

Merriam Sarcia Saunders

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Trouble with a Tiny t

Capstone Editions

Genre:

Realistic Fiction with
Magical Elements

Reading Level:

Grade 3-6

Reading Age: 8-12

Themes:

ADHD, Differences,
Divorce, Friendship,
Bullying, Self-Esteem,
Grief, Empathy and
Compassion, Families,
Identity, Emotions and
Self-Regulation,
Kindness and Caring,
Conflict Resolution,
Disability and
Neurodiversity,
Overcoming Obstacles

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SYNOPSIS

Eleven-year-old Westin heavily identifies with the trouble his ADHD causes. When he finds a magic pouch, he makes life worse by using the magic to make a tiny T. rex, followed by a headless plastic army and a six-inch Thor. He can't figure out the magic to make them go away—and they're battling in his bedroom, stealing lunchmeat from the fridge, and GROWING.

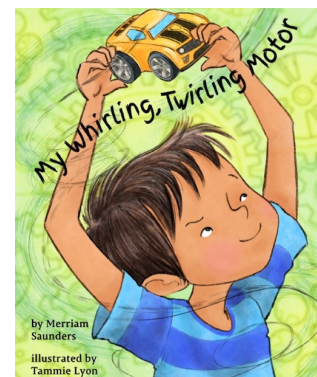
At the same time, he's forgetting homework, in trouble at school, not listening to parents, and losing his friends--all very common problems for kids with ADHD. But, the story is ultimately empowering. Because Westin will find a better, more understanding friend and realize that his talent for art might be just the exact magic he needs.

Merriam is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist specializing in the treatment of ADHD. She has been a K8 School Counselor and is the mom of three grown kids with learning disabilities, ADHD & Autism.

Merriam has degrees from Brown University and Dominican University, where she is presently an adjunct professor in the graduate psychology program.

Merriam is the author of the picture books MY WANDERING, DREAMING MIND & MY WHIRLING TWIRLING MOTOR (APA), which received a starred review from **School Library Journal**.

She loves dinosaurs, flying pigs and has a tiny Chihuahua with no teeth named Gigi.



This Guide is Common Core Aligned for:

3rd grade: ELA. RL.3.1,2,3,4,6,7,9; W.3.1,2,3; SL.3.1,2,4; L.3.4,5

4th grade: ELA. RL.4.1,2,3,4,6,7,9; W.4.1,2,3; SL.4.1,2,4; L.4.4,5

5th grade: ELA. RL.5.1,2,3,4,6,7,9; W.5.1,2,3; SL.5.1,2,4,5; L.5.4,5

6th grade: ELA. RL.6.1,2,3,4,5,6,; W.6.1,2,3,4,7,8; SL.6.1a,3,4,5; L.6.1,2,3,4,5

7th grade: ELA. RL.7.1,2,3,4,5,6; W.7.1,2,3,4,7,8; SL.7.4,5; L.7.1,2,3,4,5

8th grade: ELA. RL.8.1,2,3,4,5,6,9; W.8.1,2,3,4,7,8; SL.8.4,5; L.8.1,2,3,4,5

With a special emphasis on Social Emotional Learning

Explaining ADHD to children

CHADD (Children and Adults with ADHD) defines ADHD as "a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting 11 percent of school-age children. ADHD is characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity.

Children with ADHD often experience delays in independent functioning and may behave younger than their peers. Many children affected by ADHD can also have mild delays in language, motor skills or social development that are not part of ADHD but often co-occur. They tend to have low frustration tolerance, difficulty controlling their emotions and often experience mood swings."

Chances are, you will have at least one student in your classroom with executive functioning issues. Using this book as a class text can create empathy and understanding for some frequent hard-to-tolerate behaviors while also helping that student feel less isolated.

Questions in this guide can serve to start a conversation around differences. It's important to emphasize and recognize strengths and interests of all children, as opposed to labeling and solely focusing on the differences amongst children with ADHD compared to neurotypical children.

Some students may be very forthcoming with their diagnoses and struggles, which can be empowering. If you use this as a class text, it is suggested you discuss it first with any diagnosed students, so they may pause before impulsively sharing information they later regret.

When speaking about ADHD with youth who are or are not familiar with it, consider showing the four-minute animated video, narrated by children by NCMH (National Centre for Mental Health)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeamHE6Kank>

Trouble with a Tiny t

Before you Read

1. Take a look at the cover of *Trouble with a Tiny T*
 - What do you think this story will be about?
 - Based on the cover, what type of book do you think this will be?
 - How do the images, shapes and colors make you feel?
2. Read the inside flap of the book jacket:
 - What are you wondering about?
 - What predictions do you have for the story? Why?
 - What questions do you have for the author?
3. This book focuses on an adventure involving
 - magic
 - dinosaurs
 - Thor
 - art.

Of those four things, which interests you most?

Which of those four things do you know most about?

Vocab Preview

1. **Cast** (page 2): "The bulb clicks on, dull and yellow, **casting** eerie shadows across the endless pile of boxes."

I think this word probably means:

2. **Flick**. (page 6) "Quicker than the **flick** of a rubber band, the crocodile clamps down and gobbles the poor turtle up like a snack."

I think this word probably means:

3. **Nudge** (page 24) "Mom takes a hand off the steering wheel and **nudges** my side. "Are you listening?"

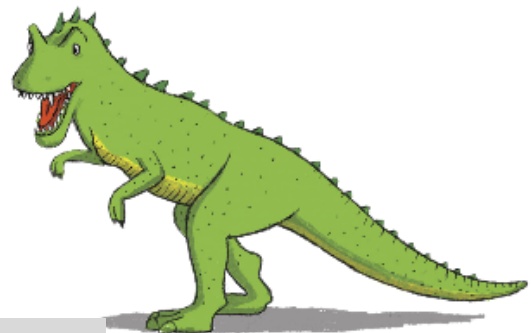
I think this word probably means:

4. **Dread** (page 40) "I **dread** Candy Fridays. If my class doesn't earn the points, it's usually because of me."

I think this word probably means:

5. **Advance** (page 106) "Thor **advances** toward Lenora, hammer held high, and jumps from my desk onto my bed."

I think this word probably means:



Vocab Preview

6. **Vicious** (page 142) "He needs them to protect his legs from his **vicious** dinosaur, Frankie."

I think this word probably means:

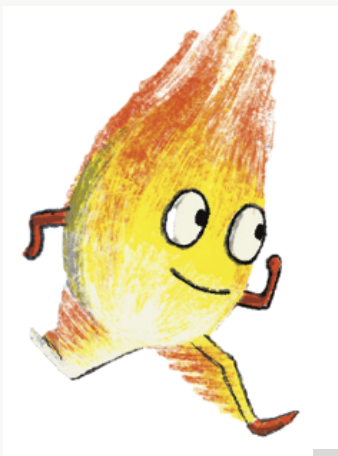
7. **Stem** (page 198) The chain clinks against the **stem** of the bike as Lenora unravels and plops it into her front basket.

I think this word probably means:

8. **Ecstatic** (page 203) Mom is a total softie when it comes to helping people. She'll be **ecstatic** I made a new friend.

I think this word probably means:

9. **Bitter** (page 235) "I run to the gym...The **bitter**, gassy smell hits me in the face but I'd rather be smelling robot-farts in private than letting anyone see me cry."



I think this word probably means:

Sunday Night to Monday at Recess

1. In the opening scene, Westin is going into his grandparents' basement.
Why does he think he needs to be quiet?
2. What does Westin find in the basement?
 - a. What would you do if you found something like that?
 - b. Would you keep it? Would you tell someone?
3. What does Westin do to his grandmother's sheets when he is helping her?
 - a. Why did he do that?
 - b. Do you think it was on purpose?
4. Why do you think Gramps is grumpy toward Westin?
5. What do you think Westin means when he says,
"But no, not my brain. My brain is worthless. In Hawaii half the time.
Or climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. Or canoeing the Amazon. Wherever he is,
he's not in my head doing his job."
6. Does Westin tell his mother what he found in the basement? Why or why not?
7. Why does Westin say his mother is a "question factory"?
8. Do you think Westin thinks he's a good student?
Do you think he wishes he were a good student?
9. Why do you think Westin has a hard time paying attention?
10. Do Westin's parents agree on the type of school he should go to?
What type of school do you think he should go to?
11. At this stage of the story, do you think Westin feels very good about himself?
Do you think there are many people in his life that say positive things about him?
12. What do you think Westin means when he says:
"Vacation Brain may get me into trouble with a capital T,
but with Uncle Marty's magic, trouble is a thing of the past."



Sunday Night to Monday at Recess

13. When Westin gets home, what is the first thing he tries with the object he found in the basement? What would you try?
14. How does Westin think the magic works at first?
In the morning, what new conclusion does he reach about how it works?
Do you think he's correct?
15. Do you think Westin intended to make a T. rex?
What kind of dinosaur would you make?
16. If you made a tiny T. rex, would you tell someone?
Why do you think Westin keeps it a secret?
17. Do you think Westin's math teacher likes him? Why or why not?
18. Westin meets a new girl. What is her name?
What do she and Westin have in common?



Miss Molly asks the Friendship Group to play an introduction game. With your class, come up with
2 Truths and 1 Lie
about yourself, and see who can guess the lie!

Ms. Molly asks Westin to write a
List of Three Things
he is good at.
What three things would you write on your list?

Monday at lunch to Wednesday morning

1. Westin describes Snake as “an Anaconda now, instead of a plain old snake.”
What does he mean by that?

2. What does Westin find out at lunch that hurt his feelings?
Why does he think that happened?

3. When talking about the Monster Truck Rally, Josh says,
“That truck is like ten thousand million pounds.”

Is that an actual number? If you wrote that number, what would it look like?

4. How do you think Josh feels during lunch?

5. Do you think Westin’s friends are kind to him?
What would you say to them if you were Westin?

6. Westin says, “The whole day was torture and mostly felt like there was a pack of lemurs in my belly, slipping and rolling around.”

Imagine you are nervous—can you describe how it feels inside using an animal or insect action?

It feels like a _____(animal)
is _____(action)
in my _____(body part)

7. What happened to Westin’s plastic soldiers?

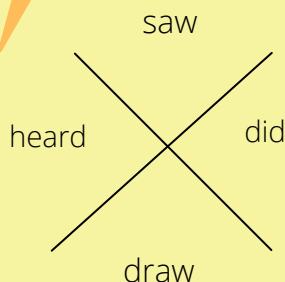
8. At one point, Westin considers keeping the T.rex in a hamster cage. Do you think that’s a good idea?

9. Westin uses salami to lure the T.rex. **Conduct Internet research** and find what scientists think Tyrannosaurus Rex actually ate.

10. Westin decides not to tell his mother about the T.rex and plastic army. Do you think this is a good decision? Why do you think he doesn’t want her to know?

11. Westin likes to describe his mother as a helicopter. Why do you suppose that is? If you could be a form of transportation, what kind would you be? Can you draw it?

Complete an X chart for scenes, filling out what Westin did, what he heard, what he saw, and draw a scene. Afterwards, students can write one big thought from the details of their findings to make a conclusion about West’s character.



Monday at lunch to Wednesday morning

12. Westin asks his mom to stay out of his room because he is organizing it. Is this the truth? What would happen if Westin told his mother the truth?
13. At lunch, Snake says, "I'm going to blow up my house after school." Does he mean this **figuratively** or **literally**? What is the difference? What house does he mean?
14. Lenora talks about *expected* and *unexpected* behavior. What does she mean? Can you name one thing that happened to you today that you *expected*, and one thing you did not *expect*?
15. Does Lenora think Snake, Frankie and Alex are Westin's friends? Do you?
16. Why does Lenora become upset with Westin? Do you think he meant to hurt her feelings?
17. When lightning strikes in Westin's bedroom, it makes a black hole in his carpet. **Conduct Internet research** to learn why lightning might do that.
18. Westin's magic has made a mess of his room and created several unwanted creatures. But Westin realizes he may have made one good new thing. What is it?
19. Look at the picture of Thor on the cover of the book. Find the description of Thor on page 102. Does the cover image match the description? Can you spot two things that are different? (answer on last page)

Thor

Internet research

When Westin wants a superhero from the pouch, Thor comes out. Find out the origins of Thor.

- a. Where is he from? Can you find the area on a map?
- b. What is the Aesir?
- c. What is Norse?
- d. Is Thor a superhero?
- e. Was Thor a real person?
- f. Why does he carry a hammer?



Wednesday Morning to Thursday Morning

1. After the T. rex escapes from Westin's bedroom and Westin is once again not ready for school, what does he mean when he says, "Mom's face is a thundercloud. Any second, horns will jut out of her forehead and fire will shoot out of her ears."
 - a. What other type of weather could be used to describe emotions?
 - b. Can you think of natural elements that could be used to describe:
anger sadness fear joy excitement
2. Why are other students whispering about Westin at school?
How would you feel if you were Westin in this situation?
3. If you were a grown-up and you saw how Westin's friends treated him at lunch, what would you say to them?
4. Mr. Widelot likes to wear funny t-shirts with math puns. What is a **pun**?
5. Mr. Widelot's Wednesday t-shirt says,
"Math teacher's aren't mean. They're above average."
Why is this a **pun**? Why is it funny?
6. Westin thinks it is unusual that Mr. Lowde whispers. Why?
7. Westin made a big mistake in Mr. Widelot's class because he was angry.
Have you ever been angry? Is it okay to react the way Westin did?
What could he have done instead?
8. Westin says his grandmother makes him feel like he's "sitting next to a campfire with a full bag of marshmallows and a long stick." What does he mean by this? In your life, who are the people that make you feel this way?
9. Westin says that Lenora must feel "like she has a meteor-sized hole in her heart."
Why does he suppose this?

internet research

Find out how big meteors really are. How big does a meteor have to be to be considered an asteroid? What type of space debris most hits the earth?

Wednesday Morning to Thursday Morning

1. Westin tries to tell his grandmother about the magic, but she doesn't believe him. Why do you think this is?
2. In the beginning of the story, Westin is convinced there is an alien treasure in Uncle Marty's things. What does the alien turn out to be? **Conduct internet research** to see a picture of this. Do you think it is scary? Can you draw one? Can you name three types of this species?
3. Westin's grandmother gives him permission to go in the basement, but he often does things he shouldn't. Can you name three things he has done so far that could get him in trouble? What would you have done differently?
4. When Westin says to Thor, "You could've at least cleaned up after yourself. Did you have to leave such a mess?" he is surprised by his own words. What was the state of Westin's room even before Tiny T arrived? Is this an example of **irony**. What is **irony**? Why are his words ironic?
5. Westin thinks about things he could do to Mr. Widelot if he were invisible. What two nice things could you do for a friend or your teacher if you were invisible?
6. Thor always calls Tiny T a dragon. Is he a dragon? What are some differences between dragons and dinosaurs? Why do you think Thor calls Tiny T a dragon?
7. Westin's mom tells him that ADHD is an "explanation, not an excuse." What does this mean. Do you agree?
8. Westin's mom tells him that "sometimes people only see the negative stuff. But your mind operates in amazing ways. Like your terrific imagination and your drawings."
 - a. How does your mind operate in amazing ways?
 - b. Westin doesn't believe his mom. He thinks his bad grades mean his mind is not amazing. Do you agree?
 - c. Is it possible to be smart but still struggle in school?
9. Why does Westin decide not to tell his mom about the dinosaur that night? What would you do in his shoes?



Thursday Morning to Friday

1. Why does Thor tell Westin it is not a good idea to bring the pouch to the museum? Do you think this is [foreshadowing](#)?
2. Thor says, "If one mistake loses a friend, and a treasure gains him back, a true friend he never was indeed." Do you agree?
3. Mr. Widelot's Thursday t-shirt says, "There are 3 kinds of people in the world: those who are good at math and those who aren't." Why is this funny?
4. Lenora joins Westin when he bounces his knees. Why is this important to him?
5. Visit <https://egyptianmuseum.org> Imagine you are on Westin's fieldtrip. Find the Museum Tomb Tour. Do you think it is scary?
6. **Conduct Internet research.**
 - a. What is a mummy?
 - b. Why did Egyptians mummify people?
 - c. Can you find the name of one Egyptian ruler that could have been Westin's mummy?
7. Lenora asks Westin why he wants to be friends with Josh and Snake, but he doesn't answer her. If he had, what do you imagine he would say?
8. Lenora tries to help Westin see the good sides of his brain. Can you match what she told him?

Westin says he's:

Poking where I don't belong
Vacation brain
Flaky thinker
High Energy

Lenora says he's:

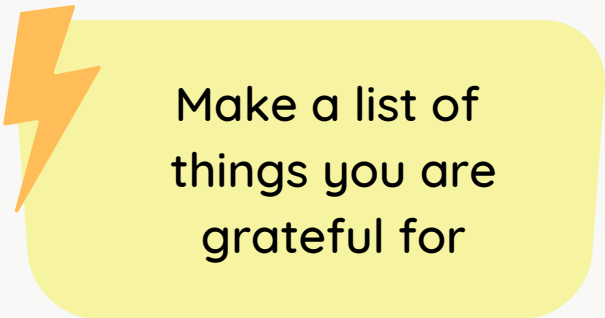
Creative thinker
Never boring
Curious
Adventurous Brain

What are some ways you struggle? Are you ever the opposite way?

9. When considering Lenora's request for what she wants from the pouch, Westin says, "Even act-before-you-think Westin knows this is a bad idea."
Why does he call himself that? Do you think it's a bad idea?

Friday to Saturday Later

1. Can you write the math problem that equals Westin's points for Candy Friday?
2. Miss Molly asks Steve, "What does it mean to be a friend?"
Do you think Steve has a good answer? What would you say?
3. What three words does Miss Molly write on the board that mean being a good friend?
Can you write three more words?
4. Westin tells Lenora, "Being a friend means putting yourself in their shoes. Trying to understand them, even if you don't like the way they bounce their knee or make noises."
Do you agree? Do Westin's other friends do that?
5. But Lenora says she should not have to understand Westin, if he is not willing to sacrifice for her. What does it mean to sacrifice for someone?
6. Why do you think Josh stays quiet when Frankie tells Westin they find him annoying and are not friends? What would you do?
7. Westin draws a fire monster that burns down the gym. How do you think that could have happened?
8. Do you think it's Westin's fault the gym burned down?
9. Westin's father thinks that he uses ADHD as an excuse for his behavior. Westin's mother says to his father, "It's a disability. Asking him to just try harder is like asking a blind kid to try to see."
What is a disability? Can you always tell by looking at someone if they have a disability?
10. Why do you think some people are not kind to people with disabilities?
11. What conclusion does Westin draw about how the magic was customized to Uncle Marty?
12. What are some of the things Lenora said her mother was? Why did she lie?
13. Lenora said Westin made her realize she had things to be grateful for, even though she was sad.
What does it mean to be grateful?



Make a list of things you are grateful for

Friday to Saturday Later

14. Who are the new friends Westin draws to help?
15. **Conduct Internet research.** When and where did the Vikings live? Can you locate those countries on a map? What connection would Vikings have to Thor?
16. If you had to draw people to help you with a problem, who would you draw? Draw them!
17. Westin tells Snake he never hurt him to be mean. Does it matter if you hurt someone by accident or on purpose? Why?
18. Westin tells Tiny T that he knows the lesson T came to teach. What was it?
19. Does Westin forgive Josh? What does he tell him he needs in order to stay friends. What would you say to Josh?
20. Westin's fire monster wound up saving people's lives. If something good comes from a mistake, does that make it okay?
21. Where does Westin think Uncle Marty went? If you were Westin, would you tell your parents? Why do you think Westin doesn't tell them, especially if they are worried about Marty?
22. Westin and Lenora think they should have a code for using the magic responsibly. What three other things should they write in their code?

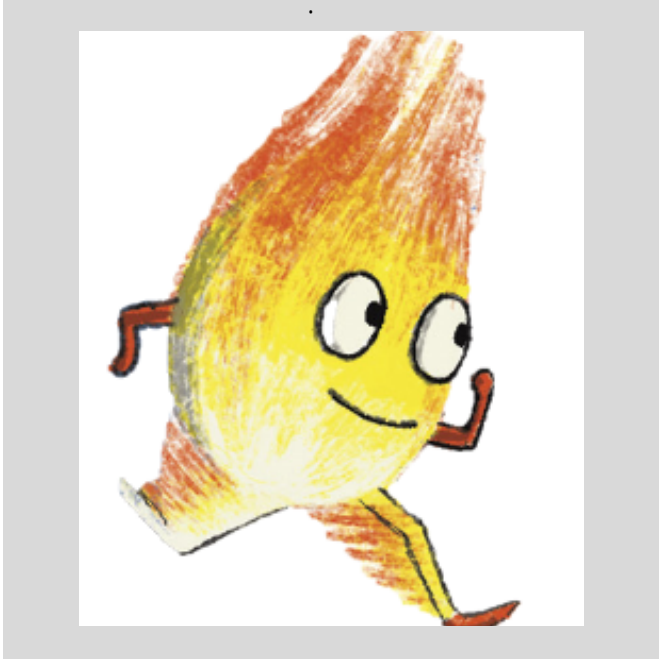
Code for Keeping Magic

1. Lenora keeps the pouch
2. Westin must clear its use with Lenora
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

25. What are Lenora and her father going to talk about later?
26. Westin's last two lines are: "I'm trouble alright. But maybe just trouble with a tiny t."
 - a. What does Westin mean by this?
 - b. How does this compare with how he felt about himself in the first scene of the book?
 - c. How is the title a pun?

After You Read

This is how Frances Castle, a professional illustrator, imagined Westin's fire monster:



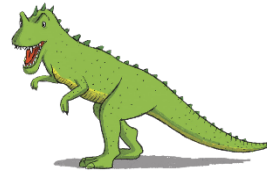
Trouble with a Tiny t

This is how Sabrina Saunders, the author's daughter, imagined him:



Can you draw your own fire monster?





Story Imaginings

This story was told from Westin's point of view. How would this story be different if a narrator told it?

If you had a magic pouch, what would you make?

What do you think is in the Other Realm?

Westin conjures Thor when he requests a superhero because he'd recently seen Thor in a fictional movie. If you needed a superhero for help, who would you choose?

Did you like the ending? If you were the author, how would you have ended the story differently?

Westin's drawing on page 16, the smell of the gym, and Alex's volcano were examples of foreshadowing. Why?

Character Development

Which character in the story do you most relate to?

What are some ways you are like Westin?
Ways you are different?

How are ways that Lenora and Westin are different and similar?

How is Westin similar to Charlies in the author's picture book, MY WHIRLING, TWIRLING MOTOR? How are they different?

Social-Emotional Learning

Westin has a difficult conversation with Snake, then Josh, then his parents. How does this show Westin's growth from the beginning of the story. What do you think this means about how he sees himself now compared with before?

Why is it important that Westin realizes he is not only about the trouble he gets into?

Do you think it is easier to do well when people are cheering you on, or when they are criticizing? Why?

Westin has ADHD. Had you ever heard of ADHD before? Do you think you understand it more after reading this story?

Westin and Lenora became good friends after only knowing each other for one week.

Do you think it is possible to make a friend that fast? Why do you suppose they became friends so quickly?

How can you be sure to be kind, even when someone acts differently?

Sometimes people are not nice to others who are different from them. Why do you suppose this is?

Research the term "hidden disabilities".

What are some examples? Why do you think it might be difficult for people living with a hidden disability compared with someone with a visible disability?

Writing Activities

Write a letter to Thor. What would you ask him about?

Conduct Internet research. Compare and contrast Westin's trouble with Snake to Thor's conflict with Jormugandr in Norse mythology.

Two themes that run through TROUBLE are self-esteem and friendship. Choose one of these themes and write a 500-word essay:

- How is this theme evident in the characters and events of the novel?
- What can readers conclude about this theme from this story?

Thor speaks in a different way. Write a short paragraph about meeting Westin for the first time, from Thor's point of view.

On the bus, Westin and Lenora imagine the news headlines if Tiny T grew. Can you write your own news article about a T.rex that grows and escapes from a boy's bedroom?

If you were Westin, how would you try to help Uncle Marty return from the Other Realm. Write a short story about this.

Write a book review for the novel. Include major characters, setting and conflict without giving away the ending. Explain your opinion and if you recommend the book. Share the review online with parent or teacher permission.

Trouble with a Tiny t



Several times in the book, Westin describes what he is drawing. (page locations on Resource page) Choose one and draw it yourself.

If you could ask the author a question, what would it be?

Ask your teacher or parent for permission to email it to the author at merriam@outlook.com

Resources

There is One in Every Class

*Educator Tips for ADHD
and Other Behaviors*



Image by Tammie Lyon from the picture book *My Whirling Twirling Motor* by LMFT Merriam Sarcia Saunders (Magination Press).

Contact the author:
www.MerriamsBooks.com
merriam@outlook.com
T: @MerriamSaunders
I: @HowToParentADHD

Merriam is available
for Author Vistis.

For a free copy of helpful tips to manage ADHD in your classroom, please email the author at merriam@outlook.com

For a list of children's books that focus on various mental health and neurodiversity issues, please check out www.ANovelMind.com

[ADDitude Magazine](#) is a great resource for teachers on the topic of ADHD

[CHADD](#) - Children & Adults with ADHD

[Answers:](#) Thor on cover has a beard and red cape, which are never described in the text.

West's art descriptions: Pages 16, 36, 79, 109, 122, 167, 265, 285, 302

Other ADHD Middle Grades

Trout and Me -Susan Shreve

This is not the Abby Show -Debbie Reed Fischer

Kevin Keeps Up -Ann Whitehead Nagda

Focused -Alyson Gerber

Joey Pigza Swallowed The Key -Jack Gantos

The Boy With The Butterfly Mind -Victoria Williamson

First Star I See -Jaye Andras Caffrey

Norse Mythology

Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard -Rick Riordan

Norse Mythology for Kids -Mathias Nordvig

Little Thor Gets Mad

Brotherband -John Flanagan

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