

By Sally Thompson

Faces and Feelings

Award-winning author and artist, Catherine Snodgrass, has presented us with another masterpiece. Her latest book, *What's That Look on Your Face?* is a creative tool geared toward helping children with language and communication difficulties. As a mother and advocate for children on the autism spectrum, Snodgrass understands that translating the facial expressions and understanding the emotions of others can be an overwhelming obstacle. The book introduces 12 fundamental emotions by juxtaposing her artwork with funny short poems. By combining the exaggerated facial expressions on each illustration with easy-to-remember rhymes, this book is a way to help your child achieve successful social interactions. We talked to Catherine Snodgrass to learn more about her inspirations, knowledge and experience; here's what she had to say.



What motivated you to create *What's That Look on Your Face?*

After writing and illustrating my first book, *Super Silly Sayings That Are Over Your Head*, I was hooked. The motivation behind *What's That Look on Your Face?* was my own children. Their delightfully animated faces grace the pages of this book as the ideal cast of characters.

How are your books geared especially toward children on the autism spectrum?

Every picture tells a story. By design, my books are filled with a lot of visual information. Since children on the autism spectrum respond to this, it tends to facilitate the learning process.

How has being a mother of a child with Asperger syndrome affected your perspective on autism? How did it help you write/illustrate this book?

My children have taught me so much. Seeing things through their eyes is truly amazing. An important lesson that I've learned is that you have the ability to teach effectively if you are able to also speak their language – whatever that may be. I've often had to communicate visually using my illustrations; this inspired me to create these books.

Why do children with autism have a more difficult time empathizing with others and interpreting human emotion? How can this book help break down barriers

to social interactions/relationships for children with language and communication difficulties?

Mind blindness is a term used to describe the inability to develop an awareness of the mental state of others. While intuitive to most, this skill must often be taught to those on the autism spectrum. It is essential to not only recognize a facial expression but to understand its relationship to the feeling. This book uses teaching methods that help the reader connect [external] faces to [internal] feelings.

How do the short, rhyming poems juxtaposed with the illustrations help children remember and process/store the lessons taught?

Some children process information visually, some aurally. This book's teaching method combines both, allowing the reader to learn and commit the lessons to memory.

Why is emotion recognition so important for autistic children to understand? How does your book help?

The ability to gather information from reading faces and body language is a very important social and communication skill. *What's That Look on your Face* portrays 12 different emotions with illustrated characters displaying exaggerated facial expressions spotlighted in color while a gray backdrop presents a scene with an appropriate emotional response. A short poem with a physical description of the feeling is interlaced with synonyms, providing more words to identify feelings. Diane Twachtman-Cullen's dynamic foreword also offers many clever teaching tips and the book jacket's flip side doubles as a surprise poster.

Why is it so important to introduce a book like this at a young age?

Mostly to encourage appropriate social and communication skills early on so that social connections and relationships can develop.

What would you suggest to other parents of children with Asperger syndrome or who are on the autism spectrum?

Always see and appreciate your child for everything wonderful that they are, instead of what they are not. ♦

Sally Thompson is a Westchester-based writer.