

Different But Equal

Alice was beginning to understand what her parents were telling her about genes, but she had a puzzle. How did her schoolmate Max fit in? He was the son of neighbours, but he didn't look like the rest of his family.

"Dad... you know Max? Why's he—you know—different?" she asked one day.

"He has a genetic problem," replied her dad. "Sometimes things go wrong inside the genes. It's as if some of the letters of the DNA message are repeated or unreadable. Then part of that person develops more slowly than normal—or some features may be altered."

"Max has Down's Syndrome," her mum said. "But have you noticed what a good boy he is? And he's always so cheerful, too!"

"But he makes me nervous," said Alice.

"Yes—because you think he's 'different'. But you shouldn't judge people by their appearances. Max is just like anyone else—he can do many things and achieve many goals. Also, look how affectionate and honest he is. It's too sad that other children think him different and don't want to be his friend—even exclude him from things—just because he's not quite like

them. You know, that's called discrimination."



"I like Max, but..." Alice lowered her head, feeling a little ashamed.

"Don't feel bad," Dad said. "What you have to do now is learn how to treat him fairly. You can play together, learn many things, and just have a good time."

"Do you think that he wants me to be his friend, Dad?" asked Alice.

"I'm sure he does!" he responded energetically.

