filled with questions about teen-specific issues and spaces for replies, and he or she can add personal responses to those questions—be they angry, joyful, droll, or somber—to those already entered. While in *The Sibling Slam Book*, the text itself is typed, the entries are in different fonts (representing different handwriting styles), and some cross the paper's printed lines, often stretching into curves or looping into circles of text, as handwritten entries might. *The Sibling Slam Book* is an enjoyable, insightful compilation of the thoughts and feelings of teenage siblings without disabilities, eighty of whom collectively author the work, as they navigate daily life with their brothers and sisters with special needs.

Recent news reports have broadcast various debates surrounding "myspace.com," a website where teenagers can upload their own photos and profiles, and post comments about teenage life, on topics ranging from musical interests to trendy fashions, from romantic intrigue to peer pressure. Parents worry that teens posting their lives on the Internet for all to see is irresponsible and even dangerous. Teens counter that the site provides them with a venue to meet peers with whom they can discuss what is on their minds, to talk about things they cannot or will not share with parents or teachers.

The Internet may have helped myspace.com to flourish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, the concept of a "teens-only" space—and the value of such space—is certainly not new. Middle school and high school teens have been using slam books to voice their thoughts and feelings for decades. Furthermore, in slam books teens not only record their own words, but also read the responses of others, many of whom have faced similar situations and experienced similar feelings in reaction to such situations. The unwritten rule that the slam book is a nonjudgmental, free space for expressing oneself means that the responses are usually frank—in response to the question, "What's the toughest thing about being a sib?" for example, a *Sibling Slam Book* author writes: "The responsibility definitely stinks. I get few privileges for all the work I do for my family and my little brother" (p. 141). They are also poignant: "[I]t is the uncertainty, not knowing what's coming next, and the feeling of vulnerability if something does happen and that you're open to being really hurt," writes another. "Also, not knowing if my little brother will wake up the next morning or when a kiss I give him will be the last" (p. 141).

The book's simple question and answer format allows the reader to compare and contrast sibling perspectives on a plethora of issues—some disability-related, some more generally teen-related. Importantly, the *Sibling Slam Book* asks questions about the advantages of having a sibling with a disability, and some of the answers reveal teens' great pride in their siblings' resilience. "He's my special light in the darkness," writes the sibling of a brother with special needs, "There when all other lights go out" (p. 134). These responses offer support to others who may not receive such reassurance from school peers or friends who do not understand their circumstances. I call this book a reference work, for while it does not offer dictionary definitions or historical descriptions, it does provide, through its list of questions, an index of topics that teens can explore based upon the questions they have at a particular time.

*The Sibling Slam Book* may not offer new theories or medical breakthroughs, yet it is informative and would serve as a good resource for courses on disability culture as well as for teens' libraries. This heartwarming, honest, and humorous book will appeal to parents, teachers, practitioners, and others who seek to broaden their understanding of teen siblings' experiences with brothers and sisters with disabilities. It is definitely worth the price, and moreover, as suggested by the editor, himself the creator of hundreds of trainings for families of children with special needs, some or all of the fifty-four questions included in the book can be used to spur discussion in similar workshops or classroom sessions.

Having siblings is not only fun, it is also a great responsibility. First of all, if you have brothers or sisters you can spend your free time together and enjoy yourself. You can fool around, dance, sing, laugh and play with one another. Secondly, if you need some help you can always count on your older siblings because they are wiser. They can help you with maths, biology or any other subjects. Another thing is that you have someone with whom you can talk to. Of course, anyone with a brother or sister is in for his fair share of sibling rivalry. But the disadvantages of having siblings are far outweighed by the advantages -- the friendships, the shared memories and the lifelong support that brothers and sisters can bring to your life. Cite This Document. Apa mla MLA7 chicago. Audio Books & Poetry Community Audio Computers, Technology and Science Music, Arts & Culture News & Public Affairs Non-English Audio Spirituality & Religion. Librivox Free Audiobook. StoryTime with BrainyToon: Podcast for Kids NFB Radio 101 Sermon Podcast Pauping Off All Steak No Sizzle Podcast Church of the Oranges Daily Chapel - Spring 2012. Be the first one to write a review. 34 Previews. DOWNLOAD OPTIONS. Borrow this book to access EPUB and PDF files. IN COLLECTIONS. Books to Borrow. Books for People with Print Disabilities. Internet Archive Books. Scanned in China. Uploaded by Tracey.Gutierrez on November 29, 2011. "These brothers and sisters will likely have the longest-lasting relationships of anyone, relationships easily in excess of 65 years," Mr. Meyer said. "They should be remembered at every turn." Still, many siblings welcome the early maturity and responsibility that come with having a disabled brother or sister. In 2005, Mr. Meyer also published "The Sibling Slam Book: What It's Really Like to Have a Brother or Sister With Special Needs," a collection of candid remarks by 80 children. Mr. Meyer said that when asked about the most embarrassing moment of their lives, few of the children cited anything having to do with their disabled siblings. Instead, most recounted the usual teenage humiliations: problems in romantic relationships or dealing with parents.