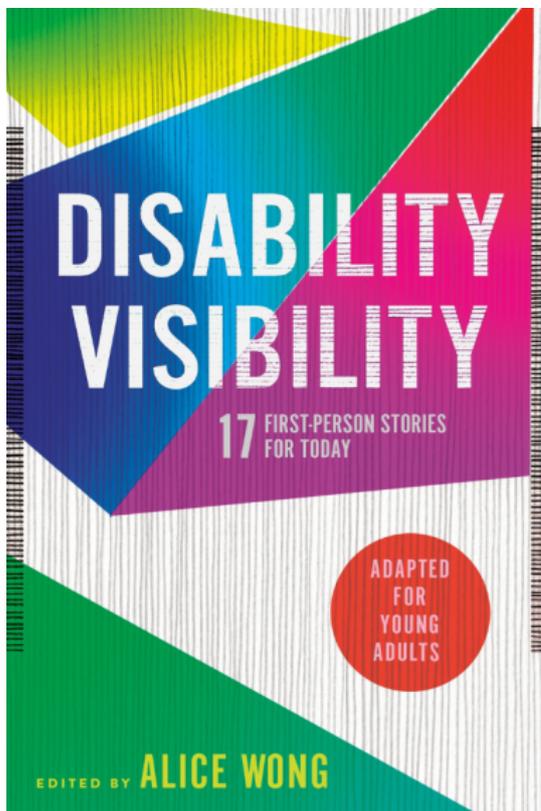


# Disability Visibility

17 first-person stories for today

## Discussion Guide



**\*Guide adapted from *Disability Visibility Discussion Guide* by Naomi Ortiz**

Ortiz, Naomi. (June 30, 2020). "Discussion guide for Disability Visibility First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century." Disability Visibility Project.

More about [The Disability Visibility Project](#)

Disability is part of community, culture and daily life. *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century* offers readers the opportunity to delve into layers of perspective in each essay. Yet, reading a book is not always the same as knowing how the ideas shared connect to us and our lives. How do we bring this wisdom home?

This discussion guide is for anyone interested in examining the themes and questions shared by the authors. This guide supports you to ask how these stories connect with your life, family and communities.

In this guide, you will find overall questions focusing on themes which run through multiple essays. In addition, for each individual chapter, there are questions that explore the essays's themes. There are also suggested activities and projects for individuals or groups to do after reading the book. Finally, there is a glossary including some of the terms multiple authors use in their essays.

The goal of this guide is to provoke thoughtful conversation and introspection. Some of the questions focus on essay content. Other questions relate to personal self-reflection, exploring how topics relate to you and your life.

The Discussion Guide questions are only a place to start. As we ask ourselves how to bring the wisdom shared by these authors home, notice what piques your curiosity or challenges you, and ask yourself, "Why?" A good question can hold the surprise of joy, and the satisfaction of self-discovery. Enjoy!

# Overall Discussion Questions:

1. Alice Wong, the editor of the book, describes the disability community as, “political, power, resistance and magic.” What examples for each of these categories can you locate or identify from the stories in the book?
2. Harriet McBryde Johnson says, “We enjoy pleasures other people enjoy and pleasures peculiarly our own.” What pleasures might be unique for disabled folks?
3. What are some of the disability rights issues the authors identified? How did people discuss fighting or advocating for their rights?
4. Alison Kafer, author of *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, says that “rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds.” If this idea was accepted and valued in society—how would it impact the topics other authors discussed (such as: incontinence, climate change, advocating for disability access, fashion, parenting)?
5. What stories have stayed with you? How have they impacted your worldview?

# Part One: BEING

## If You Can't Fast, Give - Maysoon Zayid

1. What traditions do you have that require discipline and/or sacrifice?
2. How does your family or community respond to your participation or lack of participation in traditions?
3. Have you had a situation or know of one where you or someone you know broke with tradition due to a disability? What was that like?

## There's a Mathematical Equation That Proves I'm Ugly-Or So I Learned in My Seventh Grade Art Class - Ariel Henley

1. Have you experienced what the author describes as, "...obsessed with bridging the gap between the person I was and the person I felt I should be"? If so, what was that like? If not, why do you think you haven't experienced this feeling?
2. How do the unique ways you look set you apart and make you beautiful?
3. The author states that, "my appearance was my art." How does the statement make you feel? What thoughts or feelings does the statement inspire in you?

## When You Are Waiting To Be Healed - June Eric-Udorie

1. How is cure connected to shame for the author?
2. What does the author gain by owning disability as an identity? What do they lose?
3. The author discusses their family's hope that God or a doctor could cure their disability. Have you or someone you know experienced similar attitudes from family or faith communities?

## The Isolation of Being Deaf in Prison - Jeremy Woody as told to Christie Thompson

1. The author states that not having access to ASL interpretation in prison was a deprivation. Explain why.
2. What examples does the author give of ableism\* and audism\* from the staff and others in prison?
3. Why is the incarceration of Deaf and disabled people a human rights issue? Why is it a disability rights issue?

# Part Two: BECOMING

## We Can't Go Back - Ricardo T. Thornton Sr.

1. How does the author describe the transition from living in an institution, to living in the community?
2. How do low expectations of disabled people impact their lives and opportunities? How do high expectations impact us?
3. How does living in an institution affect a person's choices?

## Guide Dogs Don't Lead Blind People. We Wander as One. - Haben Girma

1. How did the author develop their confidence to move around?
2. Why does the author describe it as ableism\* when someone assumes that their guide dog brought them to where they were going?
3. How did the author's description of working together with a guide dog change what you thought having a guide dog is like?

## Canfei to Canji: The Freedom To Be Loud - Sandy Ho

1. The author says, "Now I understand the exchange of silence for the comfort of others as oppression..." How do you decide when to be silent or when to make others uncomfortable?
2. Whether in East Asia or the United States, cultural values validate the narrative of worthy versus unworthy bodies." How does your culture talk about disability?
3. Why does the author talk about having hard discussions with family members as a legacy for future generations?

## Nurturing Black Disabled Joy - Keah Brown

1. How does pop culture betray disabled people? What are some examples you can name?
2. How does the author describe living unapologetically? How would you define this for yourself?
3. The author says, "The reality of disability and joy means accepting that not every day is good but every day has openings for small pockets of joy." What are the openings for small pockets of joy for you in your daily life?

## Selma Blair Became A Disabled Icon Overnight. Here's Why We Need More Stories Like Hers - Zipporah Arielle

1. The author says, "The embarrassment around unfashionable mobility devices and the limited selection of stylish accessible clothing has long been a problem for many disabled folks." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. How does the author explain internalized ableism?
3. Why is having disabled people visible on TV and in movies important?

## Part Three: DOING

### So. Not. Broken. - Alice Sheppard

1. How does the author talk about their wheelchair as an extension of their body?
2. What does the author share about how disability is connected to their development as an artist?
3. Why does the author talk about learning how using their wheelchair on stage and in the world as different from learning how to move their wheelchair?

## **Incontinence Is a Public Health Issue — And We Need to Talk About It - Mari Ramsawakh**

1. Would treating incontinence as a human rights issue have given the author a different experience in childhood? Why or why not?
2. Why is incontinence a public health issue?
3. What could incontinence products look like that are geared to young people?

## **Falling/Burning: Hannah Gadsby, Nanette, and Being a Bipolar Creator - Shoshana Kessock**

1. Why does the author say that they will forever thank Hannah Gadsby for telling people that artists don't have to suffer for their art?
2. How does the author describe their journey with medication and their art?
3. Where do you go for checks and balances - to seek advice, support or help?

## Gaining Power Through Communication Access - Lateef McLeod

1.

What kinds of technology do you use? How does it help you communicate? What are its limitations?

2.

Wong and McLeod discuss assistive technology which, when medicalized, oftentimes is extremely expensive and not designed by disabled people. If you use devices which are medicalized, can you imagine them combined with technology which readily exists, like phones and tablets? How would that change things for you?

3.

What are Ugly Laws?

## Part Four: CONNECTING

### The Fearless Benjamin Lay—Activist, Abolitionist, Dwarf Person - Eugene Grant

1.

Who is Benjamin Lay? Why is Lay historically important?

2.

“Lay is not just a role model; he is a dwarf role model.” Why does the author make this distinction?

3.

Why is it important to include disability identity when we write about or discuss historical figures?

## Love Means Never Having to Say . . . Anything - Jamison Hill

1.

What are the easier parts of dating another person who is disabled/ sick? What's harder?

2.

How does the author discuss the ways that they and their partner care for each other?

3.

What are the different forms of communication expressed by the author and their partner?

## On the Ancestral Plane: Crip Hand Me Downs and the Legacy of Our Movements - Stacey Milbern

1.

How does the author describe crip ancestors?

2.

What support do we draw from our ancestors, crip or otherwise?

3.

Who are your cultural ancestors? What gifts do they pass down to you?

# The Beauty of Spaces Created For and By Disabled People

- s.e. smith

1.

What about the dance performance the author described makes it an example of crip space\* for the performers and audience?

2.

Why do we need crip spaces?

3.

"Members of many marginalized groups have this shared experiential touchstone, this sense of unexpected and vivid belonging and an ardent desire to be able to pass this experience along." Have you had this experience? If so, how have you passed it along?