

# Adalyn's Clare

By Kari Dunn Buron

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In the “no man’s land” that is the tween and pre-tween years, it can be difficult to find appropriate children’s literature, in general, let alone a book that teaches tolerance, compassion, and kindness through a story that is appealing to that age group. *Adalyn’s Clare* achieves this goal in a skillful and sensitive way. It is a book that will not only appeal to children in its third-to-sixth grade target range, but also impart lifelong lessons along the way.

It is no wonder that this lovely story achieves its ambitious goal, for it is written by someone who understands the “territory”—that is, children with differences, special interests, and anxieties. Skilled teacher and award-winning author, Kari Dunn Buron, has created a “match made in heaven” with her lead characters—

a very smart but highly anxious young girl and her sweet-natured, wise-beyond-her-mere-three-months canine companion with a very special “friendship mission.”

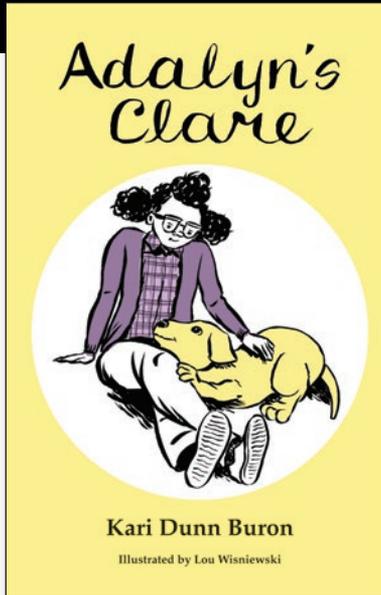
*Adalyn’s Clare* is the story of a fourth grader named Adalyn who presents with many of the characteristics of Asperger syndrome

and other conditions associated with social anxiety, although no specific diagnosis is given. Clare is Adalyn’s therapy dog, brought in to help her make friends with her peers. The book

alternates between the perspectives of Adalyn and Clare, and adeptly explains why each character thinks and behaves the way she does, as well as demonstrates why it is important to learn about and appreciate others’ perspectives.

*The absence of a diagnostic “label” for Adalyn adds to the widespread appeal of this book, as any child who is a little different from his or her peers will easily be able to relate to Adalyn.*

Adalyn is presented in a straightforward and honest manner, as a girl who is trying to behave as expected while coping with her “worries,” but also as one who makes mistakes—sometimes big ones. Clare is a puppy who is learning, as well. So, she seeks help from some endearing animals in the science room, who



advise her to try to find Adalyn a “pack” of other kids like her that she can relate to. Notably, finding a small group of peers that share interests similar to Adalyn’s is not all that difficult, demonstrating one of the author’s premises that Adalyn, while different from her peers, shares more commonalities with them than differences.

In its short 114 pages, *Adalyn’s Clare* manages to address almost every common issue that challenges those with Asperger syndrome (as well as many other children, in general)—tolerating social and behavioral differences; bullying; maintaining

self control; the balance between independence and seeking help; and even how to handle verbal threats in the age of “zero tolerance.” The book even reveals the contrast between insightful and insensitive teachers for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of sensitivity in both adults and students. By so doing the author skillfully and nonjudgmentally underscores the importance of opening oneself up to new knowledge, becoming more compassionate, and admitting one’s mistakes.

With the tremendous emphasis on inclusion in recent years, the challenges that Adalyn faces are becoming more and more common in regular education classrooms today, creating a need for resources that can help to increase sensitivity to and understanding of children with differences. *Adalyn’s Clare* is an ideal resource for this purpose. Indeed, it would be an excellent read-aloud book in classrooms where teachers could guide the discussion of issues raised in the book while helping

children to discover the book’s valuable lessons. The absence of a diagnostic “label” for Adalyn adds to the widespread appeal of this book, as any child who is a little different from his or her peers will easily be able to relate to Adalyn. I plan to make *Adalyn’s Clare* required reading for my third and fifth graders—and I would highly recommend it for yours! 🐾



Author, Kari Dunn Buron, shown with her real-life dog, Clare