

# One child book report essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In *One Child*, author and educator Torey Hayden retells the story of being a special educator in 1980. Placed in a small room with a diverse group of students, Torey Hayden is not your average educator. Her students call her by first name, she gets emotionally involved, and she even takes the desks out of her small classroom. Yet despite the challenges, she and her students come together successfully and begin learning. The class is thrown for a loop when six-year-old Sheila joins the class in January.

Feared by some for her erratic and dangerous behavior, her placement with Torey is meant to be a temporary solution while she awaits admission into the State Hospital. With a lot of patience and controversial tactics, Torey “tames” Sheila, and delightfully discovers that not only is she a smart girl, her IQ is off the charts. The school year concludes with the classroom being broken up due to lack of funding, but with the students fully prepared to enter less restrictive environments in the next school year. This book greatly affected the way I understand families and/or children with disabilities.

The greatest thing I learned is that intelligence or giftedness can be a challenging exceptionality. Through additional research, I found that giftedness can often be misdiagnosed as ADHD or LD. In some cases, children who are gifted can also suffer from specific learning disabilities, and need accommodations on both sides. Sheila was certainly an exceptional child because she had a very high reading and math ability despite being very young and disadvantaged. She lived with her father who was a migrant worker, who despite loving her, could not help her academically.

Emotional circumstances have hindered Sheila's development. Her mother left her a few years earlier, and the belief that she was unworthy prompted her to act out in school settings. She was so afraid of failure that she spent weeks ripping up her math worksheets instead of attempting the problems. Likewise, her father suffered from emotional problems, and used physical discipline to try and correct Sheila's stubbornness. When emotional challenges are present, they can stunt intellectual progress. With patience, Torey dealt with the emotional problems first, and then Sheila was more able to succeed in her schoolwork.

Reading this book greatly affected the way I will interact with children with disabilities and their families. My current field placement is teaching art at a Middle School. Each class consists of students from 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, as well as students with special needs including giftedness. My cooperating teacher has taught me a great deal about differentiating lessons. Torey Hayden has showed me that it is not enough to differentiate lessons or plan adaptations for our students with exceptionalities.

We truly have to look at them as a complete human being, and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of every student in our classroom. Because of this book, I have not been afraid to speak with Mark\* who has downs syndrome, or Alicia who has a cognitive impairment and hearing problems. I have tried to get to know my students with exceptionalities as well as all of my students as individuals, and understand their backgrounds. In the future I will continue to treat each student as a unique person and get to know them and their families before passing judgment.

The other important lesson I learned was that research and reflection are essential to good teaching. Torey Hayden had quite a few unorthodox methods for teaching the children in her classroom. She did not dress professionally and her class discussions permitted all topics, including sexual abuse. It is naive to consider that we as educators are perfect, and know everything there is to know about teaching. Surely in the future we will continue to advance our field and create more effective teaching methods.

However, when we chose to push into new territory, we must consider all negative consequences. For all the good that Torey did for Sheila, she also became incredibly attached to her. Torey went so far as to let Sheila pretend that Torey was her mother. In the long run, this can cause more harm to a child. So I learned that while it is essential to push the boundaries of teaching methods, we must do so with clear insight and proceed with caution. We will never be perfect, nor will our students. But with careful research and reflection we can have a profound effect on the lives of our students.