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Hearing the Drummer

*"If a man does not keep pace with his companions,
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music which he hears,
however measured or far away."*



—Henry David Thoreau

It wasn't until I started school that I realized I heard a different drummer. I vividly remember my very first day of school. Mrs. Castleberry, my teacher, asked my classmates and me to color a worksheet picture of an apple. I dutifully pulled out my two favorite crayons, green and blue, and laboriously tried to get large chunks of colored wax to stay within the confines of the fruit outline centered on the paper. Not being blessed with well-tuned fine motor skills, my proud strokes made their way beyond the boundaries of the paper itself.

I was quite pleased with my final product—until a dismayed Mrs. C. held up my paper for everyone to see, "Boys and girls, look at this. First of all, apples are NOT blue and green. But more importantly, I said to color *in* the apple, and look what Debbie did . . . she went *outside* the lines!" With a grand show of dismay she wadded up my paper and tossed it in the trash. I can still remember the collective gasps as other students quickly tried to conform their masterpieces to her expectations.

We soon learned that there was to be no *going outside the lines* that year! We were led through a tedious nine-month term of being quiet, sitting still, and repeating exactly what we were told to do. It was not a good year. As one who never made it out of the Slug Group (or whatever insipid name she used for the low readers), I found myself constantly feeling like something was wrong with me.

While some of the students were able to satisfy Mrs. Castleberry's every directive, I was just thankful that I remembered to change my pajama bottoms for real clothes before I showed up at school. I knew the drum I heard was indeed *distant and far away*, but rather than learning to cherish my *outside the lines* thinking, I felt ashamed and frustrated. I remember sitting in the back row thinking, "But I'm smart, too!"

The good news is that there have always been teachers, and later I had some of them, who have the perception, the imagination, and the courage it takes to go beyond the traditional teacher-centered model. They are able to look inside children and see their unique gifts. They differentiate instruction to address the gifts, to engage, to motivate, and to challenge. These teachers don't demand that students march to one inflexible beat; rather, they encourage students to find their own ways, their own rhythms, and their own strengths. They are able to teach students by recognizing and utilizing the gifts they already have.

This book is dedicated to all those teachers who do indeed drum to the beat of their different marchers, and it is written for all those who want to begin.



Beat of a Different Marcher

By Debbie Silver & Monte Selby

*All children in reach when we find their rhythm—
The step, the dance, the song within them
That's a better journey, but so much harder
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.*

Bobby marches to the beat of his different drummers
Jeffrey does his reading, but he can't do numbers
Shawna's up and talkin' 90 miles an hour, again
Can't find his book or pencil, that would be Ben



Hyperactive, dyslexic, class clown, non-reader
Upper class, no class, off-task, bottom feeder
Little Arty's a challenge; Martin's a dream
We've seen them all, they all need to be seen.



*All children in reach when we find their rhythm—
The step, the dance, the song within them
That's a better journey, but so much harder
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.*

Sandy's in the slow group, a proven low achiever
She's the small quiet one, not a class leader
Crayons in her hand, she can draw what she knows best
But no room for pictures on the standardized test.



Ballerina, bricklayer, biochemist, ball player
Diesel driver, drum major, diva-destined, dragon slayer—
Some kids have a chance, with a different choice
To show what they know, they must have a voice.

*All children in reach when we find their rhythm—
The step, the dance, the song within them
That's a better journey, but so much harder
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.*

Introspective, oversized, minimized, criticized
Round holes, square lives, not much room for compromise.
There's a new song not yet written
For each and every child, will we listen?

*All children in reach when we find their rhythm—
The step, the dance, the song within them
That's a better journey, but so much harder
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.
Let's all dance to the beat of each different marcher!*



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What I See In My Child

Put your child's name in the center square. Fill in the spaces around his or her name with words that describe the strengths you see in your child. Place the most important attributes in the spaces closest to the center. You can use words from the Strength Word List or your own words. When you have filled in all the spaces, give this sheet to your child.