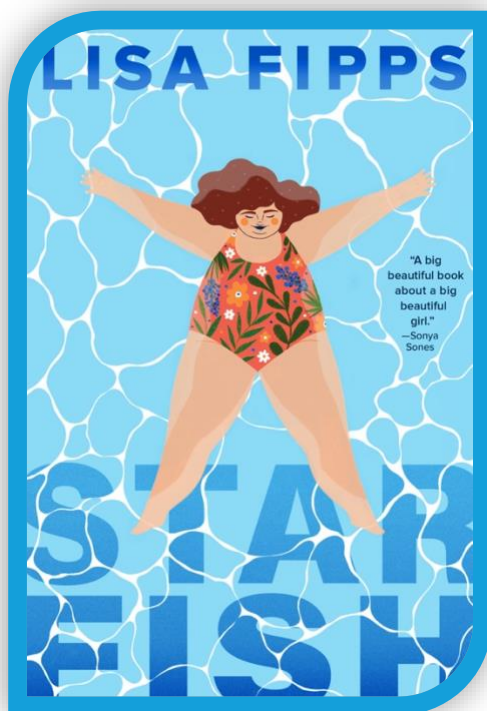




Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



Starfish

Lisa Fipps (Author)

ISBN: 978-1984814500

Publisher: Nancy Paulsen Books

Year Published: 2021

Age Range: 10–13

Book Themes

Weight/Size Bias, Identity-Based Bullying, Acting as an Ally, Standing Up for Oneself

About the Book

Ever since Ellie wore a whale swimsuit and made a big splash at her fifth birthday party, she's been bullied about her weight. To cope, she tries to live by the "Fat Girl Rules"—like "no making waves," "avoid eating in public," and "don't move so fast that your body jiggles." And she's found her safe space—her swimming pool—where she feels weightless in a fat-obsessed world. In the water, she can stretch herself out like a starfish and take up all the room she wants. It's also where she can get away from her pushy mom, who thinks criticizing Ellie's weight will motivate her to diet. Fortunately, Ellie has allies in her dad, her therapist, and her new neighbor, Catalina, who loves Ellie for who she is. With this support buoying her, Ellie might finally be able to cast aside the Fat Girl Rules and starfish in real life—by unapologetically being her own fabulous self.

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a conversation that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the book?
- How did Ellie change and grow throughout the book?
- Why do you think Ellie feels like she has to make herself small?
- What are the ways that Ellie is bullied at home, in school and in her community? How did you feel as you were reading those passages? If you were there, what would you say or do to support Ellie?
- What is Ellie and Catalina's friendship like? What do they have in common and how are they different?
- Have you ever seen, heard about or experienced weight bias? If so, how did you feel and what did you say or do, if anything?
- Why do you think it's difficult for Ellie to stand up for herself? Have you ever had to stand up for yourself? What was that like for you?
- How did you feel when the book ended and what do you think will happen next for Ellie?
- What do you think is the author's message of the book?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations that will make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

1. Weightism and Sizeism

Talk with your child about weightism or sizeism, which is a primary focus and theme of the book. Elicit that Ellie was the target of weightism in school, in her town/community and at home. Explain to your child that **weightism** is the disrespect, harm and mistreatment of people who are viewed as overweight compared to people who are not seen as overweight. Explain that weightism takes place among children and adults alike. Ask your child if they have seen, heard about or experienced weightism in their school or in the community. Explain that weightism is very common in schools today and many young people are the target of bullying, stereotyping, harassment, body shaming and discrimination because of weight or size bias. Ask your child how they think Ellie felt when she was bullied and targeted and then talk about other people they may know who have experienced weightism, and the harm caused to that person. You can share that these biases begin in preschool and often get worse as children get older. Then talk with your child about what they can do about weightism and weight bias when they see it happening in school or in our community and share your own thoughts about what you have done or could do.

Note for Parents/Families

The National Education Association's (NEA) report on size discrimination concluded, "For (overweight) students, the school experience is one of ongoing prejudice, unnoticed discrimination, and almost constant harassment. From nursery school through college, (overweight) students

experience ostracism, discouragement, and sometimes violence.” According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), approximately one in three overweight girls and one in four overweight boys report being teased by peers at school, and peers regard overweight children as undesirable playmates

In the book, Ellie uses the term “fat” as a descriptive term to describe herself. With the [body positivity movement](#) and “fat activism,” language has evolved, and many people use the word fat as a descriptive, honest and direct term to talk about their body. However, that doesn’t mean it is okay to use the term to describe someone else. Ellie notes that the term fat is oftentimes used as a put-down, slur and way to target and bully people, and we know this happens in school and among children often. Therefore, while you discuss the book, the term “overweight” or “perceived to be overweight” should be used.

2. Bullying and Acting as an Ally

Talk with your child about some of the challenges Ellie faced because of weightism at school, in her community and at home including bullying, exclusion, ridicule, discrimination, harassment, threats, etc. Ellie experienced regular and ongoing bullying at school. With your child, define **bullying** as when a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed. Ask your child how Ellie feels when this happens to her and what others can do to help or support her. Then, talk with them about what it means to act as an ally to someone who is being bullied. Explain that an **ally** is someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias. Talk with them about who acted as an ally to Ellie (e.g., Catalina, Ellie’s dad) and the ways they engaged in ally behavior. Ask your child if they’ve ever acted as an ally to someone who was targeted based on their identity and share experiences you’ve had with engaging in ally behavior. Emphasize how impactful and important that is for the person targeted. Share ideas for ways they can act as an ally when they see bias or bullying. Highlight that there are many ways to act as an ally; use ADL’s [6 Ways to Be an Ally](#) to explore those various ways

3. Standing Up for Yourself

In the book, we see that Ellie struggles to stand up for herself. She says, “Every time I try to stand up for myself, the words get stuck in my throat like a giant glob of peanut butter.” Ask your child what Ellie means by this and if they’ve ever felt this way. Ellie is targeted by weightism at home, school and in her town/community. She struggles with how to stand up for herself with her mom, brother, Kortnee and Melissa and strangers she meets who call her names, belittle and make fun of her. With her therapist, Ellie and Dr. Wood talk about the difference between “attacking back” at people who target you and defending yourself. Talk with your child about some examples from the book when Ellie attacks back and examples for when she defends herself. Engage your child in a conversation about why it’s important to stand up for yourself and at the same time, explore how difficult it can be. Ask them if they have ever struggled with that and talk about what might help them better able to stand up for themselves. Share your own reflections and experiences to stand up for yourself and what made it easier to do so.

Other Books You May Like



Beautifully Me by Nabela Noor, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/beautifully-me



Posted by John David Anderson, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/posted



The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Q. Raúf, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-boy-at-the-back-of-the-class



The Misfits by James Howe, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-misfits

ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on weight bias, identity-based bullying and acting as an ally.

Curriculum Resources

Identity-Based Bullying, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying.

What is Weight Bias?, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-is-weight-bias.

Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. (Also in Spanish.)

National Bullying Prevention Month

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/national-bullying-prevention-month

Some resources to help students be motivated and empowered to act as allies and help contribute to creating a positive “ally culture” at their schools.

Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all

This resource provides information about how to promote a safe, respectful and inclusive school community.

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk

Provides the tools parents and family members need to engage their families in conversations about important news stories and other timely discussions about societal and world events. Includes discussion guides containing a topic summary, questions to start the conversation and dig deeper, ideas for taking action and additional resources. See “[What Bullying Is and Is Not](#).”

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Bias, Discrimination & Hate: Size Bias, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[180\]=180](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[180]=180)

Bullying Awareness & Prevention, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-2=1&tid\[165\]=165&tid\[166\]=166&tid\[167\]=167&tid\[168\]=168&tid\[169\]=169](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-2=1&tid[165]=165&tid[166]=166&tid[167]=167&tid[168]=168&tid[169]=169)