

### **Figure 4.7: Gifted Characters in Books, Movies, and Television**

#### **Using Vignettes of Gifted Characters to Recognize Giftedness**

Vignettes of gifted characters offer an engaging way for educators and families to recognize high ability and high aptitude. The following are recommended works that comprise well-developed characters from underrepresented and general populations. The characters display gifted behaviors or emergent talents representing promise in intellect, creativity, leadership, accelerated achievement, and/or the performing arts. In each case, the content includes thought-provoking situations, issues, or personal needs with which gifted students particularly identify. To ensure that the vignettes are as applicable as possible, I avoid animation and recommend examples with human gifted characters who represent the target ages of the KOI—pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Many times, wonderful books become worthy movies. In those cases, I reference the book but list the work under movies since the visual presentation has great impact for many people.

To use a vignette for professional development, select specific scenes in which the depicted characteristics and/or conditions illustrate a key point about giftedness. Plan how to involve the participants in engaging interaction and questions. Additionally, consider how to use these vignettes in discussions with gifted students.

#### ***Books—Each of these titles is an award winning book.***

***Catherine, Called Birdy*** by Karen Cushman

Gifted character: 14 year old medieval girl

Gifted connections: High intellect; leadership; sensitivity; independent character in a time when a girl was to be properly subservient to males

***Encyclopedia Brown*** series by Donald Sobol

Gifted characters: Encyclopedia Brown, named for his wealth of knowledge, and Sally who solves mysteries with him

Gifted connections: High intellect and reasoning; intuitive processing skills

***The Great Gilly Hopkins*** by Katherine Paterson

Gifted character: An 11-year old brash girl juggled among foster homes

Gifted connections: Brilliant, street-smart, and creative; issues of love and belonging; uses negative behaviors to hide feelings

***The Invention of Hugo Cabret*** by Brian Selznick (Award-winning film: Hugo)

Gifted character: A 12-year old orphaned boy who lives alone and survives by his street smarts

Gifted connections: Mentally clever; self-taught; highly inquisitive; creativity; ethical issues

***The View from Saturday*** by E. L. Konigsberg

Gifted characters: An Academic Bowl team of four 6th graders

Gifted connections: High intellect and sensitivity to diversity and social issues; explores ways to handle being different and the courage required to be kind; differences in the cultures and gifted strengths of each character; importance of love and friendship

***Homecoming*** by Cynthia Voigt (Series of seven books titled the Tillerman saga )

Gifted character: A 13-year old girl who cares for and protects three younger siblings when deserted by their mother

Gifted connections: High intellect, sensitivity; leadership; high creative problem solving and adaptations relevant to poverty, homelessness, and survival

## **Movies**

### ***Akeelah and the Bee***

Gifted character: An 11 year old Black girl; skipped one grade

Gifted connections: Intelligence, high vocabulary, memory and accelerated achievement (spelling);

### ***Billy Elliot***

Gifted character: An 11-year old boy with exceptional talent for ballet

Gifted connections: Performing arts; sensitivity; conflict and love between coal-miner father and son's passion for ballet; mature issues and language

### ***Bridge to Terabithia*** (Award-winning book by Katherine Paterson)

Gifted characters: Gifted 5th grade boy and gifted girl become best friends

Gifted connections: Leadership, art; creativity; social-emotional issues of being gifted and different; one teacher is significant to the character development

### ***Little Man Tate***

Gifted character: Profoundly gifted 6-year old boy

Gifted connections: Intellect; accelerated achievement (math); conflict of social-emotional and intellectual needs; strong female single-parent; mature issues and language

### ***A Little Princess*** (Book by Frances Hodgson Burnett)

Gifted character: Sara, a 7-year old orphaned girl

Gifted connections: High intellect and sensitivity; creativity; issue of belonging and response to ill-treatment: Sara reasoned "...A person who was clever ought to be clever enough not to be unjust or deliberately unkind to any one...So she would be as polite as she could to people who in the least deserved politeness."

### ***Matilda*** (Book by Roald Dahl)

Gifted character: Precocious little girl who walks to library every day at the age of four to read while her parents are at work

Gifted connections: High intellect and ethics; sensitivity; the role of the teacher is significant; negative parenting model; insightful scene between Matilda and the public librarian before Matilda begins school

### ***The Joy Luck Club*** (Book by Amy Tan)

Gifted character: Young Chinese girl; chess prodigy

Gifted connections: High intellect and impassioned interests; issue of parental pressures and expectations;

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** (Award-winning book by Lee Harper)

Gifted character: Young daughter; reads classics before beginning school

Gifted connections: High intellect and sensitivity; poverty; ethics and issues; strong male parenting model

## **Television**

### ***Parenthood*** (Series 2010 through 2015)

Gifted characters: Young girl, Sydney diagnosed as gifted after problems in school; older boy, Max who is twice exceptional with Asperger syndrome and an obvious gifted intellect

Gifted connections: High intellect; creativity; sensitivity; strong parental interactions with children; observe for more subtle behavioral clues of giftedness, particularly in last three seasons