

SSLP Student Voice: NEURODIVERSITY



CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

Shortlisted Entries



Southwark Schools

LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

In a collaborative effort between Harris Boys' Academy East Dulwich and James Allen's Girls' School, we organised a writing competition on the topic of neurodiversity. We hoped that through creative writing, SSLP students would be able to capture some of the experiences of neurodivergence.

In this competition, we invited students to compose a piece that satisfied any of the four categories:

- * Most Creative
- * Most Informative
- * Most Inspirational
- * Most Relatable

There was no word limit, and it could be any form of writing, for example poetry or short stories.

We also created a website: [Neurodiverse Stories - Writing Competition \(neurodiverse-writing.com\)](http://neurodiverse-writing.com)

Here is a collection of the shortlisted entries.



A Girl Embraces Her Neurodiversity

In a world of patterns, she is a kaleidoscope,
Every twist and turn, a special scope.
Her mind dances to a mismatched beat,
In a symphony of colours, oh so sweet.

Her thoughts are scattered yet so bright,
Illuminating the darkest night.
With every single step, she paints her own path,
In a world where norms often are at task.

She has embraced the quirks that make her whole,
And wears her neurodiversity like a crown, bold.
In her world, there's beauty in every hue,
A celebration of what makes her true.

She's a masterpiece of her own personal design,
Unravelling the threads of her mind.
With every stride, she breaks the mould,
A beacon of courage, strong and bold.

So let her shine, in her own beautiful way,
For she's the embodiment of a brighter day.
In her embrace of neurodiversity,
She will always find strength, joy and her true identity.

A Tight Grip

The noise in the classroom is only getting louder, and it feels like my eardrums are about to burst. I clutch my mini plush bunny, Coco, even tighter in my pocket. As the deafening chatter continues, I clasp my hands over my ears. The clamour reduces to muffles, and I manage to retain deep breaths. I hesitantly remove my hand from my ears. Mrs Gonzalez has managed to reduce the noise level in the classroom. The commotion simmers down as we finally reach the end of the lesson and the bell pierces my ears. An uncomfortable ringing is left in my eardrums, as I briskly pace to my safe space. I open the door to the school's outdoor grounds, the rejuvenating breeze blowing gently into my face. Gradually, the murmurs fade away, and all I can hear is the rustling of trees as the wind swiftly gusts through their leaves, and the occasional tweets from robins and sparrows as they flutter around above me. I make my way towards the quaint, miniature forest, just a short walk away from the main school.

The mud, blended with fallen autumn leaves crunch underneath my feet. There's silence all around me, with everyone probably all lined up in the lunch queue, snaking down the school corridor. A couple paces more into the forest, and I'm there, in my special spot. The aged tree stump, which is a seat to me on many a visit to this place, is nestled in vines which cascade from the trees' thick branches high above. As I sit down on the tree stump, I take Coco out from my pocket. Her slightly scruffy material gathers around her black button eyes, which stare up at me innocently. I like to think that she's my friend, that she'll always listen. That she'll always be there for me. The tranquil silence is disturbed by rustling and footsteps. I hear a snicker from close by, then somebody hissing, "Shush! She'll hear us," and low tones of giggling. I immediately stand up and stuff Coco back into my pocket, trying to hurry as quietly as I can out of the forest.

My path is immediately blocked by a boy who looks at least two years older than me. "Where do you think you're going?" he asks me, with a leering, ominous grin on his face. I turn to sprint in the opposite direction, when I'm obstructed by a blonde girl, much taller than me. She shoves me back in the boy's direction, and scoffs.

"Is this her?" she smirks at the boy and he nods flippantly in response. I scan the area for a quick escape, but their friends are surrounding me. I'm trapped. I grab on to Coco inside my pocket, but the girl standing in front of me grabs me and pulls me towards her. My arm jerks out of my pocket and Coco falls onto the grimy, filthy ground. The girl standing in front of me smirks. She picks Coco up from the ground by the ear and huffs, "You've got to be joking. How old are you, three? Anyway, we found what we were looking for. Didn't think someone could be this pathetic". My breathing quickens and I look around for some sort of comfort, for

anything, anyone. All of a sudden, I hear a snip. The blonde girl glares at me tauntingly, but all I can see is Coco. Without her head. The boy walks over to join his friend, and stomps Coco's severed head even further into the ground.

He grins sadistically, "Are you going to cry? What are you going to do?", and his posse of friends all snigger at me. I barely know what's happened, but what I do know is that Coco is gone, and the perpetrators are standing here jeering at me.

And that's when I see red.

I look down at my hands and pick at my nails as the counsellor looks at me searchingly. The office is pristine white and pale green, the empty cleanliness almost making me feel sickly. "Your name is Estelle, yes?". I nod without making eye contact. "Well, Estelle, I'm not here to tell you off, but I do want to know what happened," she says softly. I glance up to see her warm brown eyes staring back at me with curiosity, and not scorn.

I quietly begin, "There's someone in my class that I don't get along with. The girl was his older sister. She came into the forest and cornered me with all her friends. Then they cut off Coco's head. And after that, I hit them," my voice reduces to a whisper at the last part.

"Coco? Who's that?" the counsellor inquires, intrigued.

"My friend," I say, my voice wobbling, as I take the dirtied remainder of Coco, and hold it out to show her. Tears blur my vision but I briskly wipe them away. The counsellor's face softens, and smiling wistfully, she asks me, "Why is Coco so important to you?"

I swallow, and murmur, "Coco is always there with me. When I'm nervous, I can hold her, because she's always in my pocket. She makes me... she made me feel brave, and like there was always someone in my corner. She was the only one who didn't make me feel like I was different. And now she's gone," I say, lachrymose, with my eyes red from excessive rubbing.

"Estelle," the counsellor says in a steady voice, "I'm sure that Coco means a lot to you. I know that she must have helped you be more confident, and help you feel like you aren't alone. But Coco won't be here forever. Nothing is forever. You need to find what you found in Coco in you. What you thought that Coco gave you has always been inside you. Someone is always going to be in your corner, even without Coco. Your confidence comes from you, not Coco. And don't worry about being different. Be thankful for it! There is no one on this planet like you, who thinks like you, who completely understands you. Our brains all work in unique, and amazing ways. You don't have to hold on so tight. With or without Coco, someone is for you,"

I sit in silence, comprehending what was just said. After a short period of silence, the counsellor gets up and smiles, "Now, let's go and find Coco, shall we?". After around 15 minutes of rummaging around in the forest, we finally find Coco's extremely soiled head. The counsellor and I wash her head. I go back to class, leaving Coco in the counsellor's capable hands.

A couple of days later, I find a neat parcel on my desk. I open the box to find Coco, restored. I take her out of the package and notice her head is stained a light brown, and there are unmistakable stitches around her neck, but she's with me and she's all in one piece. That's what matters.

Nowadays, I leave Coco at home. When I'm at school and I feel nervous or scared, I know that I have the confidence inside of me. That my differences are beautiful, and special. I don't need an object to find boldness or strength.

I don't need to have such a tight grip.



Neurodiversity Waltz

In the garden of minds, a dance unfolds. Where neurons pirouette, stories untold. Autumn leaves whisper secrets to the breeze. As synapses tango with electric ease.

Dyslexic daisies sway in rhythm's embrace. Their petals spelling chaos, defying space. ADHD fireflies flit and dart, a wild ballet. Chasing moonbeams, forgetting yesterday.

Autistic constellations map celestial trails. Connecting dots in patterns that never fail.

Anxiety's delicate spiderwebs shimmer at dawn, catching worries, weaving resilience drawn. Depression's brooding cypress trees stand tall. Roots anchored in shadows, yet reaching for all. Bipolar sunflowers turn faces to extremes, chasing highs and lows in kaleidoscope dreams.

And schizophrenic stardust, oh how it gleams, Painting galaxies of voices, fragmented streams. Each mind a universe, unique and profound. A symphony of quirks, harmonizing sound.

So let us celebrate the neurodiverse ball, where every step, every glitch, every fall, adds colour to our shared cosmic tapestry.

A dance of beautiful minds. Forever free.

Meep

Meep. That's how I addressed him, my fuzzy, carrot-coloured toy. The monosyllable 'Meep' became my catch phrase. When my mum asked me if I had finished my dinner; Meep. When I was upset that I didn't manage to win that week's star of the week prize; Meep. When my brother called me bespectacled and friendless; 'Meep.' And yet, who needed flesh and blood friends when I had Meep. No one quite understood my peculiar fascination with something as worn as my withered toy. Naturally, they had assumed the obsession would fade as I grew up, but my attachment only grew more prodigious.

Growing up was like being one of the puppies in '101 Dalmatians' except I wasn't born with spots but with a dangling toy hanging by my side. My attachment over him was like a metastasizing cancer - uncontrollably destructive. I had a sobbing fit when a hateful adult would take him from me. Now they realised, what I had wasn't an attachment.

I was autistic.

Thirteen and diagnosed with autism. It's one of those odd ages where most teenagers are becoming familiar with version of themselves that they know. But I felt different, and I began to see the world with a perspective that changed me. Every look branded me, and every word was pestilence to my ear. I let go of Meep. I had performed a burial for him in my back garden, pouring handfuls of soil over his dirty orange skin. I didn't want him to get cold, so I made sure to add an extra heap. I hadn't let go. It wasn't the fuzzy, carrot-coloured toy that I craved, it was the comfort and support it gave me. So, when it was gone, the desire for comfort didn't disintegrate because I was still autistic.

I can't let that go.

Still in Bloom

Often I pondered within,
What's it would be like to sway with the breeze like kin,
Yet I was trapped in a storm's spin,
Buffeted by winds of words my mind couldn't pin.

Challenges withered me, stem to petal,
But hidden, my bloom remained subtle,
Unsure of purpose, I grappled,
Blindness veiled me, a relentless battle.

Time's pressure weighed heavy,
Dependent on my pace, steady,
Yet unfulfilled, I felt unready,
Wilted by the stem, petals unsteady.

Yearning to reveal true hues,
But concealed, shadows did confuse,
Encouragement, like morning dews,
Lifted me, petals anew, I choose.

Awareness of differences dawns, a shared sight,
We're all blooms in life's ongoing fight,
Rising from stems, into the light,
Together, in bloom, our futures bright.



Untitled

I can taste my parents' disappointment. It is sharp and bitter, like when you eat something too hot, it burns your mouth, but you cannot spit it out; it would be rude.

We are sitting around a table, the four of us. Me, Mum, Dad and Mrs Beech. She is describing my behaviour; her words are black and spiky. Their injustice stings like lots of little cuts. Not excruciating but dull and constant. I've got used to it. It doesn't hurt as it once did. In my frustration it's easier to look at my hands than at anyone. It's odd being the topic of conversation. I decide I don't like being discussed very much, at least not when I'm being criticised.

She is saying I don't take part in class; I don't do the work; I don't make an effort. I want to tell her I would. If only the many conversions, the tiny twinkling pinpricks, weren't so shiny. If only the posters didn't buzz, calling me, beckoning me to join something which I know is not real. If only she could keep control and if only I couldn't taste her scolding. But I don't. Because they never believe me. Because when I asked my friends to be quiet, because their shrieks were blinding me, their laughter was an ugly yellow, dirty and vivid.

She's describing the time I started crying in maths. She asked me a question. I didn't know the answer. I had been trying to block everything out, the flashing words, the murmuring drawings taped to the wall. She got angry, saying I hadn't been listening. I burst into tears. She is telling my parents what an attention seeker I am. How dramatic I am.

Then she tells them how I can't focus in class. How I sit motionless with my head on the desk. Again I want to explain. The class is too loud. I can see their chatter. Bright white lines. The walls are too alive. Throbbing. Covered in images. I can hear them whispering. Excited, eager. How am I meant to concentrate when I am bombarded with the cyan lines of laughter and the deep purple of tears.

Then she gets onto art. The only thing I do well in. There hearing the sun singing is good. It's creative, original. Mrs Beech asks where I get my inspiration from. I've given up trying to explain to her that it's what I see anyway. I'm not imaginative; I'm drawing my world.

One of my paintings hangs above her desk. It's one of my favourites. Poppies swaying in the breeze. At least, that's how the picture began. On one side the crimson flowers stand tall, strong. By the other side the paper is dotted with floating red and gold. I was trying to capture their song, the call they have, tiny

patters, like raindrops on a lake. How I wish the blood red petals would take me with them, as they flutter away.

Take me somewhere where I am not the only one who can hear the poppies singing, and knows how they long to be free. Who can see the harmony dancing, leaping over the glistening water.

Always moving away.

Always just out of reach.

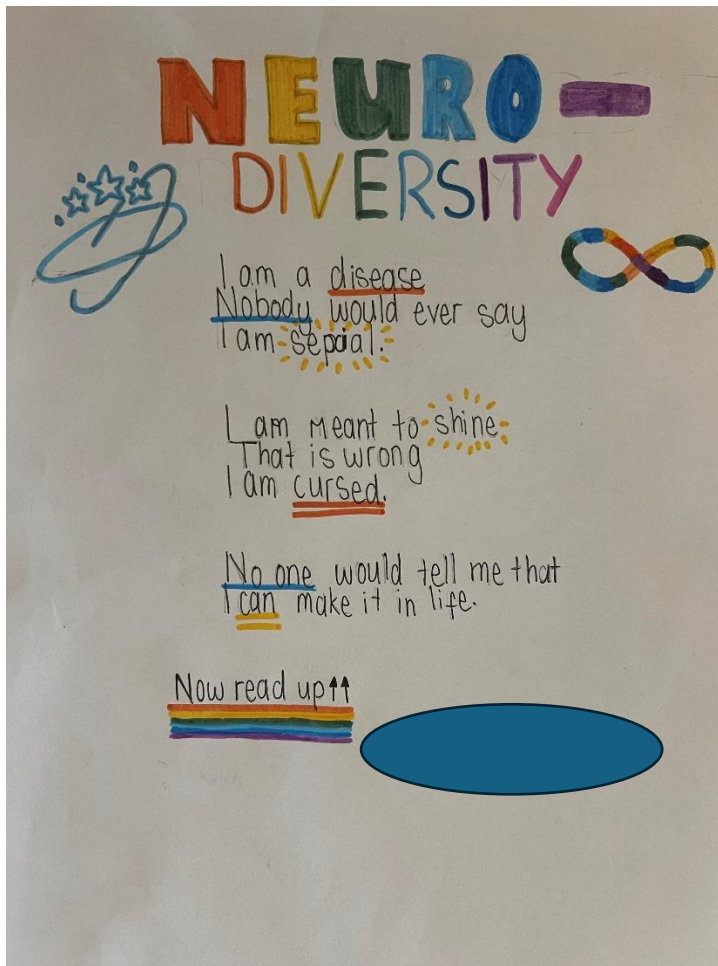
Special or Normal?

Why do strangers think that I can't hear them?
Why don't they understand that I can hear their whispers?
Why do strangers think that it is odd to be outside the bus canopy in the rain?
Why don't they understand it is too crowded in there?
Why do strangers think it is odd to have my hood down in the rain?
Why don't they understand I like the feeling of rain hitting my hair?
Why do strangers think I can't hear them say special?
Why don't they understand that I know that word?

Why do people scream at games on their phones?
Why don't they understand that it hurts?
Why do people scream when I need to pack my bag?
Why don't they understand that I need to be there?
Why do people like the noises?
Why don't they understand that others don't?
Why do people not care that I suffer?
Why don't they understand the torture they cause?

Why do I get affected my sensory inputs unlike a normal person?
Why don't I ignore them like a normal person?
Why do I stop speaking when I am overwhelmed unlike a normal person?
Why don't I always communicate like a normal person?
Why do I move always unlike a normal person?
Why don't I stay still like a normal person?
Why do I have shutdowns unlike a normal person?
Why don't I live unaffected by sensory overload like a normal person?
Why am I special?
Why aren't I normal?

Neurodiversity in Reverse



Morgan

Morgan was a remarkable young woman who lived in a world where experiences are interwoven into a vivid tapestry. Her world was painted in a kaleidoscope of colours and textures by her neurodiverse nature, which was endowed with her unusual mind. Morgan's mind was a maze of intricate connections that frequently defied conventional understanding, and her thoughts danced to the beat of her own unique symphony. The world around her could feel like a symphony of turmoil and noise at times, or it could whisper secrets only she could understand. She was inundated with sensory inputs like a wave. The soft touch of a hand, the hum of the refrigerator, and the sound of leaves rustling in the breeze all resonated within her with a power that could move and inspire her at the same time. Morgan felt like an alien in a society that frequently rewarded conformity. Her inability to focus and communicate effectively served as imperceptible walls separating her from her peers. However, despite the difficulties, there was also a secret genius. Morgan's mind was capable of making astonishing connections between seemingly unrelated concepts, creating intricate information networks that amazed people who genuinely listened to her. Her vivid landscape paintings and elaborate stories took her and others to worlds far beyond their ordinary existence. Her imagination ran wild. Morgan found comfort in a community of like-minded people as she managed the challenges of puberty. They learned the value of accepting their neurodiversity and embraced their uniqueness together. In a world where they were frequently misinterpreted, they served as a light of acceptance and tolerance. With their help, Morgan discovered how to use her special talents. She found that she was able to see the world with a richness and depth that others frequently missed because of her increased sensitivity to sensory stimulation. Her non-traditional thought processes offered her a fresh and imaginative viewpoint, which helped her find solutions to issues that others were unable to. Morgan became a neurodiversity advocate as she grew into a young woman. She broke the taboo around mental health by sharing her story and encouraging others to celebrate their uniqueness. She reminded people that even in the most unusual of pathways, there was always a space for belonging as she talked about the wonders and difficulties of living with an unusual mind. Morgan's journey thus became a symbol of the neurodiversity's unwavering spirit. She demonstrated to the world that every thread, no matter how colourful or unusual, had a place in the fabric of human experience.

Untitled

A brain spinning like cogs in a machine,
Beautifully intricate and precise,
A mind so delicately serene,
A scene of paradise.

Yet misunderstood by those who see,
By lenses hazed, not yet free,
But in this child, a brilliance so clear,
A mind unshackled, with nothing to fear.

Social cues like foreign lands,
A map navigated with unseen hands,
Yet friendship blooms in rarest hues,
With a loyal heart, steadfast and true.

In the deepest depths of a curious mind,
Where thoughts weave patterns undefined,
There dwells a child with eyes so splendour,
A universe within, a message sender.
In fields of numbers, equations dance,
Leaving their mark in a knowledge-filled trance,
Vocabulary vast, like the stars above,
Whirling through their minds like doves.

Although we may not understand,
Let us embrace this wondrous soul,
For in their world we might just find,
The keys to mysteries of humankind.

People don't understand

People don't understand when I stop
They just look at me, semi-shocked
People don't understand when I can't talk
They think it's simple, like an ambling walk
People don't understand when I can't look them
Square on in the eyes, (believe me, I try)
People don't understand when I do the same thing
Over and over again, they start glaring
People don't understand when I cry
They don't have a clue why
The fact is, they treat me more like a riddle
Then a living breathing human being
But that's alright
They don't understand that I am what I am
And that I am content with being the person
That people don't understand



Embracing Neurodiversity: Celebrating Differences and Fostering Inclusion

Introduction:

Neurodiversity is a concept that challenges conventional views of neurological differences by recognizing and embracing the unique strengths and perspectives of individuals with diverse neurotypes. It encompasses a spectrum of conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others, advocating for acceptance rather than cure. In this essay, we delve into the significance of neurodiversity, its implications for society, and the importance of fostering an inclusive environment that celebrates differences.

Understanding Neurodiversity:

Neurodiversity acknowledges that variations in brain function and behavior are natural and valuable aspects of human diversity. Rather than pathologizing differences, it emphasizes the richness of cognitive diversity and the contributions that neurodivergent individuals bring to society. Each neurotype offers unique skills, talents, and perspectives that can enrich communities and drive innovation.

Challenging Stigma and Misconceptions:

Historically, neurodiversity has been overshadowed by stigma and misconceptions. Many neurodivergent individuals face discrimination, marginalization, and barriers to education and employment. Society's narrow definition of normalcy has led to a lack of acceptance and support for those whose neurotypes deviate from the norm. It is crucial to challenge these stigmas and promote a more inclusive narrative that recognizes the inherent value of neurodiversity.

Promoting Inclusion and Accessibility:

Creating an inclusive society requires deliberate efforts to accommodate diverse needs and preferences. This includes providing accessible learning and working environments, embracing alternative communication styles, and offering support services tailored to individual requirements. By promoting inclusion, we can harness the full potential of neurodiverse individuals and cultivate environments where everyone can thrive.

Harnessing Neurodiverse Talent:

Neurodivergent individuals possess a wide range of talents and skills that are often overlooked or undervalued. Many excel in fields such as mathematics, technology, art, and science, bringing fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to complex problems. By recognizing and harnessing neurodiverse talent, organizations can foster creativity, resilience, and productivity in diverse teams.

Educating and Raising Awareness:

Education plays a pivotal role in promoting understanding and acceptance of neurodiversity. By incorporating neurodiversity into school curricula and workplace training programs, we can raise awareness, combat stereotypes, and foster empathy and inclusion from an early age. Additionally, highlighting the achievements and contributions of neurodivergent individuals can challenge preconceptions and inspire others to embrace diversity.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, embracing neurodiversity is not only a matter of social justice but also a source of strength and innovation for society. By valuing differences and fostering inclusion, we can create a world where all individuals, regardless of their neurotype, are empowered to reach their full potential. Let us celebrate the richness of human diversity and build a future that embraces and embraces the diverse talents and perspectives of all its members.

