

We're All Different in Our Own Ways

Joshua Yuchasz - Milford, Michigan



By all outward appearances, Joshua Yuchasz is a regular teenager. But his classmates still tease him about the thing that makes him different. Yuchasz believes it's our differences that deserve respect.

What if everyone in the world was exactly alike? What if everyone talked the same, acted the same, listened to the same music, and watched the same T.V. programs?

The world would be extremely dull! I believe it's important to accept people for who they are.

Differences are important and they should be respected. For example, many important people throughout history were considered different, such as Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Harriet Tubman, Peter Tchaikovsky, and Abraham Lincoln. They did great things, but some people thought they were weird, because they had strong feelings about something. I can relate to these people, because I've been in that situation before, many times.

It all started in elementary school when I realized that I wasn't like everyone else. My mom says that I have a tendency of obsessing on certain subjects. Unfortunately, these subjects don't interest other kids my age and they really don't interest my teachers. In fact, my kindergarten teacher said she would scream if I mentioned snakes or lizards one more time, while she was teaching the days of the week. I would get in trouble for not paying attention, and the teasing began.

In third grade, my teacher informed me that I have Asperger's Syndrome, and I said, "So what? Do you know that Godzilla's suit weighs 188 lbs.?"

Later, I asked my mom, "What is Asperger's Syndrome? Am I gonna die?" She said that it's like having blinders on, and that I can only see one thing at a time, and that it's hard to focus on other things. Like, I would tell anyone and everyone that would listen about Godzilla, because my big obsession was, and still is, Godzilla — not a real popular subject with the middle school crowd, and so the teasing continues.

I might be different, because I have different interests than other teenagers, but that doesn't give them the right to be so mean and cruel to me. Kids at Oak Valley make fun of me for liking what I like the most. People also make fun of me for knowing facts about volcanoes, whales, tornadoes, and many other scientific things. My mom says that she has been able to answer many questions on Jeopardy just by listening to what I have to say, but I've even been ridiculed for being smart.

Maybe someday, I'll become a gene engineer and create the real Godzilla. I can dream, can't I? Sometimes I wish I were like everyone else...but not really. Because I believe people should be respected for being different. Because we're all different in our own ways.

Fourteen-year-old Joshua Yuchasz is a high school freshman in Milford, Michigan. He plays in his school's concert band and is also on its football team. In addition to Godzilla, Yuchasz likes other reptiles including Bubba, his pet red-tailed boa constrictor.

Adapted from This I Believe series, NPR radio

Questions for discussion/writing:

1. What are the advantages or positive aspects of being unique or different? Is it OK to make fun of or tease those with different or unique personalities? How are they just like you?
2. Describe the attributes of Asperger's Syndrome. Do you know anyone with Asperger's? How is a person with Asperger's unique or different?
3. What if everyone in the world was exactly alike? Describe some possible results.
4. Why do you think many people are teased for being smart? Why do some teens think that it is wrong to be smart? What is the result for the smart person who is teased?
5. Did your attitude/feelings change toward different or unique people in any way after reading, thinking, and writing today?
6. Joshua Yuchasz is a freshman in high school, and 14 years old. (A LOT like you!) He says, "Sometimes I wish I were like everyone else...but not really." Do you agree or disagree with his wish? Why?