Choice Project #2-Book Talk

**Text:** *Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman

**Teacher Role:**

**Hook**: First I am going to have everybody in the class take out a piece of paper and a pencil. I will have them solve the problem 354 times six. I will give students about two to three minutes to solve this problem. When everybody has completed the problem I will ask for a volunteer to tell me the answer to this problem. Next, I will ask students to solve the problem 348 times seven. However I will tell students this time they cannot use their fingers or their hands. I will then give about a minute for students to solve this problem. They will quickly realize that this once easy mathematical problem became very difficult.

**Book itself**: This is the daily life for Shawn McDaniel (at the same time pointing to the picture of him on the cover of the book). This will then lead into me talking about the book summary.

**Brief Summary**: *Stuck in Neutral* is about Shawn McDaniel who is a 14 year old boy with cerebral palsy growing up in Seattle. He cannot control his fingers, hands, stomach, tongue, throat, eyelids, and his left foot. He has a brother Paul who is 16 years old and his sister Cindy who is 17 years old. His parents got divorced ten years ago because his dad couldn’t deal with Shawn’s condition. Teachers and doctors continually tell Shawn and his family that he is stupid. However, Shawn is able to remember everything he ever hears with total recall. He has been able to do this since three years old. As Shawn experiences life he often wonders what it would be like if even one person knew what Shawn was really like inside. Shawn continues to fear that his father who is going to kill him to end Shawn’s suffering, however Shawn wants to continue experience what life has to offer.

**Characters**:

**Shawn McDaniel**: Shawn is fourteen years old almost fifteen. When he was born he had brain damage because there was a tiny blood vessel burst in his head that was in the wrong spot. As a result the blood vessel wiped out his muscle control and confined him to a wheelchair. Shawn can remember everything he has ever heard perfectly with total recall.

**Linda McDaniel**: This is Shawn’s loving and patient mother who is forty-five years old. She still talks to Shawn as a newborn baby or infant. Has always had absolute love for her son, Shawn. Although she has a part time job her full time job is taking care of Shawn.

**Sydney E. McDaniel:** Left the family ten years ago because he couldn’t handle his son’s condition. Shawn considers his dad to be a complete jerk and a great guy. Also, he thinks his dad is a basic, slightly smarter than most human being. Sydney wrote a poem about him and his son that won him a Pulitzer Prize. Also, he films a documentary trying to figure out why we teach children who cannot learn.

**Cindy McDaniel:** Shawn’s sister who is seventeen years old. She helped teach Shawn how to read when he was seven years old by playing school with him. Shawn thinks Cindy is a lot like her mom, in that she is very loving and patient toward Shawn’s condition.

**Paul McDaniel:** Shawn’s brother who is sixteen years old and plays football, basketball, and baseball. He helped save Shawn’s life when two teenagers were going to burn him by beating them up and making them leave.

**Mrs. Hare**: According to Shawn she is an older teaching lady. She has little reading glass and is nice, patient, a little boring but really caring.

**William**: A teaching assistant to Mrs. Hare. He is fifty years old, strong, big, and not afraid of his students.

**Becky**: A teaching assistant to Mrs. Hare. Becky has red hair that is long and soft. According to Shawn she is about twenty years old, gorgeous body and is super nice.

**Earl Detraux**: He is in jail because he killed his two year old son who was brain damaged. He killed his son to end his pain and agony, which he suffered from every day.

**Vonda**: Shawn’s respite care provider. She is nice and sometimes impatient with Shawn’s feeding times.

**Favorite Passages**:

I will read page 77 when talking about Earl Detraux. This will give students an insight to why Earl did what he did. As a result, this will help students have a better understanding of why Shawn thinks his dad is going to kill him.

I will also read page 34 when talking about Shawn McDaniel. This will help students to visualize Shawn’s life with cerebral palsy.

**Connection**s:

Students can relate to Shawn because his parents are divorced. Many students have gone through this or are going through it and know the pain it causes in the family. Also some students can relate to having a sibling with a disability or know someone that has a disability.

**Author Info:**

Terry Trueman has written seven other books besides *Stuck In Neutral*. The sequel to this book is called *Life Happens Next*. Also he has written a book from Paul’s point of view (Shawn McDaniel’s brother) called *Cruise Control*. Terry Trueman based *Stuck In Neutral* on his son Henry who also has cerebral palsy and has been diagnosed as profoundly developmentally disabled.

**Unit:**

I am taking this class to get a reading endorsement. I think this is an excellent text to incorporate into the reading classroom. This would be a great text to incorporate into a unit about discrimination.

**Incorporate:**

I would have students read this book independently. Since some students may have a strong connection to it I want them to be able to release their feelings in a safe place without judgment if they needed to. I would assign a chapter each day to students. Then we would have a class discussion talking about what happened, their reactions, and predicting what is going to happen next. In addition each student would have their own personal journal where they can react to the story. Although these will not be graded, they are able to turn them in if they want me to look at them. This gives students another safe place to write their thoughts and engage with the story.

**Activities:**

I would split the class into ten groups of three to four students. I would assign a different character to each of the groups. Then I would have students use poster board to make a scrapbook for their character. This could include anything from their favorite food to their crush. After students have completed this they will share with the class the reasoning behind the items on the poster. Once the groups have finished presenting, the posters will be displayed in the classroom. Overall, the students will be able to use their creativity to connect with the story.

**Other text/content:**

This would be a great text to also incorporate into the health classroom. This is because it goes into some details of what cerebral palsy is and what a person goes through every day. If students really liked Stuck In Neutral then I would also incorporate the sequel Life Happens Next. This will help give students a closure to the book and a further understanding of cerebral palsy. Also I would have students read Cruise Control since it’s from Shawn’s brother point of view. I think many students will like this book because they can relate to being a sibling with a disability and know its ok to be mad about it sometimes. For students who don’t have a family member with a disability this will give them a new insight of what it’s like on an everyday basis.

**Vision:**

My overall vision is for students to have a deeper understanding of cerebral palsy. I want students to realize that students with disabilities are usually born with it and they shouldn’t be discriminated because of it. They deserve just as much attention as anyone else. Overall, students should have a deeper understanding that people with disabilities aren’t stupid and are very smart in their own way.