



PINK SHIRT DAY
FRIDAY 16 OCT 2020

Dare! | Weird! | Tough!

Erin Frankel (2013), Free Spirit Publishing, US

The *Weird* series is made up of three books: *Dare!*, *Tough!* and *Weird!* It's predominantly the same 'story' but the books capture the perspectives of three children - the target of bullying at school, the child who is doing the bullying and the bystander. It's a great approach allowing us to empathise with each of the characters as we read about them and garner some details of their home lives and interests.

First things first, when asked to review a children's book, my philosophy is always to read it to a child, or ask a child to read it and capture their first impressions. Evie, aged 8, has done just that.

Evie's observations of the three books are interesting. She engages quickly with each of the characters and determines her favourite is Luisa, who's 'weird'. Evie says, "She's actually really nice. I really like this girl."

That's actually a magical and wonderful thing. Evie can quickly relate to one of the characters, despite her portrayal as 'weird'. I imagine for Evie this may be validating – we all feel a little 'different' sometimes. But Luisa's difference – wearing polka dot boots, speaking Spanish, telling jokes, raising her hand to answer questions and hugging her mum, are all great qualities. There's little doubt Evie recognises this too. "She isn't really weird at all."

It's harder to like Sam, who's 'tough' (and a bully). Her story relays her jealousy of other children, particularly Luisa who she believes 'has it easy.' Her story also hints (but doesn't dwell) on her being bullied by a sibling at home. Sam feels she has to be 'tough' and she's helping others be tough too. Evie says "she needs to learn how to be nice," and she does, slowly. For me, I like the demonstration that people can change, and how to do this - even though it's hard sometimes!

Jayla is a little scared and therefore wouldn't 'dare' intervene in bullying, stand up to Sam nor oppose her inclusion in bullying Luisa. But she has a conscience and willingness to get some help, as well as support Luisa. Evie is also impressed by this: "I liked how the other girls talked to the teacher about it. That was the right thing to do when you are being bullied."

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It's clear though that Evie's loyalties lie with Luisa. She states that the best positive outcome was that Jayla "learnt how to stand up for herself, AND Luisa." She also thinks one of Luisa's strategies to tackle the bullying is the best – continuing to make others laugh.

The overarching theme is 'be your true self'. Luisa continues to be quirky, Jayla is true to her conscience, knowing what's 'right', and stands up for her friends, and Sam lets her guard down in order to be able to be herself.

Evie and I like these books. There are guides for parents, teachers and children at the backs. The guides are good too, but there's enough in the stories alone. To build empathy in your classroom or to help your child with their bullying or being bullied these, we believe, will help.

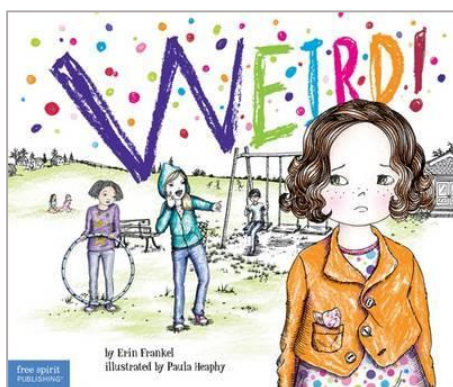
My only note is the characters are all female – the next set would be great with other genders too!

<https://theweirdseries.com/>

Reviewed by Evie Ryan and Anna Mowat.

Evie is a Year 4 student at St Albans Primary School. She loves words, writing and drama and has a naughty dog called Pipi.

Anna works as part of the All Right? wellbeing campaign in Otautahi where she is based. She also delivers Incredible Years parenting programmes for the Ministry of Education and is also currently working on a Cure Kids research project to create a support resource for parents whose children find it tricky to manage their big emotions.



The Mental Health Foundation's Information Service brings you reviews this Pink Shirt Day on books with bullying prevention themes.

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<https://www.pinkshirtday.org.nz/good-reads/>

