

A Disabled Person Reviews Disabled Media Rep - Master Doc - (Sydney Zarlengo)

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I am aware that I messed up the numbers in this series like 3 different times, truly unsure how the heck that happened lol

Month	#	Title	Review
Nov	101	Out of My Mind	[releasing Nov 22 - will return]
Nov	100	The King's Speech	This movie tells the story of King George VI, who had a speech impediment, and the speech therapist he worked with and became close friends with in order to be able to confidently give speeches as the king of England. And I went into this expecting your classic inspirational "how this person overcame their disability through hard work and perseverance" story because that's the trope that it's set up to be, and then... instead I got a story of a guy trying to fix what he perceived as a physical issue but learns is a bodymind issue that he will always have to live with and needs to learn how to work with it instead of against it. It carefully balances his stutter improving to some degree with all his hard physical and mental work that gave him tools to navigate it more easily, along with him slowly learning to accept that it's a piece of who he is. And it's also not linear – he will be able to roll with it sometimes and then become angry at himself for being unable to speak fluently other times. This is also a very rare occasion in media where a disabled historical figure is reframed within the context of their disability. Not in a way that weakens them, but in a way that humanizes them. And while the British monarchy isn't my favorite thing, there was something really moving to me about seeing a prominent historical world leader in speech therapy and working through trauma and internalized ableism. That meant more to me than I thought it would. The film does have some inspirational tropes in it, sure, but I felt like it sort of framed the movie in a way that was more palatable to an audience unaware of disability culture to make them comfortable and then at the end gave them a message they did not expect which makes them think about disability in a more expansive way. Which is so interesting and done so incredibly well here. So definitely check this film out if you haven't seen it before, it's very very well done. Show it to your parents if you need them to understand things, this is definitely the movie for that.
Nov	99	X-Men	I watched this with the intent to review Professor X, he has a really complicated history within the comics, particularly with all of the various retconning that went on, I don't feel qualified enough to talk about that. But what I will talk about is the fact that for a long time Professor X was the wheelchair-using character people named when you asked if they knew of any wheelchair-using characters. So honestly I was expecting more from him in that regard when watching the movie, but overall he just exists and uses a chair that is not at all shaped to fit his body to any degree. And it's also important to note that he became disabled during a fight for the greater good, making it a sort of symbol of his devotion to the cause rather than just a thing that happens to people sometimes. Also, more generally, the vast majority of the mutant characters in this film are disabled in the supercrip tradition, where they have a super ability that "makes up for" their lack of a different ability. Based on cursory research it seems like disabled people are fairly split between frustration around nearly every character present being supercrip and the fact that a group of

			<p>misfit disabled people finding their community and doing cool things is something we've never really seen in media before and is extraordinarily important. And I think both can be true at the same time, particularly because at the time the first movie came out and absolutely at the time the comics came out, this was somewhat the only option for that kind of representation. For me watching it now, I felt like I've seen better and more cohesive superhero movies and overall didn't love the extensive use of supercrips, but the historical importance of this movie is very important.</p>
Nov	98	Goldie & Bear	<p>This is a Disney Junior show and Goldie's mom is a wheelchair user. She's a businesswoman and travels the world and her custom wheelchair scooter thing like... locks into a flying car thing so she can travel and collect things from her travels to store in there? It's super cool. I would also argue that her parents very much give off the energy of a queer woman married to a trans man which I think is fun. Like that totally wasn't the intention but it's just a strong vibe that I was getting that my friends agreed with so it feels important to note. In regards to the actual show as a thing, it's all storybook characters in a world together and it's really cute! It also brought me a lot of joy to hear Goldie sing about how she dreams of being just like her mom and getting to travel to cool places. I think it's interesting that her wheelchair use is never really mentioned, especially since children's shows tend to over-explain minority identities, but I like that a lot! I think it's super cool to just have disabled people around because disabled people... well we just exist and that existence does not need to be discussed unless it comes up organically. So, overall, a cute show, yay representation, though the mom, since she travels a lot, isn't actually physically in the show very often, that would be my one critique.</p>
Nov	97	White Bird	<p>I reviewed this book 2 years ago when the movie was supposed to come out after there had been trailers in theaters and then they forgot about the movie? I guess? But it's finally out, I saw it, I have Thoughts. Also spoilers. Many of my critiques of the book still stand – the disabled character doesn't really have a personality or interests beyond being the generic kind person who sacrifices everything to save the nondisabled person in a way that teaches them about kindness and what it means to be human. I like that they end up falling for each other and they kiss and whatnot, that's not something we usually get with disabled characters, but then he is killed off and then she goes on to marry a nondisabled person and the memory of this boy is then used to tug at your heartstrings later in a way that could've been done in a different way. Holocaust narratives include a lot of loss, so I get it from that angle, but in this particular case using the cure or kill trope on this disabled character is both a tired choice and one that further dehumanizes him and turns him into a symbol. They also insinuate that in death he is free, though it's way less strong in the film than it was in the book, still don't love it. The material felt a little more aged up in comparison to the book and thus they made it more complicated and in-depth which is important and improved upon the source material in that regard, but the main messaging of the piece is, functionally, using a disabled character and a Holocaust narrative to teach people that kindness is important. In a way that feels sort of vicarious and derivative of both minority communities it's trying to represent. And very much oversimplifies different aspects of and mechanisms of oppression in... I don't want to say a dangerous way, but definitely in a concerning way. And given that this is functionally the sequel to Wonder, a story that very much utilized disability in a cookie-cutter inspiration porn manner to teach people about what it means to be human in a way that caused a lot of harm to the disabled community, I am even more concerned about the narratives continuing to be perpetuated in these stories. Yes, kindness</p>

			<p>is good, but we are trying to teach that message at what cost? And I'll be super real with you, this film is gorgeous. It's well written, the soundtrack and the acting and the editing are just unbelievable, and it feels good on impact, albeit maybe a little too sugar sweet. But the more I think about what it's really truly saying and doing after the fact, the more uncomfortable I feel about this as a piece and about the wider Wonder cinematic universe.</p>
Oct	96	Warriors of Virtue	<p>My friend likes to make me watch movies from the late 90s and early 2000s that aren't very good but are a really fun time and now you get to hear about one of them. Warriors of Virtue is a film about a kid named Ryan who wears a brace on one of his legs and really wants to be good at football but can't play, so instead he is the water boy. Also he gets bullied a lot, especially by the football players. But also he is like a tiny child in comparison to them so it's not just because he's disabled. Anyway, they force him to do a dangerous thing but he ends up falling into a whirlpool and magically appearing in an alternate world that has kangaroo people who are warriors? Also a primary character is a little person and that's handled surprisingly well? And in this alternate universe his leg is cured and he gets really excited and everything. But then when a war between the Warriors of Virtue and the Bad Guy (who is so unbelievably queer coded) happens, he learns that there are many kinds of strength and, in fact, the more important kind is your inner strength and your virtue. So when the bad guy tries to convince him to go to the dark side because then his leg will be cured forever, he chooses to stay on the good side and save the day, preferring to be true to himself in being different rather than changing and becoming a terrible person like the villain is. Is the movie good? Not particularly. Did they handle disability surprisingly well for the era in which it came out and also for the current era? Absolutely. And it is a fun watch. It feels very nostalgic. And we really don't get queer-coded villains like this anymore.</p>
Oct	95	Freaks	<p>This movie came out in 1932 and was very controversial but is also a hugely important part of disability history. It tells the story of a group of disabled freak show performers, as played by actual disabled performers, and one of them gets married to a nondisabled trapeze artist named Cleopatra because she's after his inheritance and then she intends to kill him. The community accepts her as one of them but she shows her true colors pretty quickly and poisons him which ends up in the freaks going after her in revenge for what she did to their friend, with her ending up... I guess could be described as a human duck hybrid situation? Which is interesting narratively because then the film is both saying that being a freak is normal and being an outsider is not, and showing how the disabled people have regular lives where they fall in love and get married, they have friends, they do laundry, they cook dinner, all of that stuff, but then at the same time show her becoming disabled as punishment for doing evil. It also sort of relies on the horror film shock value trope of using visible human difference to create unease, but it could be argued that this film may have been a deliberate choice by Browning to try to overturn that trope by having authentically disabled people living their lives in those roles instead of nondisableds being scary for shock value as was the trend at the time. Overall the film caused a lot of backlash, including when it was being filmed, with many people on the MGM lots complaining about having disabled people around. It also got banned in the UK for awhile, got taken out of many theaters very quickly after release and some consider it to be one of the films that motivated the once and for all crackdown on censoring film that was the Hays Code, but it's also really really cool and, while it has its issues, is a crucial part of disability film history. And frankly we're making more offensive disability films today than this one so that alone should say something about</p>

			it. So if you don't know about this famous horror film that's not really that scary, now you do.
Oct	94	Daredevil	Alright let's talk about the supercrip trope. There's this disability trope that finds itself into superhero stories all the time and it's called "supercrip". And what that means is a character who is disabled but also has some other ability that is so strong as to somewhat replace their disability or "make up for it" to some degree. The three most common being a deaf person with super sight abilities, a blind person with super smell or a sixth sense, and someone with a limb difference that they then replace with high tech prosthetics that are fancy weapons in and of themselves. Obviously Daredevil is the second in that list, as someone who does not have eyesight but has super sensing powers and whatnot. And on one level, I think it's important to have media that shows how many blind and low vision people navigate the world, particularly spaces they are used to, very fluidly, given that a lot of media acts like blind and low vision people are all constantly stumbling everywhere all the time because people forget that one gets used to things and accommodates them. It's cool to see a blind person in media out and about and doing things and having a job and all of that stuff. I also think it's cool that he's seen as a sexual being cause disabled people are not often seen in that way. But all of those things don't really cancel out the fact that he is so cookie cutter supercrip that it's almost painful. Disabled people don't need something to make up for their disability to make them worthy or cool human beings, and also hear me out what if we had disabled superheroes whose disabilities were completely unrelated to their superhero ability. Which Marvel is kind of aware of, in that they've been doing better with other more recent disabled superheroes, but still. We can do better than this.
Oct	93	Winter	This will be my final Lunar Chronicles review, thanks for coming along, we're specifically focusing on the madness Winter experiences as a result of not using her Lunar gift which mostly manifests in hallucinations, however she also already looks at the world super differently and whether that's directly related to that is unclear. Either way, I am once again super impressed by how this was handled. Particularly the level of fluctuation of symptoms that she had - they got significantly worse in traumatic situations and better in her safe spaces and when she was in control of things. Sometimes she could see them but knew they weren't real but couldn't totally fight them off, while other times she couldn't tell the difference at all. It was also explicitly framed as "this isn't the most helpful thing in the world, but on some level it's a coping mechanism for the horrors she has witnessed and calling it 'mental weakness' is absurd because she's the strongest of any of them" which I loved. She also used perceptions of madness against other people - everyone assumed that she was making things up and so she would use that assumption to get away with things to help various spy missions that led up to the revolution against the queen. We also saw many moments where she would explain something in an odd manner that seems to make no sense and is called crazy but then when that situation played out you realize she was right from the beginning, just different. I also specifically want to appreciate the fact that her hallucinations were never a superpower, it was never like "oh she can actually see the future" or whatever. Because while that would have sort of fit into this world building, it also would've made her madness more palatable to an audience and I love that it never went in that direction. Winter was very grounded in a real and complicated disabled experience that just happened to exist in a fantasy sci fi world. Which is, once again, incredible.
Sep	92	Happy Feet	I planned to talk about Mumble as an allegory for disability but he's actually canonically disabled! It's not

			<p>just “oh he’s different” but that his egg was dropped when he was incubating and then he hatched significantly later than all the other eggs. Which does imply that his disability is his father’s fault for being a bad parent, which the father then somewhat exiles himself with guilt over until Mumble tells him it’s okay and he likes being different but we’re just going to ignore that. He’s not able to sing like all the others, but he instinctually prefers to dance, which is a very clear parallel to stimming and behavioral communication rather than spoken communication, and everyone tells him that he’s not really a penguin because he can’t sing like penguins are supposed to. But then his stimmy feet end up being important and helping the rest of the colony and so everyone else decides to try it too and even though it’s not as natural for them as it is for him, they realize that doing lots of different things is really fun. There’s also an interesting religious tone in line with how communities often handle disability, where the elder penguins say that his difference is an omen, which they then say is confirmed by the fact that everyone is joining in with him. There’s also a moment where, when Mumble’s teacher goes to his parents concerned about his progress, the parents are immediately afraid that he won’t be able to find love or community or be a true penguin with everyone else. But then, of course, he ends up becoming confident in his differences and everyone accepts him for who he is and he saves the penguins from the evil humans destroying the planet and finds love. All of which to say, the use of disability language and parallel in this film is so clear I feel like it has to have been deliberate and bar the weird parent guilt thing that becomes the kid’s responsibility to break for their parent, they handled it really really well. Though the gender norms in this film are really aggressive so that’s a downside. But otherwise. Ages really well and the soundtrack is a banger.</p>
Sep	91	Agent Carter	<p>First of all, kick butt femme fatale lady spy show, you should watch it. Second of all, Agent Sousa was injured in the war and has a prosthetic leg and uses a crutch to get around. Which he also happens to use as a weapon when fighting like the icon that he is. Though it makes sense, since his crutch is an extension of his body, and also metal stick makes for great weapon. It’s very clear that his peers see him as a weakling and treat him as such, and you can see how he somewhat internalizes it, and also how that gives him a stronger connection to Agent Carter who is also seen as a weakling because she is a woman. They are the misfits of the office, an office entirely run by a lot of misogynistic scummy dudebros, and so it makes sense that they’d band together, but I also appreciate that it never tried to assert that their marginalization was interchangeable. One thing I do want to note, that’s not a negative thing but just a trope to spot, is that the vast majority of amputees in media are amputees because they are veterans, when there are many reasons someone may have a prosthetic limb, so that’s a bias to be aware of. But I really loved this representation, it felt super natural and was included into his storyline as much as it normally would for a person, as just another part of who he is. Because really smart detective people can also be disabled. Just like they can also be women. And I think that’s great. Though it would’ve been better if they cast an actually disabled person in the role. Just saying.</p>
Sep	90	Superstore	<p>I was also going to do an autism review for this show but it’s the same archetype conversation I discuss with pretty much every comedy, so if you want to hear me talk about it you can head to autism review number 134. Anywho, the show itself is really witty and really fun, it has more of a Brooklyn 99 or Abbot Elementary energy than it does The Office or Parks & Rec. Which I personally prefer because there’s less awkward secondhand embarrassment humor. It’s also very aware of what it is and has a lot of great commentary on minority issues in a super over the top silly way. I also think Garret’s character as a</p>

			<p>wheelchair user is handled quite well – he has an extensive personality, he has happy and health romantic and platonic relationships, he’s viewed as Garrett, not as “the disabled one”, and they also point at issues with ableism and tokenism and the issue of everyone wanting to know why he uses a wheelchair. From a writing perspective, at least from the 4 episodes I watched, I felt like they did a really great job. The issue is that the actor, who did a wonderful job in the role but that’s beside the point, is nondisabled. And I will cut them a little slack in saying that this show did begin to air right around the time that the conversation about actually casting disabled people in disabled roles was starting to slightly be taken seriously and we started to see that casting shift in the industry. And I also read in a few places that they supposedly tried to cast a disabled person for the role but chemistry mattered to them more which is how they landed on this actor, but then my question is why did they then choose to continue to have that character as the disabled one if that’s who they chose to cast. Why not make a different character who is a different archetype disabled instead? Disabled people make up 25% of the population and a whole lot of us are actors so I find it statistically improbable that they couldn’t find a single actually disabled person to cast in any role on this show. If they’d wanted to work with a disabled person, they could have. So while the writing itself is good, given the wider context I don’t really want to praise them too much for it because... yikes.</p>
Sep	89	Fairest: Lunar Chronicles	<p>And also a bit of Winter because we’re going to talk about her facial difference here as well. Levana’s disability (she was burned severely as a child) is the one in this series that I don’t think was necessary given that the original fairy tale does not include disability – yes the evil queen is obsessed with mirrors and beauty, but I think making her ugliness more or less in her head because she is corrupt and greedy and evil would have been a lot more effective as a narrative tool than making her visibly disabled. Especially because having someone’s disability, particularly a facial difference, be even a small part of their motivation toward being evil is a bit of a tired trope. And because her obsession is with beauty and by including disability in there as part of what she wants to erase or hide or overcome you’re making a fairly strong statement as to what is or is not beautiful. That being said, I think it was handled okay, in that it very much specified that she was insecure before becoming disabled and she sort of dug her own hole into corruption and being evil. Which is compared to Winter, who wears her visible disability with confidence and pride and everyone admires that she is visibly different. So it is somewhat clarified that she has no actual conception of reality or perception and is solely ruled by greed and obsession and her own personally warped view of the world. And since the series has so much other disability that is handled really well, it somewhat becomes a case where the semi-use of this trope within the wider context of the series doesn’t bother me that much because it is diluted by so much other representation. And particularly we see two characters faced with a similar disabling situation and choose two completely different paths. When if Fairest as a story existed without the wider context, I would be frustrated that this narrative was used when it isn’t necessary. Which is super interesting.</p>
Aug	88	McKenna Shoots For The Stars	<p>Ah, the American Girl movie franchise. Particularly in that tiny era where they made movies about the dolls of the year but only did it for maybe 5 of them and then randomly stopped. Also this film kinda crushed it with the disability representation? For 2012 at least. I’m quite impressed. Other than seemingly not casting an actually disabled person for the role, but we’ll just ignore that. Because 2012. Basically McKenna is really struggling with reading comprehension and so she needs a tutor and the tutor she is given is named Josie and she’s a wheelchair user. Her chair is named Lightning. At first McKenna is</p>

			<p>embarrassed to have a tutor but after breaking her ankle in gymnastics and realizing that maybe she can't do everything on her own she finally warms up to it and the two of them end up becoming friends. At one point they go on a camping trip together and McKenna mentions to her dad that she feels bad that Josie can't go hiking with them and then her dad is like "you do realize you're in crutches, right?" and then he shows her the wheelchair he got for her to use and the accessible hike that he found for both of them to go on which was super wonderful. There was a little moment where the final piece wasn't accessible and McKenna jumps her way to see the waterfall better and feels bad that Josie can't do that, but Josie's like "it's fine, I can see it really well from over here". I think it sometimes had the energy of disability is a negative thing, like McKenna at one point complains about how hard it is to not be mobile and Josie is like "yeah, I know" in a sort of "oh yeah, she's stuck like that" kind of way that wasn't my favorite. But it generally leaned toward focusing on the fact that that's just who she is and everyone has things about their lives that are easy and things they struggle with and that that's okay because needing help and support isn't being weak. And I think adding disability into that message specifically was really smart and well handled. Especially given that kids' media at this time didn't really ever involve disability.</p>
Aug	87	Can Bears Ski?	<p>A Disabled Person Reviews Disabled Media Rep Part 87 - Can Bears Ski? This is a children's book about a little bear who has lost some hearing but doesn't quite have the words yet to explain that that's what he is experiencing. So he gets in trouble for ignoring his friend by accident and he has a really hard time being woken up in the morning because he can't hear his dad trying to wake him up. And he keeps getting asked "can bears ski?" and he's not sure if they can or not, or why people keep asking him that question. But then his dad brings him to an audiologist and they start him in therapy and lipreading classes and they give him hearing aids. Which aren't very comfortable and make everything really loud and robotic sounding. And he takes them off and loses them a lot. But over time he gets used to it and gains all these tools to be able to accommodate himself so he understands the stories his dad reads to him at night. It's really cute and I love the illustrations. I also think that having stories where characters realize that maybe they might need help is really important, like I know that when I was little I didn't realize I couldn't see and needed glasses until my teacher told me I squinted a lot and said I should ask my parents about it. And the adjustment to changing abilities or changing accommodations is a rocky one that I think was handled really well in this book. My one critique would be that it never actually specified what "can bears ski" is supposed to be a misheard version of, according to the internet it seems like it's supposed to be "can you hear me" or something to that effect, but s sounds are typically really really clear so I didn't make the direct connection from one to the other but that's definitely me just being nitpicky. I at least wish they'd clarified it somewhere in the story itself because I know if I'd read this to a classroom every single child would ask me what bears skiing had to do with anything. But otherwise it's a really cute book and one of the first picture books I've seen, if not the first, with a character who uses hearing aids. Which is pretty cool.</p>
Aug	86	Argylle	<p>Somebody told me the main character is autistic-coded so I watched this for that reason, there is literally no universe where she is autistic-coded, but then, and huge spoiler alert I guess, it's actually a memory loss film. So I managed to get a review out of it anyway. But for future notice, someone being slightly nerdy does not mean that they are autistic or autistic-coded, that's not what that means. But when it comes to memory loss - also my memory loss series is now in the disability series because it was weird having a third</p>

			<p>series I keep forgetting about - the specific trope of “super spy had an accident so then they got memory loss and then lived a peaceful life afterward but their spy past comes back to haunt them and they have to figure out what they forgot on the fly” is the only non-old-people-with-dementia memory loss representation we ever get. And it has been done much more successfully in the past than it was here. Particularly because the film decided to save it as a twist that they didn’t set up at all and only made it a twist maybe halfway through the film when that very much negates the entire purpose of the first half of the film. Traditionally this trope is set up so that the person is living their life and they accidentally discover that they have certain abilities, like “oh wow why did I dodge that so well?” or they decide to learn a sport and discover they have unnaturally good aim. It’s usually muscle memory things they do automatically and then go “why did that happen”. Because traditionally the kind of memory loss used in these stories is the kind that makes you forget facts and events but other things remain intact. Memory loss is complicated medically because we know less about brains than we like to think we do, but this is kind of in line with what we’d maybe see with both physical and mental trauma, like super traumatic event plus a TBI, and that wouldn’t majorly touch muscle memory. Again, vast generalization plus heavy suspension of disbelief, but generally that’s what this narrative usually goes for. So the fact that she, at the beginning of the film, is pretty bad at physical spy stuff but knows a huge amount of spy information but doesn’t know why she knows it and thinks she’s coming up with it organically doesn’t make a whole lot of sense? There are moments where they seem to know how memory loss works and others where they decide to ignore how it works for plot purposes which, whatever, memory loss is the most flippantly used disability in media, but they do it in a way where it contradicts itself so much that it creates plot holes kinda? I– I’m confused. This movie confused me.</p>
Aug	85	Bridgerton	<p>I definitely did not say “yeah I have every reason to binge watch the entirety of season 3 for work because there is a total of maybe 30 seconds of disability representation”. That would be such a silly thing for me to do. That being said I have 3 different people to talk about – first is the debutante who uses British Sign Language to communicate with her mother. She’s cool. She appears for a very short period of time in the first episode and then reappears in episode 6 to call Whistledown the devil. Which was way funnier than if they’d just had someone speak that line, really enjoyed that. The second is one of the lords of the Ton appears in I think 2 episodes and he uses a historically accurate wheelchair which brought me a lot of joy and also was really cool. Again, just a thing that exists along with everyone else. The third is one I didn’t notice until I watched this season, but Lady Danbury uses a cane! What a legend, we love to see it. I love that it exists and isn’t commented upon, I would selfishly love if maybe we could have more disabled primary characters to more accurately reflect the 25% of the population that is disabled beyond one primary character and otherwise less than 30 seconds of screen time, but baby steps and whatnot.</p>
Aug	84	Cress: Lunar Chronicles	<p>The second book in the Lunar Chronicles series doesn’t really have anything new disability-wise so I opted to skip reviewing it but will review all the others. Now a main story in this book is a version of Rapunzel, where the original disability at hand is the prince finds the princess but then jumps out of the tower when he thinks she is dead and becomes blind in his fall and wanders aimlessly until he finds her and her magic tears cure his blindness, the underlying metaphor being that one cannot truly see until they are with the one that they love. Because why actually talk about disability when you can use it as a metaphor instead. But yet again Marissa Meyer knocked it out of the park and actually made this pretty decent</p>

			<p>representation. Basically Thorne gets a head injury when the satellite falls to earth and becomes blind and he just kinda goes “well. We’re stuck in a desert. And I can’t see. But we’re going to figure it out because we need to not die” and so he makes a makeshift cane, he learns to accommodate himself fairly quickly, and he and Cress work together to find their way to survival. And obviously he needs help – he has her audio describe things and kind of point him in the right direction, but he also very much supports and helps her in different ways so they both feel equally vulnerable and complicated. There are a few lines that are like “he’s very good at this thing despite the blindness” which, if it were a character who had been, say, born blind, that would be kind of a frustrating description, but since he is literally relearning how to navigate the world I think that is a completely reasonable thing to comment on. Also he gains skills quickly to the point where he is still a really good fighter and it’s fantastic. He does get cured at the end, and normally that would also be a thing to critique since most disabled characters are either cured or killed at the end of their story, but it’s more like “treatment for this exists in this world but it’s hard to get at but we’re going to try so that you can pilot the ship again” than any specific disability-is-inherently-negative narrative like this is usually used with. And we also see that the recovery process for him is kind of rocky. So, once again, major win, go read the Lunar Chronicles, and I’ll be back with a review of the next book next month.</p>
July	83	Disney’s Hunchback	<p>So many complicated thoughts on this intellectual property. I did a theatrical disability deep dive into this show that’s up on my channel if you want to learn way more than this, but for very brief commentary on Disney’s 1996 Hunchback – it is an interesting situation where its goal is to teach about not judging a book by its cover and supporting the misfits of the world but then it does that by telling a story where it aggressively stereotypes its misfits, not just with Quasimodo but also with Esmeralda and the overall representation of Romani people. Which brings in a major “do the ends justify the means” conversation. But also everything about it is very confusing and contradictory depending on which scholar you talk to, where everyone uses the same main points about these characters and yet come up with completely different narrative judgments based on those facts. My specific thoughts boil down to “hey it’s super cool that we have a Disney movie centered around a visibly disabled person” cause that’s a huge deal, and also they expand his character far beyond what it was in the original text and adaptations which makes him less of a stereotype, but also fleshing out a stereotype makes it less obvious that it’s a stereotype so maybe that’s actually not a good thing. And also this is kind of the one time where we have a clear love interest presented, the protagonist goes through a hero’s journey, and then at the end he doesn’t get the girl. Which I think is an interesting twist, and I do think he needed to figure out friends before figuring out romantic love, but also having the first time a narrative of unrequited love appears in a Disney film be used on the first disabled character is a serious issue. They very much equate his disability with him being an emasculated infantilized man-child who is then held up against Phoebus who is the picture of masculinity and ends up getting the girl despite objectively not deserving her. The musical kinda fixed some problems while creating others, though the new live action film is definitely not going to draw much from the musical given Disney’s track record with that, so I don’t have high hopes for more ethical storytelling in the new version. But again this is all very very complicated because this story has been part of the cultural zeitgeist for centuries and I didn’t even scratch the surface here, but you should go check out my longer video which has a lot of conversations about all the adaptations and ethics and all that kind of stuff.</p>
July	82	West Wing	<p>The fact that I haven’t directly reviewed a Marlee Matlin character in this series yet for some reason is an</p>

			<p>actual crime. What am I doing? Joey Lucas, played by Matlin, is a government person who works in polls and stuff and she kicks butt. The first time we meet her she just waltzes into Lyman's office with her interpreter and starts yelling at him and he is more surprised that Joey Lucas is a woman than by the fact that she is Deaf. Everyone in the show immediately presumes competence, just rolls with the fact that an interpreter is always present, and she takes up valued space along with everyone else without question. It's fantastic. There was one moment where she was talking with the president and he asked her if she could lipread and then has a conversation directly with her rather than via her interpreter, clearly to try to connect with her more personally, and it did sit a little weird with me that he did a thing that was more comfortable for him and less comfortable for her and that was kinda left unaddressed, but also this is a political show that moves really quickly so things being left unaddressed is just how it goes. And also that episode came out in 2000 and that critique is a very 2020s disability media rep critique – in recent years we expect more explanation and personality with our disability than it just existing without it being commented upon and often in situations like this some might say that they portrayed a world without ableism toward her which is unrealistic. And I think there's an interesting balance between we should be able to just have disabled people who exist without comment but we also shouldn't only be side characters who exist without comment, just like we shouldn't only be characters where our whole identity is that we're the disabled one, you know? It's about balance more than anything. But anyway, in this particular setting where they literally do not have time to stop and think about adjusting to new ways of living, they just go, having her just slide in as is without issue feels perfectly on brand and it brought me so much joy because, again, this character kicks butt and I love her.</p>
July	81	The Politician	<p>This show is chaos and absolutely nothing is meant to be taken seriously so I won't critique this too harshly. And also they had several disabled actors in the show who were incredible (specifically looking at the character of Andrew and the principal), so it's clear that the more critique-able things were deliberate. Same with the handling of race and gender as well. The show, if you're not familiar with it, is about a high school student body presidential race but one of the guys running has only one life goal which is becoming the US president so he feels like he needs to follow the steps of historical presidents to get to that point, winning this presidency is one of those things, and it is a bloody fight to the finish line. Truly so much happens. In both seasons. And it makes you think a lot about the circus and inhumanity of actual politics as well. The one thing that I do want to touch on is that there is a Munchausen's by Proxy subplot. I think if this is going to be used anywhere, a chaotic comedy show is the place to use it, but as I've spoken about before in another review on here somewhere, the existence of Munchausens, now called Factitious Disorder and by Proxy is very much debated, because at the end of the day it is medical abuse. The question of whether the desire behind that medical abuse is also a mental illness is a whole other discussion that brings in the question of what is mental illness and where is that line, hence the debate, but we also know that the increased portrayal of these narratives in media makes it harder for actually disabled people to be believed and to get care because it further centers the idea that disabled people (or relatives of young disabled people) are faking it for attention. So I always feel uncomfortable when that comes up in media, though when it usually comes up it's in some intense drama show and this is definitively not that so I hate it less because it does seem absolutely absurd as a narrative choice, but I am aware of the wider legacy and that concerns me a tad. Also suicide is a really strong plot point in this show so if you are planning to check it out just be aware of that!</p>

July	80	See	<p>This is an AppleTV show that takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where everyone is blind and the concept of sight is seen as heresy and witchcraft. The concept itself is really fascinating, and there was clearly a lot of effort put into worldbuilding, though not always in the best directions. But they had less than a handful of actually blind/low vision actors involved, none of which played series regulars. Which means that the vast majority of the cast of this show was paid to act blind. And the opening of the show that tells you the premise of the thing was text on screen, rather than voiceover. Which, as a show about blind people, is a choice. I think the show itself thought it was showing the capability of blind/low vision people, in that they had alternative forms of communication, they had full societies and armies and all of those things, but then narratively it focused on the idea that blindness is somewhat primitive while sight is advancement and the future. And that in their culture, they believe that they were all made blind as religious punishment from God for what mankind was doing to the world. So even if they claim to be positive about their blindness, the story doesn't show that at all. With the exception of really leaning on the trope of "someone without one sense therefore has superpower level abilities in other senses" which is also an issue. But what really stuck out to me the whole time is that this concept is a folktale in the Deaf community. It's called Eyeth (like earth but eye instead of ear), and the idea is a world where everyone is Deaf and some babies happen to be born hearing but they are the odd ones out and they are the minority culture forced to conform to Deaf culture. And I think this show would have been a lot more successful if it had borrowed from that story a bit and recognized its place within the disability cultural narrative. Also, just, anthropologically and linguistically, the way they viewed the world through language over centuries should have changed infinitely more than what we see in this show and I think that would've been really interesting to dive into. But they focused, ironically, more on the visuals of creating a blind culture rather than the cultural norms of it. All while not actually centering blind people. Also if you do choose to watch this show, heads up that the credits are kind of flashy</p>
June	79	Hawkeye	<p>I've reviewed so many superhero things at this point that I actually genuinely like this genre now? Anywho, Hawkeye is hard of hearing, as is Jeremy Renner who plays him, and it's really cool. First because it's not the supercrip trope of "oh one sense doesn't work so now they have superpowers in a different one to make up for it" which always brings me joy to see. I also love it because superheroes are next to really loud explosions literally all the time so this is a perfectly logical outcome given their line of work. What I loved about this representation in particular is that Clint becoming hard of hearing is fairly new to him at the time of this series, and so he doesn't really have backup plans beyond his hearing aids. He knows a small handful of signs, but when his hearing aid breaks he needs help to have a conversation with his son on the phone. But then we see that balanced off of Maya, who I talked about when I reviewed Echo, who is ingrained in Deaf culture and when she sees that he wears hearing aids she unbinds his hands to give him the ability to communicate, even though he's her captive, and is somewhat surprised that he doesn't communicate like she does. Because not all deaf and hard of hearing are interchangeable. Also seeing two disabled superhero people fighting each other and both getting large amounts of screen time in a show where they were just people made me kinda teary eyed. I also loved how he clearly missed pieces of conversation because hearing aids aren't perfect, I loved how he moved Kate to be on the side of his good ear so he could hear her better. And also how easily helpful and accommodating Kate was to his needs without further question. It all just brought me a lot of joy to see. My one critique is that the filming often cut off the sightlines for the ASL so you couldn't always actually see the things they were saying which was</p>

			kind of a bummer. They did fix this when they made Echo later, but it still bothered me. Otherwise, I really love seeing superheros who just happen to be disabled and that's just part of who they are, neither positive nor negative. It's lovely.
June	78	Best Foot Forward	This show is adorable. It's on AppleTV and it follows a kid named Josh who has a prosthetic leg and has been homeschooled his whole life but enrolls in public middle school for the first time, and it does a beautiful job of blending the conflicts that come from going to a new school and making friends and being in a family and being a middle schooler with the unique conflicts that come along with being a disabled person. And it also framed it so the first few episodes were more middle school issue focused and then slowly introduced you to more disability stuff as the season went on, which creates narrative space for nondisabled kids to see themselves in Josh and then as a byproduct sort of learn about disability through feeling like him. And it explained a lot of the nuances of disability, like one child needing more attention than another, or the lack of autonomy and control, or the knowledge that difference makes you special but also it's okay to not want to be singled out all the time and just be like everybody else, in a really clear and kid-friendly way. But also in a way that's really fun to watch and doesn't feel educational. It reads a lot like your average Disney Channel show. And I don't have a lot more to say, honestly, but I don't find a lot of good teen/tween rep for this series, it's usually for adults or for really small children, so that makes this show an extra big deal and you should go check it out.
June	77	Moana	I recently read an academic paper that mentioned disability in Moana and I was like "where?? I totally missed that?" and then remembered that Gramma Tala uses a cane. Which brings in such an interesting conundrum where, first of all, disability scholars always say disability is literally everywhere you're just not looking for it, this is a great example of that. But also outside of the "everyone will become disabled one day if they live long enough" conversation, people tend to forget that elders are disabled people and use the same resources younger disabled people do. And also how much ableism and ageism are tightly intertwined. If you want to see some examples of that, the way people often go about critiquing the age of politicians is a great place to start. But I think it's so interesting how we're often more understanding or accepting or at least accommodating toward the needs of older people because culturally we respect elders while we're more critical of younger people who need those same resources. Or how when elders pop up in movies using mobility aids and whatnot we don't usually go "oh, it's disability representation!" when we would for a younger character using a mobility aid. Which ends up being both a reminder that we're all in one category and if we all fought for rights together that would be swell, but also hey when you're looking for disability rep, don't forget that we exist at all ages. And, often, the representation that equates disability to loneliness and isolation and misery and being a burden is the representation of elderly people. So pay attention to that when it appears because we internalize those things. But anyway, Moana, I love how Gramma Tala has a community to support and take care of her when she needs it but she also goes off and does what she wants and is well-respected in her community. Also her cane isn't just to help her walk, but also something she uses to move things and poke things and it really exists as an extension of her body like mobility aids often are for people. And also this movie is just a lovely time overall so if you haven't seen it yet you should really get on that.
June	76	Cinder	This series had me in a chokehold in middle school, particularly cause Cinder is the first character I ever

			<p>met who experiences migraines, and I'm so happy to report that it's just as good a read as an adult, however the aspects of it all taking place during a plague feel a little bit too real. Now Cinder is a cyborg, which means part of her is synthetic, like she has several prosthetics and some of her internal mechanisms are artificial, also she has an operating system. So we see her adjust her interface like someone might adjust a hearing aid, we see her grow out of a prosthetic and not be able to afford a new one, we see her struggle with getting sore from using crutches when she no longer has a prosthetic and how much it slows her down, and also she is dehumanized with disability words like "deformed" and "freak" and "inhuman". In this world there is also a cyborg draft, where they become test subjects for cures for the disease because they should be grateful for the doctors for saving them by making them cyborgs and now they owe them back because they shouldn't have lived that long to begin with. Which brings a stronger overlap of prosthetics and medicine. There's also a concept introduced later in the book of a "shell" which is that some Lunar children are born without the Lunar powers and they are killed for it, so again we see this disability undercurrent of "mercy killings" and otherwise infanticide. Oh and Cinder is a ward under a guardianship and therefore loses all monetary and medical autonomy which is very much abused by her caregiver. And we see her get her prosthetic taken away sort of as punishment, and denying a necessary medical or accessibility aid is a form of abuse that is unfortunately very common for disabled people. For a 2010s fantasy book that definitely isn't meant to be about disability, the author included SO many important disability concepts into this dystopia that we very much have today and handled them really really well given the era it came out. And the vast majority of it ages pretty well. I went into the book expecting to see a lot more of the "it's fine that she uses prosthetics because actually they make her a superhero and she has fancy prosthetics with guns and knives and stuff to make up for it" that is usually the only time we get prosthetics in media. And she does, at the end of the book, get some fancy weaponry prosthetics. But the majority of the time, the fact that she is a cyborg is very much a disability that has both its advantages and its disadvantages and, because the world discriminates against her, feels more disadvantage-heavy to her, but if I remember correctly she gets more confident over the course of the series and sort of turns it into a superpower of sorts. Speaking of which, because this series is all loosely based on fairy tales and almost every single fairy tale involves some aspect of disability, nearly every book in this series introduces a new disability concept, so let me know if you'd be interested in a review of every Lunar Chronicles book. Cause I will happily make the sacrifice.</p>
May	75	Rio	<p>There are two different interpretations of disability in this film that sort of contradict each other? Basically Blu cannot fly and it is a consistent problem throughout the film because it makes it harder for him to travel and escape from danger, but then spoiler alert at the end in a life or death situation he is suddenly able to fly because he believes hard enough. Interpretation one is that he is clearly overcoming or curing his disability solely by trying hard enough and believing himself. Ew. Interpretation two is that his disability is PTSD making it so that a combo of never being taught to fly so he fails every time he tries and he has flashbacks every time he tries which makes it worse has grounded him. And over the course of the film, where he is consistently forced to be brave and try new things, he is able to slowly break out of that anxiety pattern which makes him able to fly at the end. Like it's not that his disability is suddenly cured, we kind of see him slowly working through pieces of processing his past throughout the film that leads to that final moment. Especially because at that point he is being brave because he needs to help someone else he cares about which I feel like is also an important thing to note. Like if a waiter gives me the wrong food I'm</p>

			<p>just gonna take it but if they give my friend the wrong food I will say something, you know? I do think there is some narrative confusion, in that it both equates flightlessness (aka disability) to uselessness in the script, but then we also see that he has different skills he had to learn to accommodate himself that become useful in different ways. And sometimes accommodating him did take extra time or energy, sometimes he couldn't catch up to his friends, but that is also a thing that happens for disabled people. And I think more or less it was the villains using the useless language and his friends were pretty chill about his needs, though sometimes they pushed him to do the scary thing. And it was a friendly loving push that he also kind of wanted to happen and you could tell. There was also weird halfway commentary about institutionalization, where we saw lots of the kidnapped and caged birds acting mad in various ways, but. Yeah. I don't see a major narrative issue, but I also understand how this narrative could potentially be perceived as the slightly different one that causes harm to disabled people if that makes sense.</p>
May	74	Avatar	<p>The blue people. This film is a slog. And also very like. A whole lot of racism and colonialism and weird stuff going on. But focusing on disability alone, the main character is a paraplegic but also that only actually matters because part of the plot is that in his world there is a cure but he can't afford it because VA insurance is so bad and so he is willing to do stuff for the villain guy for the money to be able to afford the cure. Otherwise, the vast majority of what we see from his character is when he is in the able-bodied avatar body thing so don't worry viewers, his disability isn't actually permanent, he can escape it when he goes into the other world so it's not actually that bad! Literally the first times we see him in the Avatar body it focuses on his joy at being able to use his legs. Which is realistic, like I'm sure if this were an actual situation some of this would play out this way, but it's not an actual situation and it's also unnecessary. Having the character's only initial mission and motivation be to fix his disability because it makes him miserable is a really bad look when it comes to the very basics of ethical media representation. There's a really great review published by Disability Studies Quarterly called "Old, New, Borrowed and Blue: Compulsory Able-bodiedness and Whiteness in Avatar" by Sara Palmer that you should check out if you have a moment because it's great. Also bonus points for the fact that the avatar doesn't even look like the dude so they 100% could've cast an actual disabled actor in the human role rather than make prosthetic legs for the nondisabled actor that were made by molding the legs of a paraplegic. That's just weird y'all. The disabled character I don't see a lot of conversation about is the fact that the villain has giant facial/skull scars and how that is meant to indicate that he is a bad guy as it almost exclusively is in media. And, when you then look at him and Jake next to each other, it becomes extra clear that these disabilities were exclusively there for narrative expediency purposes - you're meant to see these disabled people as a pair, as both broken and evil, but then the more Jake gets into the Pandora world the less disabled and more whole he becomes, meanwhile the villain sort of gives into it and becomes even more villainous because even in the beginning he had the choice to quit and go get his scars fixed but he chose not to, so him leaning into that disability and refusing to fix it equates to his villainy where Jake's ascension to goodness is him becoming an abled Na'vi. So. Nice work everyone (s).</p>
May	73	Get A Life, Chloe Brown	<p>I'm back with another cheesy romance novel, this one has a protagonist with fibromyalgia. Who is also autistic-coded as hell but we're just gonna table that. What I love about this book is how we have the trope of the control freak character who matches with a partner who helps kind of loosen them up, but with the added depth that she is a control freak because she lives her life on the constant teeter totter that is chronic</p>

			<p>illness and is trying to figure out where the line between keeping herself safe and in the least amount of pain possible versus living life to the fullest actually is. And this book had no right to call me out as much as it did but also that made it an incredibly healing read at the same time. Seeing a relationship where the partner knows what accommodations she might need and plans for them but also keeps things flexible for her autonomy and her fluctuating needs rather than like... taking care of her in a slightly controlling way that this can often slip into was beautiful. It also lightly touched on medical gaslighting and late diagnoses and how you interact with the world when you both have people who are constantly worried that you're an easily breakable china doll and people who completely ignore your needs and think you're "too much". And how disability affects dating and intimacy. And like... the mismatched bravery/confidence thing, where you can easily go through absolutely horrible medical procedures without blinking an eye but the idea of going to a bar can cause a panic attack. While reading this book I kept having moments where I was like "this is just a normal thing everyone experiences, right?" and then I would slowly realize that no, it's a disability-specific experience that I've never had words for and now I do. And that's really cool. I love feeling my self-advocacy and communication skills grow while reading a book that I thought was going to be a little brain vacation. That's what makes media fun. So anyway, go check this one out if you haven't already, I've also reviewed the third book in this series which has explicit autistic representation and is also fabulous so if you need another recommendation go to that one as well. I really should make a list of favorite things I've reviewed based on category cause I have so many good disability beach reads to offer at this point. I'll think about that.</p>
May	72	Wish	<p>So we have one visibly disabled character, it's Dahlia, she bakes cookies and uses a crutch and is our protagonist's best friend. Well. Human best friend, I think the goat is her actual best friend. This character is the kind of disability rep that makes me feel warm and fuzzy inside, like Massimo from Luca, where she just happens to be disabled and happens to exist as a disabled person and it's not remarked upon, it's easily accommodated, and it's all chill. Which I think is great and lovely! But I also feel like this film sort of used that as a cop out if that makes any sense? Because her whole friend group behaves like a disabled friend group - there's the autistic-coded one, Dahlia who's a cane user, the one with severe allergies, the depressed and spaced out one, and also the grumpy one who I think might have been some sort of attempt at creating little person representation but honestly I'm not sure about that? And also if that is the case and his whole thing is that he's grumpy, that... is a choice. But also we see SO many of the citizens of this town and Dahlia is the only visibly disabled person out of all of them which I found super weird. There's also a throwaway line early on in the film where Asha talks about how when her father was sick she would wish on stars that he would get better, which immediately opened up a whole line of questioning for me about, like, what is the extent of this king's powers? Do we see no visibly disabled people because he has been curing people whether that was their wish or not because they don't remember so what does it matter? Is Dahlia the only disabled one because she hasn't made her wish yet? Even though we know from a short that her wish relates to baking, are people watching her and assuming that when she turns 18 she will wish to no longer be disabled? I feel like they had such a clear opportunity to make some sort of disability commentary here and they completely ignored it. Like with Luca, the lack of commentary on the disability made sense because the otherwise message of the film about difference was so incredibly clear that it added to it by existing wordlessly and would've muddled the plot had they done something with it. But here, really none of the characters are majorly fleshed out and so it feels weird that they didn't decide to</p>

			<p>flesh her out further. Or any of the other friends whose names I don't know because they weren't characterized enough for my brain to remember them. So like. Woo representation, they didn't mess it up which is a win, but that also does feel a bit like the bare minimum here cause they had so many opportunities to do cool things with it and just chose not to.</p>
May	71	Shape of Water	<p>Ohhhh man is this a film. Okay so basically the plot of the film is that a woman named Elisa does not speak and hasn't since birth as far as she remembers and she works as a janitor at a fancy government lab where she meets a humanoid amphibious creature dude and then she teaches him sign language and then they fall for each other and it's an experience. Anywho, I'm conflicted on the disability in this one, but leaning more toward negative. On the positive side though, Elisa has a lot of agency and confidence, she has solid friendships with people in her life, and she also has a sexuality and is an object of desire. We don't get those traits from disabled characters very often. On the less positive side, she did have a dream sequence near the end of the film in which she sang a song, as if to assure the audience not to worry because the actress playing her isn't actually disabled so it's okay. And also imply that she dreams of being nondisabled. So we love that narrative choice. The other interesting narrative choice is that she refers to herself as a disabled woman as both incomplete and lacking, which is then furthered by the fact that the only two people who find her desirable are the human monster– the villain of the thing who is creepy and weird and also they did a bit of the disabled villainy trope with having his fingers slowly die as he became more evil– and the fish man, implying that the only desirous love a disabled woman can get is from outsiders. Which, on one level, we have the aspects of monstrosity with all three of them, in that the white man is meant to be the monster, the fish man is understood by everyone as a monster, and disabled people are viewed as monstrous, but it still feels quite unsettling. Like one of the narrative implications is that Elisa is literally a fish out of water and by falling for fish man she sorta finds herself, which also explains the aggressive autistic-coding they had going on with her character because that's an easy narrative tool to show an outsider. And I don't think there's anything wrong with the fact that disabled people often marry other disabled people. But the way the film portrayed it made it seem more like the only person who would desire her (in a not creepy way like the villain dude) would be one of her own kind. The thing I found most unsettling about it all, though– well other than the quality of the ASL because they hired a nondisabled actress for the role but we'll table that for right now– is that her in a lab teaching ASL to a creature so obviously read to me as a recreation of the horrible experiments on teaching ASL to apes that were all the rage right around the same time as this film takes place. Which made the fact that she and fish man fell for each other read as if a human researcher had fallen for Koko the Ape and that made the whole narrative sit oddly in my brain. And I'm quite sure that was simply an oversight and those parallels weren't deliberate but it really ruined the film for me.</p>
Apr	70	The Greatest Showman	<p>Look if you pretend this movie is divorced from all reality and just focus on the pretty colors and the nice songs, it's a fantastic time. As a disability historian, I do that regularly, as I always say you're welcome to enjoy your problematic media as long as you're aware of it. That being said, this is a dangerous rewriting of history. I will not deny that P.T. Barnum was a genius, he was, he almost single-handedly created modern consumer culture. But also a lot of his freaks were slaves and he was a deeply heartless racist ableist dude who would do anything to turn a profit. Freak Shows as a historical thing are very nuanced and complicated in a way I cannot possibly get into in short form content, so if you want to learn about the</p>

			<p>history of enfreakment and how it has disseminated into modern culture (reality tv is sociologically identical to freak shows, almost all cultures have some semblance of enfreakment in one way or another, really fascinating stuff), I have a video on my channel titled “Freakery” that gets into the nitty gritty of it all, but for a very very brief explanation, for disabled people at the time, freak shows were the primary place disabled people could find each other and build community and have some small semblance of autonomy. They were also abusive, exploitative, and permanently changed the landscape of how we view disabled people (and people in general) in any form of media, be that in film or on stage. And both of these things can be true at once. And they’re also both muddy because considering yourself proud to be a performer and happy to be onstage and have autonomy and community while also at the same time not actually having many alternative options to get that same level of community and autonomy and therefore making the ability to consent kind of sketchy (especially for those who were enslaved). But either way, the absolute un-nuanced glorification of the Freak Show, and also P.T. Barnum in particular in this film really ain’t it. It’s just– no. Honestly a lot of the handling of minority status in this film in general ain’t it. But anyway to leave this on a less sad note, freak show history fun fact, a side show group touring Europe went on strike in 1899, creating the very first actor’s union, 14 years before Actor’s Equity. Also Coney Island had a section for preemie infants in incubators that people would pay to see teeny tiny babies and it ended up saving about 6500 children from otherwise certain death over the span of about 50 years. So. There you go.</p>
Apr	69	Luca	<p>This movie holds such a special place in my heart cause it came out right before I studied abroad in Italy and we all watched it together and yelled Silenzio Bruno at each other and it was a whole thing, also the film objectively feels... nicer maybe isn’t the right word but it feels more natural when you watch it in Italian I highly recommend. Anyway. Massimo. Massimo is Giulia’s father, he’s a fisherman and only has one arm. And it’s an important part of who he is - he obviously has to do things differently because of it. But he’s figured out ways of accommodating himself and doing what he needs to do to be a fisherman and a father and cook food to feed his family. What I like about this kind of representation is that it doesn’t *need* to be there. It has nothing to do with the story narratively, if we replaced him with a nondisabled character he wouldn’t feel super differently, and his characterization isn’t “the disabled one”, it’s so many different things, with disability just being a piece of that. Another film that does this same thing really well is How To Train Your Dragon. There’s some feeling of like... a kindred spirit of sorts when you see a character that just happens to be disabled. Like someone thought of us outside of a strict plot necessity, which is typically the only time we’re in media, and decided to include us simply because they wanted to and they thought that was an important piece of the person they were creating. It makes me feel nice and fuzzy inside. Also this film is such a wonderful queer allegory so they really hit all the pieces. And the worldbuilding too. It’s just so good. Also the soundtrack. Go watch this movie it’s one of my all time favorites.</p>
Apr	68	The Blind Side	<p>I know the major conversation around this happened like 8 months ago but I’m notoriously always late to the party so this is fine. If you’re not familiar with this film, it tells the story of Michael Oher, an unhoused black teenager who ends up being adopted by the white affluent Christian Tuohy family who then help him get his grades up and get into college for a football scholarship cause he’s real good at football and then he becomes an NFL player. The way he is portrayed in the film is not explicitly intellectual disability,</p>

			<p>diagnostically wouldn't be, but his struggles in school due to lack of consistent education are treated more or less identically as an intellectual disability. I will also mention that Oher in real life has spoken about his frustrations about that particular representation of him in the film as unintelligent and how it has impacted his career, also this film is a cookie cutter white savior inspiration porn situation. The reason this is in the disability review series despite not technically entirely being disability is because the paternalism of racism and the paternalism of ableism feed into each other and in this particular situation there is a huge disability rights conversation that comes along with it - earlier this year Michael Oher alleged that what he thought were adoption papers that he signed shortly after turning 18 were in fact conservatorship papers, which signed away his right to his story, name, likeness, and finances, giving the Touhy family the ability to make money off of his story and not compensate him for that. Conservatorships are a big disability rights issue, you may know about them via Britney Spears, I'll have a full length video about them out on my channel tomorrow, but they basically give a conservator the right to control every aspect of your life and are notoriously difficult to get out of. They are also historically are how land was taken from Native Americans and how slavery continued with disabled people after slavery ended. The idea is that if someone is incapable of taking care of themselves and making their own decisions, someone else can take their place and make decisions in their best interest for them. The problem is that they are incredibly easy to abuse, the conservatee doesn't have to agree to a conservatorship for it to happen, and it affords them less rights than we give to prisoners. Portraying Oher as someone in need of rescue and care who was unable to do things for himself in this film directly backs up their control over him in real life in this manner. And as we said with Britney, if it can happen to someone as high profile and successful as them, what does this mean for everyone else?</p>
Apr	67	El Deafo	<p>I reviewed this book awhile ago, let's talk about the AppleTV show! Now what I love about the book is how, in describing Cece's experience growing up Deaf and using early hearing aids, she writes it in such a way that also perfectly explains the experience of growing up with an auditory processing disorder kind of by accident, since we see her overwhelmed by the partial auditory input she's receiving and how she navigates that which comes across identically to what many hearing folks with auditory processing disorders deal with since it's the same "I only got a small percentage of that what the heck is happening" situation. The show doesn't really do that, which is totally fine, this is first and foremost a Deaf story so what I have to say about it from a different lens doesn't matter at the end of the day, I'm completely neutral on my feelings about adaptation. Basically when adapting this story to be a show, the target audience is hearing kids. It's only accessible to deaf kids via captioning and small children are still learning how to read. Editing-wise, they have the audio styles change throughout the show in regards to what the texture of sound she is getting through her hearing aids. Which is a super cool concept, because it makes it really clear to kids what it's like to not understand or not be able to hear in a similar way to how she plays with text in the original book that I so adore. The thing is, from an auditory processing disorder perspective, this makes the show deeply overwhelming and exhausting to watch, even with subtitles, because my brain was trying to make up for the missing information and the audio texture was occasionally sensory hell. So I will both say that this design choice is incredible and creative and I am in awe of it AND that at the same time in teaching one particular audience about disability, it ended up clashing with the access needs of another disabled group. And that is okay! Am I a little sad about it because this is a story I resonated a lot with when I was younger and was excited for a show adaptation?</p>

			Absolutely. Am I also really excited for the understanding this show has created for tons of people which will further accessibility for all of us? Also absolutely. I'm just not the target audience. And that doesn't mean that it's bad or wrong or that I don't like it, it's just how it is.
Mar	66	The Lion King	Ah ruining childhood classics. So here we have a character with a facial difference that, aside from "jealous villainy" is his only character trait and also literally his name. His disability is the first thing we know about this guy. In his origin story, the scar happened because he was bitten by a cobra and the cobra venom "poisoned his mind". And I'm not saying that disability doesn't change a person, but the trope of having a character acquire a disability and then immediately becoming very angry and harsh and jealous and murderous is uh... sure a writing choice. Not only is this one of the most common disability tropes, but also when it comes to facial differences in media, this is virtually the only context in which we see them. Another example off the top of my head is the villain in the recent Wonder Woman film. Other similar examples of the trope with other disabilities would be Captain Hook and Captain Ahab from Moby Dick. The Lion King is based on Hamlet, with Scar being a reflection of Claudius who in the text is disabled, though less visibly so, and it's clear that in this specific instance the decision to create the Scar that we know and love was for narrative expedience. You're making a movie for kids, you want to be clear who the bad guy is, name him something scary like Hook or Scar and make him look visibly different from the rest of the characters and it becomes immediately obvious to everyone watching. And also make him queer-coded, that is also almost always a part of it as well. I have always wondered how much the frequency of disability being a characteristically villainous trait in the majority of our children's media, before we understood media literacy and tropes and thinking critically, impacted how we see disabled folk as adults.
Mar	65	Six of Crows	Honestly this review could have gone in the autism or the disability category and I love that my categorical system has been fundamentally breaking down of late. This book is a fantasy heist novel and the worldbuilding is absolutely off the charts. We follow 6 different 17 year olds (or about that age) who embark on a quest together, it takes so many twists and turns, and it also does that spectacularly dystopian thing I most recently pointed out in Sweeney Todd of being super unclear whether the PTSD and otherwise neurodivergent traits we see in so many of the characters are because they were born that way or because the society around them has made them respond to the world that way which is my absolute favorite kind of representation. In the madness category we have a lot of PTSD in a lot of them, as well as really clear ADHD in Jesper and arguably autism in Kaz Brekker. Kaz also has chronic leg pain because he broke his leg when he was young and it didn't entirely heal right and so he uses a cane. And oh my gosh is he an absolute masterclass, not just on how to write a multifaceted disabled character, but on how to write a multifaceted character in general. He is not the good guy, he is not the bad guy, and sometimes you want to punch him in the face and sometimes you want to give him a high five and I just adore how enigmatic he is. His disabilities are so firmly a part of him and they impact absolutely everything that he does, but they are also only like 10% of his overall identity in a way that feels very natural to the disabled experience and also like... very healing. Because it does impact everything that he does and sometimes it gets in his way and sometimes it doesn't and it is just written so wonderfully. My only critique, if one can even call it that, is if you're not in a great trauma headspace I would not recommend reading this book, maybe wait for when you feel a little more stable, cause it covers some really dark stuff. Otherwise, though, definitely a new

			favorite, check this one out.
Mar	64	Everything Everything	<p>This movie made me angry, also spoilers in this review, basically main character Maddy has SCID, an immunodeficiency, and so she can't leave her house and everything has to be sterilized for her but then she falls in love with the boy next door and runs away with him and then that sets a spiral in motion where you learn that actually her mother made up the fact that she has SCID and has been lying to her the whole time. A few main points here. First - oh my gosh never sacrifice your health for anybody. I do not care how much you love them in the moment, you need to set boundaries and take care of yourself. Period. End of sentence. I get that being a disabled teenager is hard but I need you to trust me, I know what I'm talking about. Two - this movie has the message of "it's better to live a short yet full life than a long sheltered one". Which sure, but please don't bring disability into that because you inadvertently encourage a lot of really concerning things with that message. Disabled life is also life worth living. Third, this isn't what SCID looks like or how treatment would work even were it the actual situation in question here, the Immune Deficiency Foundation released a statement about how disappointed they were in this movie and you should read it. Fourth, I've been meaning to talk about Munchausen's because of the Gypsy Rose stuff, but MBP is no longer in the DSM, it is now called "factitious disorder by proxy", but at the end of the day this disorder is still widely controversial as a concept because at the end of the day it's medical abuse and the disorder's existence often hurts people in marginalized groups trying to get real diagnoses infinitely more than anything else. I have a full length video on my channel if you want to learn more about it, but the continued use of MBP in the media really frustrates me. But uh... the soundtrack and the color palettes were really great?</p>
Mar	63	Echo	<p>This is my first MCU thing in this series and I think my third ever? Which meant I missed a lot of context and was kinda lost. Overall, this show wasn't my vibe and that is okay because even though it wasn't my favorite I can tell how deeply incredible it is. Maya Lopez is Deaf, indigenous, and an amputee. And she kicks butt. She kicks a lot of butts actually. That's kinda her thing. In regards to representation, they put so much care and scholarship into making this as ethical and authentic as possible and you can tell and it is just stunning. I particularly loved how they showed lots of different kinds of signers, with some characters defaulting to SimCom (signing and speaking at the same time), some using their mouths a lot, others not, that brought me joy. I also loved how the first obvious clue that Kingpin maybe doesn't care about Maya as much as he says he does is the fact that he is the only one in her world who didn't sign at all and instead relied on an interpreter to communicate with her. He has known her for probably a decade at least and cannot be bothered to learn how to communicate with her without a middle man and that spoke so much louder than literally anything else his character said or did. His holographic sign interpreter technology thingy is something I was initially skeptical about because there is a whole techno ableism problem of people trying to create ASL "translation" technology when that will never really be effective for a large number of reasons, so when it was introduced as a cool way to fix a communication problem I was concerned a tad cause I am really tired of seeing stuff like that, particularly when it's shown to be super effective because No, but then she later discarded it with a clear "if you don't learn to communicate with me my way I'm not going to use yours" tone to it which was awesome. I also loved seeing hearing characters communicate in sign when trying to be secretive or not be overheard, loved how deafness was an asset in many situations, particularly when using very loud sound to disorient the enemy, and my</p>

			absolute favorite part was the Pah moment. Which I would do with my hands but I don't want to mess up the microphone. It was such a perfect moment to use that sign but I was so not expecting it and I laughed super hard. But anyway. This show is awesome for all kinds of representation and you should watch it. If you like scary shooty stabby fighty things.
Mar	62	All The Light We Cannot See	The new Netflix show, I reviewed the book in part 45. The show felt just as clunky and lightly disjointed as the book but in different ways somehow? Which kind of compounded the issues the IP has to begin with. And it felt like the script didn't trust the audience to be able to fully understand what is going on or make connections and inferences about it which made it really heavy-handed and, from a dramaturgical perspective, really historically inaccurate. That also didn't help. From a disability perspective, the fact that they center the show around a blind girl and then rely on using teeny tiny text on screen to tell you various time jumps without thinking of perhaps finding a way to audio describe at least that piece in a natural-seeming way really says a lot about the depth of representation that we get here, very similar to the book in that regard. I still think the stakes were not high enough for her as a disabled person in the Holocaust here, they were regularly taken off the street and sent to camps and the Germans knew where she lived within a week of her moving there so they, historically, probably would have taken her away. They kept the dichotomy of the enemy referring to her as horribly afflicted and cursed by her blindness versus her family and friends saying she is blessed (albeit everyone treats her like a china doll to some degree so do they really fully think that) but that was yet again not super interrogated so the word choice felt hollow and performative on either end. Also I think aging up the character but keeping her traits the same when in the book she is a child made her behavior and manner of speaking feel really weird and I kinda hated it. I will say, in regards to mental disability, yet again the handling of PTSD was absolutely stunning. However the show itself is edited in such a way as to go from quiet to loud to quiet to loud with a whole lot of jumpscare so it is not a PTSD-friendly watch in the slightest. Overall super happy they cast two blind people in the role, but... yeah. This representation exists, and it's better in the show because it has the authenticity, but at the end of the day I still find it to be really shallow and... I don't know if "unsupported" makes sense as a descriptor but it definitely felt like it was missing things.
Feb	61	Narrative Prosthesis	Hello and welcome to this month's required reading. Mitchell and Snyder's Narrative Prosthesis is what I like to call the I Spy book of the disability media studies field because it is inevitably brought up in almost every single other even vaguely media-related disability writing. And rightfully so. I quote this book regularly. Which is why you should read it, it's a cornerstone of the field, but also disability media tropes aside, it's a great primer for how to look at media with a minority critical lens more generally. Like it talks about how interpretation functions as a further reflection of how we see the world, it goes in depth about specific cornerstone disability representations of history like Richard III and also Captain Ahab from Moby Dick who I should also make a video about at some point but boy do I not want to read about how to dissect a whale. I just. I love whales too much. But yeah I uh... don't have much else to say about this book other than that you should read it, obviously it's nonfiction and academic, but it is not super long, for reference it's about the same length as The Great Gatsby, so I really recommend checking it out. Especially if you like media stuff. It's truly a gold mine of information.
Feb	60	Avatar the Last	Okay I didn't *like* this character but I liked how they handled her if that makes sense. Her major thing is

		Airbender	that she is blind and she is a kick butt earthbender. But not in a “my superpower abilities make up for the fact that I am disabled” kind of way, more of a “my experience living with a disability has informed how I practice my craft and has made me uniquely good at it” kind of way, sorta subverting the traditional supercrip trope that I honestly expected to see. Her family is convinced that she is helpless and pathetic and can’t do anything for herself, continuously isolating her and taking away her ability to control literally anything in the name of “protecting her” which is what actually disables her and what makes her more likely to act out and do things behind their back which is super realistic. It did mean that, since she has never had any real friends or spent time with people and her parents are so convinced she is a helpless little baby that they don’t actually parent her, she is really bossy and annoying. But that kind of makes sense and I also kind of love that she’s not some perfect angel saintly whatever. Like she doesn’t understand the concept of working in a team or helping others because she has learned to be fiercely independent for herself and never had to work in a group before. Overall I think they did a fantastic job with the character, even if she kind of annoyed me, because fun fact disabled people are people and people can be annoying sometimes. And most of the annoying disability rep we get is just straight up disabled villainy and I am so excited that we have some snarky multidimensional disabled folks in media. We don’t get enough of that.
Feb	59	My Sister’s Keeper (film)	The film this time, I’ve already reviewed the book. I definitely liked the film less than the book, it did not make me viscerally upset for the rest of the day which, to me, says they didn’t capture the infuriating energy of the book enough. I think that happened particularly because in the book you are reading about the mother and you want to throttle her and feel like you’re the only one who sees it that way, meanwhile in the film it’s more clear she is a bit of an issue. My primary concern of the film was that they would try to Hollywood-ize the cancer and they did not do that truly at all which I appreciated. They did make Kate a little stronger on the internalized self-hatred over her illness but that’s a thing people experience so I can get over it. The thing I want to touch most on here is the service dog situation, I consulted another trainer friend after watching to get their opinion as well, though generally there is no standardization in the US so it’s really hard to judge what is “accurate” or not because a lot of behaviors are things real service dogs do. I understand why the handler missed the dog’s continuous alert which made the dog go for more loud and visible alert cues, but we didn’t see the early alert so I was questioning why we were doing traditionally pediatric alert cues for this grown adult. And also she doesn’t technically need to be wearing a service vest but I really think she should’ve been vested. She was also unleashed, some service dogs do not walk on leashes but that is few and far between and also for a reason. And then during the seizure she just stood there barking at him which was just... odd. She also sat in a chair next to him?? I don’t want to say that what she did was ever wrong because SDs are complicated but it was definitely real weird and I miss the incredible service representation we got in the book.
Feb	58	Purple Hearts	My friend told me to review this film because it’s “an adventure” and I assumed that meant the disability rep was a mess. I instead found myself forced to watch a two hour enemies to lovers between a white bigoted military man and a disabled woman of color and I truly feel like I need to put my brain in rice. Don’t watch this. It’s bad. Basically the concept is she has type 1 diabetes and can’t afford her insulin so she decides to enter a fake marriage with an absolute butt of a marine so that she can get health insurance and afford to pay her rent. And he agrees to it because he is a former addict who owes his dealer a lot of money

			<p>and needs the extra money from the marriage as well. Also she is a starving artist and that whole subplot is real annoying but we don't have time to complain about that. I think they should have just made this a horror film about how the government lets down disabled people and also how it lets down disabled veterans as well but for some reason we made it a romance. From a disability perspective, they framed her use of insulin, you know, the thing she needs to survive, as like... complimentary to his former drug use as if those two things are at all interchangeable experiences? Like she doesn't tell anyone she has diabetes, she just kinda hides and takes insulin like it is a really shameful dirty thing to do... what a narrative choice. And then there's a moment where she gets really loopy and nearly passes out in the sexiest way possible and she fixes that by taking the last of her insulin when that would have actually made the situation worse and she should have just eaten food. Which they well knew because she did that later in the film and they decided to make that moment romantic between the two of them. In my opinion, having a makeout session with someone who is currently mid medical emergency and not entirely present is real sketchy when it comes to consent but sure that's fine. Also spoiler alert, he gets injured really badly and yet you only ever see him in a wheelchair twice, one clip in PT, followed by him using a cane, and then at one point he gets angry so he decides to just go on a run without his cane because that's a great and responsible idea. He also uses the c slur once. I just... this movie is a disaster. Who let this happen.</p>
Jan	37	CODA	<p>Look, was this movie cheesy and predictable? Absolutely. Is having authentic Deaf or even wider disability representation something we ever get from our cheesy and predictable movies? No it is not. Which is why it was fantastic. I adored that the family was messy and maybe a little bit toxic but not in a way that made the viewer think "oh they're like this because they're deaf". It was "oh they're like this because they are all weirdly close to each other". Lack of boundaries is a Deaf culture thing as a response to being continuously denied communication and understanding of what is going on, we have a very similar cultural structure in the autistic community as well, both of which are fairly well documented phenomena, but from an outside person coming in to learn about deafness in this film, they would see complicated people. Who are people. And people who know the community would watch this and see so much stuff we never get to see represented which just sparked so much joy for me on so many levels. I also appreciated that they didn't put a lot of music during the signed dialogue and instead left it with the normal audio that you would hear during that conversation because I've found that a lot of media that includes ASL gets uncomfortable with silence and adds music on top and it really bugs me because uncomfortability with silence, or, rather, deaf noise, is an issue hearing people really need to work on. But yeah, as a musician myself, I really cannot stand media where the climax is the big audition or whatever because they're never set up even remotely accurately and always feel a little cringy and low stakes to me, but the rest of the film had so much heart and the family had me actively laughing out loud at a lot of parts so I would watch this one again. Which doesn't sound like a huge compliment but I swear that it is. Go watch this one.</p>
Jan	39	Wonderstruck (film)	<p>I just reviewed the book and discovered there was a film and so I decided why not add it to the series. As we've talked about before with adaptations, the story is told narratively in a completely different way, often expanding on worldbuilding in order to make up for the distinct lack of internal monologue. This film in particular really did that, to the point where I want to hug whoever was in charge of making things time period accurate for the 1920s and 1970s because it was just incredible. The cinematography was also very artistic in a way that reflected the vibe of the illustrations in the book. I will say that it often tipped from</p>

			<p>beautiful into a slight motion sickness/migraine/overstimulation territory that wasn't my favorite. What I loved most about it was how they played with silence and music and general sound design to help narratively show the perspectives of our deaf protagonists. And, particularly, with the 1920s storyline, it was filmed and edited to read like an actual silent film which I adored. But they also deliberately never captioned any of the things people said that were not heard by the viewer, giving the viewer a greater understanding of how hard lipreading is. And, for me as a lip reader, the ability to see into a whole new world of text written for this film that really no one else got to see or hear which was really cool. My biggest frustration is that they put so much effort into casting the amazing Millicent Simmons (who is deaf) to play young Rose and then cast a hearing actor who is super unnatural at signing to play older Rose. And Rose's brother who signs with her was also a really stilted signer which makes no sense given the fact that, at the point we see the two of them sign, they've been signing for nearly 50 years. And, specifically, young Rose never signs on screen and old Rose does so why did they not put in the effort to find a signing deaf person for older Rose if they were planning on only casting one Deaf person. Which, for the record, was the wrong thing to do. So zero out of ten for that, but otherwise nine or ten out of ten for the film and representation.</p>
Jan	36	Mr. Holland's Opus	<p>This is a film following a high school music teacher over the course of about 30 years and it's basically about the importance of teachers and of music and I really enjoyed it. Though it's really long. Anyway, Mr. Holland, whose whole life revolves around music (and is also really autistic coded and a bad father but that'll be my next review), has a deaf son. And this kid feels like they just put a child into the film to add some conflict and decided to spice it up a little more by making him deaf, he really doesn't add much or have a personality or virtually any screen time. Cookie cutter narrative prosthesis. It doesn't portray deafness in the best light but all of it was so historically accurate to the time period and kinda as positive as it could be for that time period so I didn't really mind it that much. There was the cookie cutter ableism of "don't teach him to sign, he won't learn to speak or use English" which is not at all true but was thought to be true back then and they also noticed he was deaf when he was over a year old which is super accurate for the time (universal newborn hearing screening didn't start until the 90s). I didn't like the directorial decision to not caption conversations that happened solely in ASL because, unless you sign, you only understood what Cole was saying through other people which I didn't love. Which kinda took away what little voice he had in the film. A lot of the things I want to critique are so clearly a product of the time that it took place, though I don't know if people unfamiliar with the history would not realize those pieces are outdated? I hope that they would? But the thing about this film that bothered me the most was that Deaf people don't need to have some way to experience or understand music in order to be happy or fulfilled. They are not missing out, they are not less than, we should not feel sorry for them because of that. Yes, there are accessible ways to make and experience music, lots of Deaf people love music, but the idea that someone's life is horrible because they can't experience music in the typical way every day and we, as hearing people, need to introduce them to it because they can't live full lives without it is icky and kinda perpetuated by this movie.</p>
Dec	57	A Christmas Carol	<p>Tiny Tim. The original inspiration porn. And the bane of my existence. Look, if you need three ghosts to make you realize that you kinda suck as a person that's fine, but why did we need to drag a disabled kid into this? His whole personality trait is "I am sad and cute and absolutely perfect to the point of not really even being a human child and I hope that my existence as a poor disabled kid makes everyone else grateful</p>

			<p>for what they have”. He is seen as inspiring and heroic just for existing. Which is icky. Because that thoroughly dehumanizes him. And the fact that this story is told every single year, often via plays that often cast nondisabled children in the role hundreds and hundreds of times around the world makes Tiny Tim one of the most seen representations of disability. Which sucks. In the traditional script, Tim is referred to using the word cr*ppl3 three different times if I remember correctly, I know this reflects the book and the time the book was written. What I find interesting is that people change bits and pieces of that script all the time to reimagine this story and yet they almost always leave in that language. And yes, it’s historically accurate and there’s something to be said about keeping the slur in to denote the fact that this storyline for him is problematic and make people feel uncomfortable, but I also think that audiences aren’t picking up on any of that and the use of the word, at the very least, is very alienating to disabled folks and I don’t understand why people don’t change it. As a theatermaker my proposed “fix” for the character would be to stage a production of Christmas Carol where every single actor is visibly disabled (which also includes visible stimming and service dogs and sign language use) except for Scrooge and Tiny Tim. I think it would be fun. So if anyone wants to make that happen and needs an assistant director call me up, let’s make it happen. But in all seriousness - we don’t talk about the issues with this character nearly enough. And it concerns me.</p>
Dec	56	Christmas Ever After	<p>This is a Lifetime movie that you can find on Hulu starring Tony winner Ali Stroker. They did something with the rep that I have never actually seen before which we will get to in a second, but first of all I will say that I did not really like the movie. It wasn’t like fun cheesy, it was just cheesy, you know? The Netflix style of Lifetime Christmas movie is so absurdly bad it’s fun and this was just a bland Lifetime Christmas movie. But anyway the rep was great! Ali is a wheelchair user so therefore her character is a wheelchair user and they just... never once mention it. No one asks, hse doesn’t talk about her experience, she doesn’t have issues being accommodated because she’s in spaces she normally navigates so they’re used to her, and she just. Existed. As herself. And it made me realize how much with disability representation we almost require the script to have some sort of explanation or things about that particular identity baked into it. When here she just existed as herself, played the character, did things as are normal to her, and that was it. I don’t know how I entirely feel about it because on one level it almost felt like she was living in a world without ableism which felt kinda off to me, but we also have queer representation and BIPOC representation in this film without any further explanation, nor do we majorly expect it for those things. Maybe more for queer folks, but still. It was kinda refreshing and I’m really into it. Let’s have more of that.</p>
Dec	55	A Christmas Prince	<p>Netflix christmas movies are my favorite film genre. Though this disability rep is weird. I... I don’t hate it but it definitely... has issues. First being that the actress playing Emily, while she did a wonderful job, is not disabled. Which is obviously an issue (no hate to the actor, this is a production team problem), but also I think narratively this character would have held just as much meaning had she not been disabled so if they really wanted her in the role why did they keep her as a disabled character? I love how spunky she is and how she takes her life into her own hands but also underneath is an anxious little girl with a lot on her shoulders, I love that her personality is not just “oh she’s the disabled one” and there’s more to her than that. There is one part where she refers to herself as “broken” and there’s definitely a lot of shame stuff going on there. Which isn’t inaccurate for many disabled folks, but the element of shame and feelings of brokenness is in every single representation ever and I would love it if we could occasionally have disability</p>

			<p>rep without the associated “I hate myself because I’m disabled” aspects to it. Like where is the disability pride? Why do we never get that? There’s also the conversation where she basically says “I’m disabled and it’s incurable. You pity me” and Amber is like “no. I think you are brave” and Emily just decides then and there that she trusts Amber and likes her a lot. And I just– there was no depth to that interaction. Why is that the thing that is their connecting moment? And also telling a disabled person that they are brave for being disabled is a truly bizarre thing to say to a person. Like thanks but I don’t have a choice? What? But the rest of the film is equally baffling and weird because that’s the genre so I am going to more or less give them a bit of a pass. But not for the cripface. We should know better at this point.</p>
Dec	54	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	<p>Let’s tackle this like the disability studies scholar that I am in the most pretentious way possible because why not. So what we see here, both with the 1964 film and frankly just the song itself is a story that beautifully explains how disability works culturally. Disability as a category was created to label the group of people who are unable to work in the typical way, leading them to be inefficient and less productive under capitalism in comparison to nondisableds, and therefore unhelpful as workers. As times change, as workplaces change, as the government budget for paying social security benefits to disabled people changes, the category of disability expands or shrinks or moves to cover different things. For example we tend to see expansions of the disability category with increased funding after major wars and we see shrinkage of disability categories during recessions or hard economic times. Looking at you “neurodivergent people are uniquely helpful in the workplace and that’s why we should hire them and not consider them disabled” conversations we see going on in the business world right now. Rudolph, with his red nose, grew up at a time where that difference was unhelpful, shameful, and was perceived to be a disability. He was told to cover it up and pretend that he was just a normal reindeer. But, when conditions changed and his disability was actually an asset, he was suddenly no longer seen as disabled but rather as the one to save the day. Because his disability became profitable and the benefits of it suddenly outweighed the costs given the shifting needs of the populace in which he lived. And of course with no one apologizing for having previously treated him terribly and instead pretending they were nice to him all along because now he is seen as useful. Which at the end of the day is just the further exploitation of vulnerable populations. In this case, a red nosed reindeer and his fellow misfits.</p>
Dec	53	Our Flag Means Death	<p>I made a review about how incredibly neurodivergent Ed and Stede are after season 1 came out and I think briefly mentioned how great this show is with disability, having all kinds of physical differences without question. Which is how pirates generally functioned - it was a dangerous job and people got hurt and they accommodated their injuries and kept working. Also pirates are the reason we now have universal healthcare because they created worker’s compensation and used it to lure people out of the military to come work for them instead so then the military had to create their own competing version. But anyway. Season 1 made me feel like they were deliberate in their handling of minority identity, particularly with how wonderful Jim’s character is, and season 2 made me wonder if that was kinda just a fluke. Because while they have so much great disability representation they also had Ricky Banes as the villain of the season, a guy who had his nose cut off by Spanish Jackie and then that becomes his motivation for trying to take down the pirates. If I were to rank problematic disability tropes, the absolute number one top of the list would be mutilated avenger because the idea is that their disability caused them to become internally angry and evil and they will lash out at anyone without warning. Which leads people who consume that</p>

			<p>media to accidentally internalize “visible disability = evilness and I should avoid disabled people”. And facial differences are specifically used exponentially more with this trope, another example being the evil lady in Wonder Woman. And I just– this is one of my favorite shows. And I do not understand how they wrote this script and no one thought to point out that maybe having the primary villain of your show being someone explicitly trying to avenge their disability is not a good idea. I truly– I just don’t know how that happened.</p>
Nov	52	Crip Kinship	<p>This is your nonfiction required reading for the month. Crip Kinship is a book about Sins Invalid, a disability justice based performance project in the San Francisco Bay Area that centers disabled queer artists of color. And a lot of their work centers itself around disabled sexuality and they are truly the absolute coolest. What I loved about this book, especially in comparison to everything else I read for my thesis, is that it isn’t just about performance style and how the arts are activism but also more generally talks about the origins of the Disability Justice framework, what activism of all kinds actually looks like, and how to be a part of it. And how to put the most marginalized in our communities at the center of it and acknowledge how we would not have the rights we do today without them. A lot of literature in the realm of disability studies is very white and this book was very not. Which made everything it talked about make more sense and feel more practical because it was intersectional. This is one of those books that oozes love and community and feels like coming home in a way that is really hard to achieve with nonfiction and also teaches you a ton along that journey. And it’s also kinda short, I read the whole thing on a 6 hour flight. So I highly recommend, such a wonderful read, check out Sins if you haven’t already, and make sure that you’re diversifying your disability knowledge. I will link some of my favorite disability creators of color on this platform below and please add your own in the comments as well!</p>
Nov	51	True Biz	<p>Ugh this was such a good read!! This book centers itself around a residential school for the deaf, following the headmistress who is a hearing CODA (child of deaf adults, also she has a wife which brought me joy), a boy who is from generations of deaf family, and a girl who has never met a deaf person before and been primarily deprived of language until she shows up at this school. I loved the little snippets of education about deaf history and ASL scattered throughout the book, I loved how the exposition of Deaf culture didn’t feel unnatural or shoehorned in or like it was deliberately describing things to a hearing audience but instead in line with the rest of the exposition. There was a lot of activism in the text but none of it felt particularly preachy or out of place, it felt like real in-community conversations that happen every day. Because they do. Which included all the messy nuances of cochlear implants and not being afraid to talk about how toxic and petty the deaf community can be sometimes and how schools for one minority can still be discriminatory towards another minority. Also I know that Charlie’s reason for getting migraines is very different from my reason for getting migraines, but I have never heard anyone talk about how sometimes trying to focus on signing can cause motion sickness or brain fog or visual sensory overload, even when at a point where it’s the most comfortable and natural form of communication. Because I very much felt that when I was younger and thought I was fully alone in that experience and felt weirdly seen. My one frustration was that none of the dialogue had quotation marks which made it a lot harder to process in my brain, though over time I grew to get used to it and I’m assuming that choice was a deliberate one. But yeah this book, regardless of disability rep, goes in directions you truly cannot anticipate, it had me glued to my seat the entire time, and I cannot recommend it enough.</p>

Nov	50	Little Women (Beth)	<p>Only the book. We are only talking about the book. I have seen a lot of people complain about ableism with this character and it creates a really interesting discussion, both about context and memory. A lot of character analyses see her as being a very bland character who has no personality other than “the angelic sick one”. A pure and innocent girl who doesn’t really need to exist other than to have her sickness be the catalyst for other characters to find their destinies. And I also remembered her as that. But I went back and realized that Beth was just very shy and liked things to stay the same and was your average messy child in actions while not much in words. And while when she does die, she is at peace with her fate and how things happened, she also has periods of time where she is quite angry at getting sick, at missing out on things, and at things changing for her. She didn’t become somewhat lonely and reclusive because she was the poor disabled one, it’s because she was shy and preferred the control of her own space far before she got sick. And she didn’t think about a long future because disabled people aren’t allowed to dream about futures but because she didn’t want anything to change so she never imagined it changing. And yes, her illness is a bit of a narrative prosthesis for the other characters, but that’s where context comes in. Beth was based on Lizzie Alcott, Louisa’s younger sister. So a lot of this characterization, the progression of her illness, the grief, the understanding, all of that is authentic. Sure, it’s not seen through Beth’s point of view so it might be a little skewed, but it is still very true to how the family experienced it and how it did very much impact their lives. So the real question is “but if the context isn’t clear and the disabled audience still feels hurt by a narrative and considers it problematic as the story has lived on, is it still an issue?”, and I don’t think I totally have an answer to that. If a narrative causes harm to you it causes harm to you and intention and impact are two totally different things, we’ve seen a lot of this with books parents write about the tragedy of having a disabled childhood, but I personally feel like historically Alcott’s narrative of illness was so much more realistic than the other narratives that existed at the time and, as long as it’s understood with all this nuance (which it often isn’t in adaptations), I don’t think it’s an issue. What do you think?</p>
Nov	49	What Happened To You?	<p>I read this book via a video of the author reading it on YouTube and it was the cutest so you should all go watch him read it. This is the story of a little boy named Joe who has one leg. And refers to himself as a pirate which I know is a normal thing all kids do, but the overlap between positive representations of disability and cool swashbuckly bois makes this extra cute. Anyway while he is playing a girl comes over and ruins his game to ask him what happened to his leg. Followed by a bunch of other kids who all start asking questions and theorizing about what happened in the way that kids do which makes Joe very overwhelmed and sad. And then the first kid who came over changes the subject and decides to start playing with him instead. And introduces herself to him. And they play together. And the other kids join in. What I like about this story is that it shows how normal it is for kids to have lots of questions. But also that those questions make the person who is being asked all those questions feel not so good. And how maybe it’s better to just understand that “some people are different” and move on and meet the person as they are. Because you aren’t owed any explanation as to why they are different, in the same way someone doesn’t owe anyone an explanation as to why they aren’t. It is short and to the point, meaning it is one of those books that you can age up or down based on your commentary around it which is so helpful from a teacher perspective, and the illustrations are adorable. And they’re all happy little pirate friends together, it’s the cutest, go give this one a read.</p>
Oct	48	My Sister’s Keeper	<p>This– this was one of the most infuriating books I have ever read and I mean that as so much of a</p>

			<p>compliment to how masterfully it was written and how it handled its content. If you're unfamiliar with this story, which seems like I'm the only one who wasn't before I read it, it's about a girl whose older sister has cancer and was born to be genetically perfect to be used effectively as spare parts to save her sister. And she decides to sue her parents for the right to her own body. Disability aside, this book is absolutely riveting from start to finish, I cannot recommend it enough, especially if you want to understand what medical trauma looks and feels like. If you have extensive medical trauma, this book is Very Triggering. First disability piece I loved was that we had a lawyer with a service dog and dealt with all the usual service dog harassment and said increasingly absurd things that the dog was for to shut people up which brought me so much joy. I have never read a book where a character had a service dog, meant a lot to me. The more major disability piece is this book really showed how, while we know trauma in general makes people age quickly, medical-related trauma makes people age quickly in the sense that your understanding of what life means, what death means, and how time works is completely altered in a way that other people simply cannot understand. And not in a sappy "you only live once" kind of way, but in a disjointed time, comfort discussing really dark things, always jumping from crisis to crisis, and struggling to connect with peers because of it kind of way. Something that people in the disability community, particularly for those of us with chronic illnesses and/or shortened life expectancies, talk about regularly with each other but so rarely with people outside the community because everybody else gets so scared and uncomfortable about it. A lot of that having to do with ableism and people not wanting to think about the possibility of disability and everything they associate with it. And this book is a wonderful example of what happens if people don't learn how to healthily deal with that abled grief. But with so much nuance and realness and authenticity that I truly did not expect to find.</p>
Oct	47	Out Of My Mind	<p>Oh look! Another book about disability written for young readers that was famous when I was in middle school and really didn't age well! I don't know what happened in the early 2010s but it was a weird time. This book holds a strong place in the hearts of many disabled folks by being the first time they felt seen and heard so I almost feel bad giving it a bad review, but what it comes down to is this book has so many of the right ideas about the experiences of disabled people with really shallow and un-nuanced execution which ends up making it really harmful. Because yes, we should always presume competence with disabled people and always give them the best possible access to the forms of communication that are most accessible to them. The problem is that this narrative flipped all the way in the other direction of "I'm different, not stupid", used the r-slur several times where it, even historically, wouldn't be appropriate, and basically elevates this character's humanity by putting down a large swath of the disabled community. And saying that her body doesn't work right but she's smarter than the whole school so that still makes her worthy of being a human which is just so very much of a problem. With the whole "locked in" narrative trope. The whole thing reeked of internalized ableism, with her putting down other disabled folks and regularly insulting herself and calling herself broken without anyone really ever disagreeing and saying she isn't broken. The whole section of the mom working really really hard to make sure she didn't have another disabled child and having that be an explicit conversation between the two of them with the kid agreeing that's what she wants too was really painful to read. This book definitely had a time and place, though I do worry how much it may have impacted the internalized ableism of the people who felt seen reading it for the first time however many years ago. Again, a lot of the experience was somewhat accurate, but they really needed to be handled with so much more nuance and care and kindness in a published work that</p>

			could have and, in this case did have, such a profound impact on how people see disabled people and how disabled people see themselves.
Oct	46	Love from A to Z	It is rare that I struggle to find words for a book so that alone should say something. I went into this expecting a cheesy romance that involved disability and instead found a direct reflection of what it means to be an activist, what it means to be in a minority, and what it means to come to terms with the fact that everyday life is hard but that finding beauty and peace in that is more important than anything else. Also having a love story between two Muslim characters and how that affects what dating looks like is so so important and we need more of that. And the way it talked about how microaggressions build up and why people get angry was just stunning. But let's talk about the disability - one of the characters has MS, a chronic illness that involves the central nervous system and is often progressive. Every page I expected things to go wrong, I expected it to teeter into burden territory, and it... somehow never did. I'm still baffled by it. It talked about how hard chronic illness is for everyone, how the primary struggle is grief time and the mental battle of it all. Learning to accept unpredictability, learning to be okay with needing help, and how, as much as we may feel like we are burdening other people, they don't feel that way. They simply care for us and want to help us in the same way that we would do for them. Yes, it's hard for them to see us struggle and in pain, but never once in this book did it feel like "oh you need to hide who you are to make others feel less sad" or "oh those poor people who have to take care of him are so unlucky" in the way that we so often see disability in the media. His disability equated with loneliness because he was too scared to ask for help and thought it was better if he hid his needs, only to find that everyone was better off when he didn't. And he is able to find love and a happy life. Not despite his disease but alongside it. This book was a hard read for me, not because it's heavy, but because it spoke to all of the things I struggle most with and made me realize that it's normal and things get better. So. Go read this one. Give it some love. It'll give that love right back.
Oct	45	All The Light We Cannot See	This is now the second time I have read this book and, both times around, I really wanted to like it but I just... I struggled. If you're unfamiliar with the book, it is a novel that mainly follows a young German boy and a young blind French girl throughout the course of the second world war, and also there's a maybe-cursed stone involved. My main issue with the book is that it continuously shifted between perspective and timeline and there were so very many characters and settings to follow within each perspective and timeline that it was really easy to get muddled and mixed up and not really feel a deep sense of connection or care with any of the above because you couldn't keep track of who was who and it made the book really slog. Also the implications that everything bad happening around her is because of a stone's curse rather than "this is the life everyone lived during the war, the world is just this cruel sometimes" sat weird with me. But anywho from a disability side, I loved how her father created little scale models of the places she lived so she could learn how to go out on her own and not get lost, I loved how, even though it mentioned that her loss of sight might be a curse once, it otherwise was not really treated as one, she was just an outcast along with everyone else. It also showed how a lot of evacuation efforts, both then and now, do not include plans for disabled people. That being said, the... lack of urgency around her disability throughout the war was odd to me. To be fair there wasn't an urgency in her timeline for them arresting Jewish people either so maybe they just wanted to ignore the Holocaust aspects of the war, maybe the characters didn't really know about it, but disabled people were individually under a lot more

			<p>danger in occupied territory than was alluded to in this book and that felt like a missed educational opportunity. Also there were some references to acquired disabilities in the book that were time period accurate but hard to read cause I couldn't tell if it was the author being accurate or if he genuinely felt that way if that made sense? Overall, rep was okay, book not my fave.</p>
Sep	44	Disfigured: On Fairy Tales, Disability, and Making Space	<p>This book fully messed with my brain but in the very best way. It's part memoir part disability theory based media analysis, basically talking about how a childhood of growing up on fairy tales that are full of really insidious messages about disability (as well as beauty which inherently ties into disability) affects how disabled people view themselves as they grow up and how the world views and treats them. I do think a lot of the things mentioned briefly in this book could really be further expanded upon and analyzed, but this is also a book I went into expecting it to be a sort of textbook and realized it was more memoir and cultural commentary if that makes sense? So it wasn't perfect for what I wanted from it but for what it is I can't find many books like it at all and think it is such an interestingly framed discussion. Conversations about media representation and its impacts happen all the time but often those conversations leave out the media that is at the core of our culture that we don't even think about anymore because it's that natural to everyone and the media that we give to children, those with growing minds trying to make sense of the world, and how that impacts them as a population more than anybody else. Highly recommend giving this one a read, the audiobook is also great, just be warned that it's one of those books that makes your brain a little fuzzy as you process it for a little bit because of how much it makes you rethink existence.</p>
Sep	43	Because of Mr. Terupt	<p>This was a really tough read but it also made my teacher heart melt in the very best of ways. This book follows six kids in their fifth grade class with extra special teacher Mr. Terupt who we later learn has an invisible disability of multiple concussions that end up being important later in the book, I won't spoil it for you, I think they handled all of it really beautifully though I will say why the heck was a doctor giving out a patient's medical information to a bunch of children who claimed they knew the patient, I feel like that's a violation of HIPAA somewhere. But I also totally forgot that earlier in the book Mr. Terupt has his students spend time in the special education classroom and it's really great and handled really well! Other than the fact that the kids equated the disabled kids with stupidity and also threw around the r-slur a semi-decent amount, but in all fairness that is how children talk so while it was hard to read it wasn't wrong. There was also a lot of bullying and fat jokes as a part of that bullying, again really hard to read but also fully accurate. I do think that the r-slur could have been called out a little better in the book, also Down Syndrome is referred to as a "mental disorder" which isn't really correct, but this book was published in 2010 so I will give it a pass for that. There's also a whole lot of autistic-coding for a lot of the characters, and, disability rep aside, one of my favorite parts of this book is how all the kids are handling some serious trauma, at home and with their teacher, that people think they're too young to understand and therefore don't properly handle it with them so they're left even more anxious about it and it comes out in their actions. Trauma informed teaching is my thing, y'all know this, and I really really loved how this book handled it and talked about it. This book is heavy but in the best way and I definitely recommend the read, particularly if you've ever been saved by a teacher.</p>
Sep	42	Studying Disability Arts & Culture	<p>This book looks like a textbook but you can get through the whole thing in like 3 hours and it is one of my favorite resources I think I've ever come across. Based on the title and structure it seems like it's specific to</p>

			<p>people who teach the arts or disability studies, but really anyone from any field, particularly educators, can learn a lot from this. To quote my instagram story post when I read it for the first time for my thesis - "I'm not even on page 10 and I've taken a full page of notes and nearly cried twice. Where was this book in my theater education? Where was this book in any of my education? This makes accessibility in the classroom look as easy as it fricken is and I've waited too long to read it. The bittersweet feeling of 'oh my gosh I'm not alone' and also 'if this information has been out there for 8 years why am I suffering now' is hitting hard at the moment". It talks about the intersections of oppression and disability and how that affects our classrooms and how we can change those classrooms to be safer for our students. And it has some exercises you can do with your students to help look at the world differently, many of which we used in the early months of Curious. Cannot recommend it enough, please go read this book and hand it to every teacher you know, it is now required reading, you're welcome.</p>
Aug	41	El Deafo	<p>This is an autobiographical graphic novel for kids about growing up deaf by Cece Bell and I love it. Also I met her like 6 years ago and she's wonderful. But anyway, this book shows how similar disabled childhood is to regular childhood - the same amount of overthinking about every interaction, the same struggles with friends and communication and adults trying to help you in ways that make everything worse. But then at the same time it's also very disability specific - she's not nervous about wearing clothes that are in style, she's nervous about how her hearing aids look. Her struggles with friends are that she's so excited to finally have one that she lets them treat her terribly and has to learn how to get out of that. And she misses huge chunks of conversation which makes human interaction more difficult. She worries about how she's doing in school because her hearing aid breaks and so she can't understand what's happening. But then at the same time, her teachers wear a microphone to help her hear what's going on and forget to take it off, meaning she can hear everything they do outside of the classroom and it becomes her superpower and that's where we meet El Deafo. From a stylistic point, the way that they wrote out phonetically what she was hearing made the reading audience really understand how difficult lipreading is and how different things we think help deaf people are less than helpful. I will also say that most of the experiences in this story come across nearly identically as someone growing up with an auditory processing disorder so this is a great resource for that as well. And I loved how you saw her go from a point of "this is normal, everyone's like this" to learning shame about her identity to the importance of seeing and being around other people like her. And how that process isn't always linear. The illustrations are adorable, the story is wonderful, it expresses so many very complicated and nuanced things in a super simple kid-friendly manner, and I cannot recommend it enough.</p>
Aug	40	From Sand and Ash	<p>I didn't expect this book to end up as disability rep when I was first handed it but here we are I guess. I also discovered that this author has a lot of issues in regards to minority folks so maybe don't support her, we're just here to talk about and learn from the rep and that's it. This book is a world war II story about a Jewish girl named Eva and a Catholic boy named Angelo who becomes a priest. They're raised sorta kinda as siblings but always had feelings for each other and the entirety of the love story in this book is super bizarre and out of place and kinda creepy and pushy and I didn't enjoy it. No means no is not a hard concept to comprehend. I did like the theological conversations in this book, with it explaining both faiths and finding the intersections between them and talking about how individual faith changes in response to trauma. In regards to disability, Angelo just happens to have a prosthetic leg. It's not integral to the plot, as</p>

			<p>far as I can tell it's not based on anyone in particular, he's just disabled. Which I loved. You can see how his disability and how others reacted to it impacted his life choices and led him to be who he was but not in a negative or positive way, it just kinda was. You saw him grow into it and become more confident about and comfortable in his difference. You saw how it was an asset in saving his life a few times and how it became a problem when he was trying to escape in others. It just felt like a very measured approach to creating a disabled character which I quite liked. He was messy and struggled with stuff just like everyone else, even as a priest, which was oddly comforting. Though again, the romantic conflict was weird. The word "crippled" came up a lot, that is considered a slur so I didn't love that, maybe she just wanted to be historically accurate or something? But it would've felt very natural to not have that word in there all the times it was used. Overall this book had as many issues as it had good things, there are definitely other world war II books that talk about the same stuff in much better ways, but the disability aspect was nicely done and I can very much appreciate that.</p>
Aug	38	Wonderstruck - book	<p>I grew up on Selznick books, he is one of my favorite authors, do check him out if you haven't read his work before! All of his books intertwine written text with gorgeous art, often with each medium being a different storyline that work parallel with each other and keep you guessing until they beautifully collide in the end. This book follows two deaf kids, one from the 1920s and another from the 1970s on their quests to find where they belong with the intercutting topic of museum curation and it is, unsurprisingly, incredible. Particularly for being written by a nondisabled author. The experiences of the characters in relation to their deafness was both timeless but also specifically accurate for the two time periods, with my favorite tidbit being the fact that, in the silent film era, cinema was wholly accessible to deaf people who then felt shut out when talkies overtook theaters. We often don't think about how some aspects of "progress" can actually make things less accessible. I love that the characters had fulfilling lives and relationships, albeit slightly different ones, and it showed such a healthy response to becoming late-deafened in the one character, with him first being reasonably distressed and overwhelmed but then quickly adapting and getting used to it because he had other life things to worry about. There wasn't any of the extensive sitting and feeling sorry for himself that most late-disabled stories tend to possess. This representation was simple but thoughtful, a story not explicitly about disability but with disability and handled properly and that's really all a person could ask for.</p>
Jul		STRIKE UPDATE	<p>An autie reviews autie media rep part 91 - ... nothing! As y'all probably know, SAG/AFTRA and the WGA are on strike right now. And the rules of the SAG strike in particular extends out to people like me, meaning that, by reviewing tv and film (and therefore advertising it) in this capacity, I'm technically scabbing, or crossing the picket line. As an actor myself (and also just a decent human being) I wholeheartedly support the unions and what they're fighting for and that means this series is going to change a little bit for the time being. I already filmed all of my reviews for July and August so I am going to post all of the ones that were book reviews and hold the rest until the strike is over. The numbers will get wonky, that's okay, I'm keeping track of it. I'm planning to continue with just books until the strike is over, though I may add in some plays and musicals in there if it lasts into September because I don't have time to read 9 books a month but we will see how it goes. As always, you can request anything at the link in my bio, that hasn't changed. And, in the meantime, if you want to support the strike (which you should), there are lots of ways to support everyone right now, including</p>

			donating to the Entertainment Community Fund, joining pickets, going to see movies (especially the smaller films in theaters that are less advertised than the big ones!), and going to live theater. All my love to everyone fighting to be treated like the wonderful human beings you are, you're the best and I'm really really proud
Jul	35	The Chance To Fly	I will admit that I was nervous about this book going into it because as a disabled theater-maker I knew it was going to call me out and I wasn't sure I was ready for that but honestly it was incredible and I felt less called out and more seen if that makes sense? This book is about a girl named Nat who is a wheelchair user and loves musicals and embarks on her very first show. I had a hard time suspending my disbelief that a kids drama camp would be doing a production of Wicked but I totally see why narratively that show made the most sense so I got over it eventually. It really touched on the extra cognitive load disabled people feel in any space and situation, as well as parents denying her opportunities to try and "protect" her from getting hurt, adults saying they're making things easier for her by excluding her, the "we'd love to have you perform but you would be such a good disability consultant" thing, the kids being more accepting than the adults ten times over, how she was confident about her differences until something else went wrong and then all of her self-hate and anxiety was directly disability related, and also the adults thinking that she, as a wheelchair user, can only be successful as a paralympian because those are the only successful wheelchair users they've seen. But at the same time it didn't feel like a disability book. It felt like a book about a bunch of silly theater kids having a lovely summer together that just happened to have all the accurate and healthy and good representation we never get. Also if you choose to listen to the audiobook instead of reading it, you get the bonus experience of Ali Stroker singing the songs in the book to you. And the musical theater easter eggs throughout are adorable. It is written for middle schoolers but frankly it's a reminder that I need to read more books for middle schoolers because media written for young people is so often better than media for adults. The best part for me is that, from a teacher perspective, I have taught every single character in this book several times over. But seeing them as the protagonists of this book made me realize that I was that kid back then too. I could gush about this book forever, I definitely needed this when I was younger and... honestly I needed it now too.
Jul	34	Champions	This movie came out in March and it's about a basketball coach, played by Woody Harrelson, who has a rough go of it and is court ordered to coach a special olympics basketball team as his community service. I had such wildly low expectations for this film and I am so happy to say that I was wrong. All of the characters, whether disabled or not, are super multifaceted and are treated like real complicated people. The jokes were mostly at the humor that is disability but not really the disabled people themselves if that makes sense? And the whole thing was definitely a little sugar sweet, but it didn't really feel like inspiration porn sugar sweet at all. Also the disabled characters were adults who were, for the most part, treated like adults. Including the fact that some of them had partners and sex lives. Which was awesome. From a movie standpoint, truly every time you think you know what's about to happen it goes in a completely different direction. Which also contributed to it not feeling like inspiration porn. There was one line that stood out to me where someone effectively said "hey, they're a special olympics team, they don't need to actually need to be good, they just need to feel like they're a team" which I didn't love because special olympics athletes are kick butt athletes, but other than that the majority of the exploitative things that were said in the film were directly called out as exploitative. And maybe I could take issue with the "bad

			guy becomes better guy because he worked with disabled people” but it also felt like “bad guy becomes better guy because he’s forced to actually pay attention to people for once” which could have happened had he suddenly been forced to be the head coach for any team. I really think we need to make more films that feel like they’re going to be inspo porn and then end up being actually decent films with fully human disabled characters being treated like adults to kind of flip the script on disability for the supposed target audience. Cause this was rad.
Jun	33	The Dragon Prince (Amaya)	Aghhh this was so good words are hard okay okay okay So Amaya is effectively a deaf lesbian battle princess and also a cool aunt at the same time and I am obsessed with her, I want to be her, this is wonderful. Her signing is wonderfully animated and they also have a person who voices for her, normally I would comment that we don’t need all signed communication to be voiced and should get comfortable with nonverbal communication, but since this show is aimed at an age group that is probably not great at reading I understand that choice. Sometimes he interprets what she’s saying when not directly facing her which is interesting. Not impossible, just interesting. Either way, when he is voicing for her, the central focus is still on her which is super important. I also loved the little details, like in one fight she had a person pinned and then saw his eyes dart to something and then she followed that gaze to see that someone else had appeared. You can tell that the cues she picks up on that make her a good fighter are hyper visual in a way that a hearing fighter likely wouldn’t need to learn. And they put in the effort to animate that. The one thing that amazed me the most was the quietness and stealth at which she can sneak up on people because deaf people can be really really loud so clearly that took her a lot of training to learn what makes sounds and how to avoid making those sounds when she moves and travels. Ugh she’s so badass this show is incredible and I will be going back to watch through the entire thing at some point.
Jun	32	The Upside	This movie is the 2017 American version of the 2011 french film The Intouchables and I can only describe it as the love child between Me Before You and Jack of the Red Hearts but with Kevin Hart, Bryan Cranston, Nicole Kidman, and none of the charm and warmth that those two movies possessed. It also clearly wanted to be a mix between drama and comedy but tonally just felt kinda bland and sad and the comedy didn’t quite work. This film is also another great example of the whole “wow! That’s a really awesome true story! But given the historical context and overall film canon for disabled representation... is this a story that is helping or actively harming with its message?” thing that we’ve spoken about before. Particularly the tropes of glorifying super under qualified carers, of late disabled people wanting to end their lives and no matter how rich they are, that you can’t really find romantic love as a disabled person, and the idea that being around disabled people suddenly makes you an inherently better person and motivates you to get your life together. I think I might have liked it on some level if reviewing media rep wasn’t my job, solely because I swear I’ve seen this exact same movie with different actors at least 5 to 10 times in the last year, but overall I am not seeing the appeal of this one. It was super cliché, a wee bit preachy, and all felt a little too smooth and simple for what it was trying to do. Like... handling social issues in an uncanny valley kind of way if that makes sense.
May	31	My Left Foot	So I didn’t realize, but this film is actually a true story and based on a memoir. Which I think is an important time to talk about the aspects of “this is a cool story but is it one that, when placed in the literary

			<p>canon, is a good idea to tell". Because it is a good story, it's really cool to watch Christy learn and grow and become a successful painter and whatnot, but this narrative can still do a lot of damage, particularly how much it plays into the narrative of "he overcame his disability and became successful" and the aggressive pushing of the tortured artist trope which thoroughly grinds my gears. Also there's the aspect of a carer flirting with a patient but not having it actually be flirty which was weird. And the film itself wasn't very interesting or compelling and a lot of the social dynamics here were weird. Likely because I didn't find Christy to be a very likable character so it was hard to root for him. It felt almost like you were supposed to pity him and therefore excuse his bad behavior which annoyed me. And I'm not sure if it was actually acted that way or if it's because I know that Daniel Day Lewis did his traditional method acting stuff with this film and was absolutely horrible to everyone on set because of it and caused serious issues and somehow he's praised for it so I don't see him as a very sympathetic person to begin with. And also the aspects of why the heck didn't they cast someone with CP for the role, Day Lewis got so many awards for his incredible acting skills in taking on the physicality of this character... ew.</p>
May	30	South Park Tourette's	<p>Here's the deal - this wasn't as bad as I expected it to be? In fact it was nearly good? I took issue with how much Tourette's was referred to as a disease or as an illness, but also the characters spreading misinformation about the disorder were mostly seen as the villains in the show. Yes, it was centered around swearing tics which is the most stereotypical and one of the least common forms of Tourette's, but that was also kinda necessary for the main theme of the episode (that faking tics is bad) and they did show lots of other tics later in the episode in a really powerful support group setting. I think in doing that they kinda tipped a little too much into "this disability really sucks and my dad left my mom because of me", but it sorta evened out at the end. I do think it was weird that it seemed almost like Cartman developed "tics" at the end because he lost the ability to control what was coming out of his mouth because that became habit, but I hope that anyone with critical thinking skills would realize that he was not actually developing tics, it was just an adjacent thing. I do get generally pissed off by the perpetuation of the idea that people fake disorders, particularly tic disorders, for clout, simply based on the whole TikTok discourse about that at the moment, but without that context I don't think that aspect of this episode would bother me. Overall this episode handled a really delicate topic shockingly well so good on them.</p>
Apr	29	Crutchie from Newsies	<p>I usually avoid musicals in this series but this one has a pro shot so it's fine. I had some people ask me about how problematic he is, considering his name is Crutchie, but honestly I think this is really great rep. Crutchie gets what I call the pirate treatment, where a group of misfits just takes in another misfit without problem. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses and they all support each other without question. And they even show some positives of his disability, such as predicting the weather, holding a strike sign on his crutch, and they joke about him having an advantage in selling papers. Also most of the Newsies have nicknames either based on appearance or on behavior, such as Specs for his glasses or Buttons or Spot or Romeo. It's not like they're singling him out as the only one. Crutchie is definitely a bit of the sweet innocent angel baby Tiny Tim sort of trope, but I feel like he's a little more in-depth than that, and he's also not the only sweet innocent angel baby who yells really loud Newsie. He is on some level Jack's motivation which makes it feel a bit like a narrative prosthesis disabled character only exists to better another character situation, but had his little brother character been nondisabled I think it wouldn't change the plot or motivation for Jack at all. There is one line in the opening number where he dreams about being</p>

			<p>able to run when he gets to Santa Fe, but this was back in a time when they believed that fresh air would cure disabilities and the social model wasn't really a thing so I can't blame them for that. A couple words that are now seen as slurs are used to describe him in the show, they probably did that to seem "historically accurate" but they also could've definitely played with words a bit to very much not do that. It really takes a person out of the narrative and is super unnecessary. The last thing I usually comment on is that this character could and should have been played by a disabled person, but also this show was eleven years ago and, in regards to actor representation, theater is really really behind so, again, contextually I'm not too mad about it. Could they have done better with some aspects? Maybe. But I think overall they did a really really nice job given the circumstances, I have a soft spot for this show anyway so maybe I'm just making excuses, but to me he's just another misfit Newsie showing another part of the system that's broken. And I love him. As flawed as he may be, so is everyone else in this show. They're all just a group of kids trying to make the world a better place anddddd that's why this soundtrack is very often my activist pump up playlist</p>
Apr	28	Seinfeld's Bubble Boy episode	<p>Okay so I feel like I was supposed to be offended by this episode but I was more confused than anything? Let me start by saying this was the first time I'd ever watched Seinfeld and I do not understand why it was popular because it's like Friends which is already bad but worse? Somehow? Anyway, brief disability stuff before we talk about the historical context, I kinda like how the kid kinda sucked rather than being a beautiful angelic victim, particularly because the only reason the characters were doing a favor to go meet the kid is because they felt bad for him? But the portrayal still felt really gross. Also the way that they fully almost killed him at the end which was played for laughs was really weird. The whole thing felt really tasteless. And, to families actually impacted by SCID, severe combined immunodeficiency, they've basically said the same thing. This and other pop culture (often satirical) representations of Bubble Boys have been really painful for them. It also brought some level of publicity that is helping to change the face of healthcare for people with various autoimmune disorders, but we should not look at that as a reason to continue these stories. If you don't know the history of David Vetter, known as "the bubble boy", highly recommend looking up the Retro Report Bubble Boy video. Short version is that he never developed an immune system and lived his life in a sterile bubble, eventually trying a bone marrow transplant to save his life that very nearly worked and led to further revolutionary change in care, followed by other research and experiences from other families that have led to early detection and treatment. Anyway, it was a cheap gag for the show to use, it did so poorly to begin with, and the wider context makes it worse. But hopefully this conversation can give more people the chance to learn about SCID and David's story. We owe a lot to him</p>
Apr	27	Me Before You	<p>Good god is this a film First thing to say is that the discussion of assisted suicide is a really nuanced one, this film was not the place to have that conversation, and it didn't even attempt to handle it with care which is super dangerous. The second thing is that, while it did portray some aspects of disabled life and latent disability accurately, the reasoning behind WHY they were doing that - to try and prove that disabled lives are not worth living no matter how much love and care and money you have - is terrifying. Particularly the line about how accepting his disability makes him less of a man, how manliness was equated with able bodiedness several times, the clear implications that all disabled people hate and are disgusted with themselves, that disability humbles you, that no matter how much energy or love you put into a disabled person they will still hate</p>

			<p>themselves so it's not worth it. Also the fact that the only people willing to spend time with a disabled person are people who are paid to be there. We won't even get into how she has no work life balance and zero training and was actively making dangerous choices regularly. Still confused as to why this man didn't have a therapist because clearly he was dealing with some internalized stuff. And the incessant and gross need for people to know if disabled people are capable of having sex was also in there and weirdly so, specifically adding to the "you can't be fulfilled with a disabled person". And, for the record, he's not entirely incapable of sex, just uncreative. The biggest thing for me, though, was how there was a whole thing where his mom talked about remodeling this stable to be accessible to him when the only accessibility aspect was extra wheelchair space. Like nothing else was even remotely close to being accessible so no wonder he's frustrated. And how Louisa never planned ahead for accessibility on their trips which made it look like disability is hard, not that, I don't know, you need to plan ahead when you go places in general? OH AND THE LINE AT THE END WHERE HE SAYS HE'S WALKING BESIDE HER EVERY STEP OF THE WAY IN DEATH oh my gosh this movie broke my brain nO</p>
Mar	26	The Miracle Worker	<p>Like the 1962 black and white one with Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke. I know that it's adapted from a play that is adapted from Helen Keller's memoir however I will be ruthlessly criticizing it anyway - first of all this is one of the loudest movies I have ever seen. Truly everyone is screaming all the time for no apparent reason and I didn't love that. I would say that it has every cliché about blind people in it but I am getting vibes that this film in fact started many of those clichés, I won't even go into the way that the enslaved characters were treated cause that's a discussion for another day, my biggest issue is that the clear message of this movie is "if you refuse to respect a child's boundaries and continuously are anywhere from vaguely to extremely violent with them until they break and submit to your will, that is in fact how you show that you care for them and show them humanity because it is the only way the poor disabled child is capable of learning". And I uh- I liked how it did reprimand the parents for pitying the child so much they refused to parent her, but I also don't think that physically throwing a child on the regular is a safe version of parenting. And I guess maybe that's how Keller authentically experienced it, but in a world where that's the only representation we have... things get sketchy quickly. Especially when, here, it's the disabled caregiver who is abusing the disabled child which makes it seem more "right" in the minds of viewers. Also there are some serious "disabled people are a burden" energy going on. Anyway I meant to review this film to remind everyone that Helen Keller was a very strong proponent of eugenics. But also this movie is a mess. So you get both things now.</p>
Mar	24	Junkyard Wonders	<p>This is the second Patricia Polacco book I've talked about on here and I'm fine with that because she is one of my favorite children's book authors. Junkyard Wonders is the true story of growing up in a special education classroom and what it's like to finally have a group of people like you and feel empowered by your difference. But not in a sunshine and rainbows way, in more of a "well the world isn't always nice to us but we know we are worthy and we have each other" kind of way which I think is much more important of a message. It also handles loss really well, in a way that young children can understand and the illustrations are just stunning and I can't describe this book in any way other than reading it feels like stepping into a big fuzzy blanket. It is a childhood favorite of mine and I cannot recommend it enough.</p>
Mar	23	Switched at Birth	<p>I have heard people refer to this show as a trainwreck and I will say that I agree. However the disability rep</p>

			<p>is fantastic and frankly one of the best things I've ever seen. The trainwreck aspects are entirely because this is a teenage soap opera, the plot is going to be a mess, that's how that works. And it's why I don't like this show. But from a disability perspective, they did an excellent job. The cast is stacked, the platform was big, and they got so many people interested in ASL that never would've been before this show. And this plotline could've been done very successfully without including disability which makes it extra cool. They kept bringing up disability issues and I was always prepared for them to go wrong and they always handled them really well with a lot of nuance, deliberately going out of their way to tackle issues most media doesn't cover. There were some issues such as how it's clearly made for a hearing audience with the unrealistic amount of simcom (signing and speaking at the same time) and a lot of times the signing would be slightly out of frame, that was kind of bound to happen. There was also criticism that the main actress put on a Deaf accent for the show but I think there would've been just as much backlash about palatability and mainstreaming deafness had she not so either way you can't win really. There was one episode randomly that was almost entirely silent to "show the deaf perspective", that felt a little random and gimmicky to me because this isn't a show that evenly switches first person perspective episode to episode and also you don't suddenly understand a minority experience by trying on a piece of it for a short bit, but just like everything else in this show, they definitely tried something new and I give them a major shoutout for that because this show really changed the industry going forward.</p>
Feb	22	Tone Deaf	<p>I haven't read this book in about a year, but if you need a good disabled love story beach read situation, I cannot recommend this one enough. It's cheesy, this is expected, but we all deserve cheesy formerly-on-wattpad romances, okay? By the way if you have any other cheesy disability romances that are genuinely good, please drop them in the comments, bonus points if they're gay, I need more content in this genre. Not to review, I just emotionally need it. Anyway um okay so this book yes! It's about a girl who was a music prodigy but then had a brain tumor and became deaf and ended up in a household with an abusive father who refuses to learn how to communicate with her, she ends up getting dragged to a concert, ends up meeting the musicians, and then escapes with them. I won't spoil anything more than that, I highly recommend this book. It looks like it's going to be cheesy in an ableist way from the synopsis but I swear it's not. There's a prominent queer relationship, prominent interabled relationship, they deal with lots of topics of abuse and they do it in a nuanced and fairly accurate way, also handles latent disability really well, the linguistic swaps between signing and English are well clarified and well written, and while a lot of her struggles are a result of her disability, it's not that she's disabled and broken now, it's just that she hasn't found the right direction for her yet, in the same way any other teen has a hard time finding the thing they're good at. I will also say that if you've had an abusive partner and have been avoiding romance novels because they're triggering, especially if you're disabled and used to being called a burden, this one did a lot of healing for me. But anyway, I loved this book forever ago and it has even aged well which, for disability media, is kinda rare and truly I need more people need to get obsessed with this book solely so I have someone to talk about it with. Go read go go</p>
Feb	21	The Fault In Our Stars	<p>It's February, why not do a romance? Now say what you will about this book, we need to acknowledge that this, particularly the film, changed the landscape for disability representation. Sure, it ushered in a new era of terribly problematic media, but it also showed that there's a lot of interest in first person disabled stories. Could they have cast disabled actors and also included people of color in this film oh absolutely but</p>

			<p>that's an argument for another day. What I loved about this book both then and now is that disabilities shade their lives rather than dictate them - you never forget that they're disabled but you also don't see them solely as their disability. And the characters actively confront and joke about traditional tropes. This story isn't a soft and easy, smoothly accessible story of disability, it's just as sharp and jagged and real as disabled life is. And that's why we like it. Though Hollywood definitely smoothed it a lot for their film and put some of the more tropey things back into it. Also can we talk about the fact that there's a sex scene between two disabled people and it's done really well? Because we never get that? I will say that some disabled people do think the story slipped into cancer porn and disability porn and missed some pretty big things that, had he asked a disabled person he would've written correctly, but I will also say that a lot of the criticisms I read said these things in connection to how John Green as a writer writes his dialogue and his characters which I, personally, also think is weird but in a great and accurate way. And, again, after this went super well we saw a million romeo and juliet plus terminal illness stories in the media and it makes this original one feel more cliché and problematic solely because we're used to seeing majorly problematic versions of the same story. Disability aside, I have other issues in regards to white and pretty privilege, safety, and romance, but I would have the same concerns if they were two able bodied teens who just met and decided to immediately travel to a new continent and waltz around a country where they don't speak the language. Because what. And that is compounded by their disability status. But generally I think we can appreciate this for what it did for the industry and also for our inner sad and lonely disabled middle school souls. With all of its flaws.</p>
Feb	19	Nemo	<p>So Nemo has what he calls his "lucky fin", one of his front fins that is a lot smaller than it typically would be on a normal fish. He doesn't really mind, it doesn't slow him down much and he doesn't know anything different so he doesn't really pay attention to it. The only reason that it is constantly brought up and he's paying attention to it is because his dad is convinced that it's getting in the way of his life, that his smaller fin puts him in more danger, that he's more fragile. And like... when it comes to disability rep, this is such an important narrative because this happens in the real world for disabled people so much. We are used to handling our disabilities and accommodating ourselves and it's just part of our life and the only reason we really notice it is because other people constantly say we cannot do things and constantly point out said disability. I mean, obviously Marlin has a lot of mental health/PTSD stuff going on that's making him kinda behave like this, but my point still stands.</p>
Jan	20	Darth Vader	<p>If you dip your toe into the world of scholarly disability media analysis, Darth Vader and Richard III are the two examples every paper uses of precisely what not to do with your disability representation. But if your nerdiness doesn't come in that form, that's okay, that's why I'm here. The reason Darth Vader is a mess for disability representation is because he is an able-bodied conventionally attractive person who turns evil. And when he turns evil, he gets his comeuppance by becoming wildly disabled. And throughout the films, the fact that he moves and breathes differently is used as a sort of fear tactic. And Obi Wan mentions how he is "more machine than human" which feels icky considering the fact that he's basically on a ventilator with a few prostheses. And this is not a fluke either - nearly all of the evil characters in Star Wars have some sort of visible disability. I will say that it's older representation so they were less conscious of the issues, but they've perpetuated this idea in the modern films as well so... that's unfortunate really.</p>

Jan	18	Only Murders (Theo)	<p>So this show is incredible for countless reasons and we've discussed it before, today we're going to talk about Theo, the Deaf character (just based on season 1)</p> <p>I loved how they created this character. He was seen as sexy and treated like any other morally gray suspect in the show and I really admired that, for a lot of the scenes in ASL, they didn't try to put music in the background or do anything else to hide the near silence of signed communication. Most shows do that and I think it's important that hearing people get more comfortable with silence. It did feel a bit like they were doing the thing Switched At Birth did with the episode that had no spoken dialogue which is supposed to make you understand the Deaf perspective, that feels kinda gross to me because that's not... no? But good effort anyway. I also think his lip reading skills were bordering on the supercrip trope, nobody gets that much accurate information from lipreading, they're just often really good at filling in the blanks, but I understand that there's a lot of nuance there that's kinda hard to show in a tv show so on some level I get it. My biggest gripe is half the time you couldn't actually see the signing. The camera was focused on their faces which is really important because signers look at the face and see the signs peripherally so that's culturally correct, but also I wanted to see them signing, not just read the subtitles. And the signing from the hearing actors definitely showed that they only had a few weeks to learn it but I admire and appreciate the effort and I love that this character was included!</p>
2022			
Dec	17	The Peanut Butter Falcon	<p>This movie was a wild ride and I adored every minute of it. It's about a person with Down Syndrome named Zak who escapes his nursing home to try to go to wrestling school and ends up teaming up with a Shia LaBeouf running from the law, they become unlikely friends, and truly none of this plot was at all predictable and I was constantly nervous about the direction it was going in and it always turned out way better than I expected it to? Like the narrative of "this guy is a horrible person but then the disabled person makes him change his ways and he becomes good" is tired and gross and I hate it, but somehow they did it really really tastefully here so I will let it pass. I loved Zak's autonomy and sheer force of will, no one could stand in his way. But he was also great at knowing what his needs were and advocating for them. I think the r slur was thrown around a bit too much, I know that it does on some level reflect reality, but was still really hard to hear. Near the end of the film there was a clear line between two different ways of looking at Zak, one that was maybe too reckless and not understanding and another that was too overbearing and protective and it was a really interesting dichotomy to look at and think about. And the twist ending was truly wild. Anyway, thanks to whoever recommended this to me. I really really loved it and will be watching it again.</p>
Dec	16	Star Trek (Dr. Miranda)	<p>I was told to specify that this is from the original series cause there are apparently a lot. Anyway, Jones is blind though you don't know that until the end-ish of the episode? I think? I knew the whole time because this episode was chosen for a reason, but everyone seemed really shocked when they found out she was blind so I'm going to assume the audience didn't know either? But either way, in regards to the quality of disability rep, it was pretty bad. I mean, I liked the nuance of how she tries to hide her disability because she despises pity, but also she uses technology that more or less negates her disability, not to mention that she has superpowers. It felt very much like your traditional supercrip (the trope where someone has a disability but it means another one of their senses is a superpower to "make up" for their</p>

			<p>disability) but with the disability even more ignored and unrepresented than we usually see. And I guess on one level that's cool cause people are more than their disabilities, but it felt weird to just suddenly be like "yeah I'm blind but I know that you are standing 4 feet 2 inches from me and my perception is better than yours". A lot of whiplash, the vibes felt pretty off.</p>
Dec	15	The Theory Of Everything	<p>A disabled person reviews disabled media rep part 15 - The Theory of Everything This was the first PG-13 movie I ever watched when I was young and it was a big deal but anyway this movie is like the poster child of Oscarbaited crippling up, having a nondisabled person playing a disabled role in a film clearly made to win awards. Which it did. And one could argue that it's harder here given the nature of the disability, but still, I'd rather have a disabled person with a different disability than an able-bodied one in this role. And that's how the whole film felt - its a script by an able-bodied person based on a book written by an able-bodied person and stars able-bodied actors and focuses more on how his wife was suffering in watching him have a hard time than on the fact that his work changed the world forever. And the scene where he imagines that suddenly he gains the ability to stand up and hand a woman the pen she dropped did not sit right with me. And the excessive focus on "oh can he have children" over and over again. Weird. Hawking really loved it and honestly that's all that matters here, but from a critical disability studies lens, this film just does not hold up at all and it makes me, as a disabled person, feel really uncomfortable about the narratives it's perpetuating and how it went about doing that.</p>
Nov	14	Soul Surfer	<p>This movie is also a true story so we won't discuss the accuracy of the story but rather the way they chose to portray the story. Because I have a feeling it is really close to accurate of her life experiences, it's just also missing a lot of the nuance of the experience, it's too glorified if you know what I mean. That being said, in comparison to the majority of other "based on a true story" inspiration porn films that exist, this one was the closest to realistic I have ever seen. It felt a little too polished in the first third of the film, but once you got into it you didn't really notice. I really loved how they portrayed Bethany emotionally dealing with the sudden onset of disability better than any of her family members do and how it hinted that half of that was her being brave for them but the other half was a "okay this happened and I'm moving on" kind of mindset. And specifically how it didn't really hit her until she finally got the chance to do her absolute favorite thing again and it wasn't working the way it used to because of her disability and that was when it truly hit home for her. Also how right after getting home from the hospital she's immediately interested in a prosthetic to make her seem "normal" and over time realizes it's much more practical to just figure out her support needs and accommodate herself. Maybe I'm biased about this film because I watched it a few times as a kid so it had that nostalgic feel, but I think they genuinely did a really nice job (given how Hollywood usually treats these kinds of stories).</p>
Nov	13	Gigi & Nate	<p>Good lord what did I just watch. Okay so this movie came out in September and it feels like a bad early 2000s inspiration porn movie, it's about a young man who becomes paraplegic and has his life saved by a service animal which uh... is a monkey. And we'll get into the history of service monkeys in the next reel, but short version, ethically very dubious and yet in this movie they portrayed the animal activists as like social justice warrior snowflake villains which was wildly annoying. I get that this is based on a true story, but it was stripped of all the nuance of the disabled experience and they changed so many things about it that it's basically fiction, it had every single cliché (including the "i'm a burden to you" speech and the</p>

			<p>disabled kid destroying his parents' marriage and he doesn't think his life is worth living and the overdramatization of the development of the disability.</p> <p>I did like how he kinda has a social life and a love interest and also yes service animals are so important yes! But this film is a disaster, it's embarrassing and offensive, and it took years off of my life. Negative 4 out of 10 do not watch.</p>
Oct	12	Thank You, Mr. Falker	<p>This is another children's book that I grew up on and cannot express how much I adore everything written by Polacco. This book specifically is about a dyslexic girl who was always teased for being stupid and didn't understand why reading was so difficult for her and hated herself until she began working with a teacher named Mr. Falker who taught her how to read in a different way and is basically about the importance of teachers seeing your potential and putting in the work and understanding that maybe you're not stupid you're just different. It's very well written, it has a cozy and nostalgic feel to it, and the illustrations are gorgeous. I don't really have critiques of this story, I just wanted to include it in here so that you know about it and can share it with your family and friends because I think that it is grossly underappreciated.</p>
Oct	11	How To Train Your Dragon	<p>This film is incredible for disabled representation, spoilers for the first movie I guess, also this film franchise is honestly the best film franchise regardless of representation you should watch it. But anyway, what I liked about this rep is that both Hiccup and Toothless are amputees and it's never the defining moment of their characters, it's never overdramatized or aggressively pointed out, but it is still a big part of their narrative and their lives. They both get prostheses for their missing pieces, but they're not superhuman (or super dragon) level prostheses, they're just functional as they need to function. They're also not the only characters with prostheses and disabilities and, again, in the case of those characters, it's also a part of who they are and it's a part of their story but it's not defining or the only thing they ever talk about or the only part of their narrative. Some of the disabilities are used for comedic gags, but never in a negative way, it's always just an honest way that disability can be funny. I find that the representation in this film sits perfectly in the realm of natural and authentic and real and is one of a gazillion reasons I love these films.</p>
Oct	10	Glee	<p>I just... Okay so um... This show is a mess. Not just for disability, I mean like in general for literally everything? Like this is a unique case of disability rep being horrible but it's equivalent to every other form of rep in the show so you almost don't notice it, you know? Obviously there are so many weird narratives, we have the person in the wheelchair played by an able-bodied person, also somehow becoming a wheelchair user also made him socially awkward to the point of being autistic-coded somehow? So that's interesting. There's also the vague glorification of faking disability and also it happens a lot, there's a lot of "handicapable" stuff going on but it seems to be making fun of itself? I hope? The amount of inspiration porn in the two episodes I forced myself to get through was truly fascinating to me. It really does feel like the writers sat down and went "people will be so glad there are minorities in this show that they won't notice how horrifically stereotypical every single one of them is" but like for every single character they put in and somehow everyone was just cool with that? I just... I have no words for the flaming trainwreck that is Glee, most of my notes are just the words WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON in all caps and my brain has already deleted it from my memory so this is all I got for you. Please do tell me more about this fever dream of a show in the comments</p>

Oct	9	Signs of Survival	<p>This is a children's chapter book that is basically the transcription of an interview with Renee and Herta Hartman, sisters who survived the Holocaust, one deaf and one hearing. Throughout the war, Renee had to be Herta's ears and help her to communicate. The book came out fairly recently and has been picked up to be a limited series with Marlee Matlin so I wanted to read it because anything endorsed by Marlee Matlin has to be good. I found the "writing" to be a bit clunky but once I realized it was a transcription of an interview and also For Children, that didn't bother me at all. It was a quick read, was honest about the horrors of the time period but in an age-appropriate way, and I thought it was really cool to see a disability perspective of the time (particularly an authentic one) because we don't see nearly enough of that. Did I wish they talked a little more about her disability? Yeah, but also I am not going to critique someone telling the true story of their life that would be weird, also, in her brain, disability is completely normal so why would she think to talk about it a lot. Anyway shoutout to this book for existing, it's a really important story, I highly recommend it, and you should go check it out.</p>
Sep	7	White Bird	<p>So this movie is coming out next month and I wanted to read the book beforehand, it's in the universe of Wonder which we've talked about before, and... hooooo buddy</p> <p>The book itself is a Holocaust graphic novel, it is genuinely incredible. I cannot deny that. It's a good story, I think it's a nice way to talk about Holocaust stuff for kids, it does briefly touch on how disabled people were also targeted by the Nazis, and on the surface the disabled character is unoffensive. Like it's fine. Looking at the character through an experienced media analysis lens, however, I have some serious serious issues. Cause you can easily find almost every cliché in the book. You have the unoffensive disabled character with no personality other than being "generic kind human who sacrifices everything for the able-bodied one", he was a love interest which was really exciting for me until I realized that no, we can't have the able-bodied girl end up with the disabled boy so he must be gotten rid of. Which they did by killing him off. And when he was killed off he had a Forrest Gump moment where he suddenly dropped his crutches and ran as if, in death, he was finally made whole again. Which I obviously thoroughly hate. And you could argue that his death is important in the sense that it shows no one is safe from harm in the Holocaust and that everyone got taken from people, but I also think that this message could've been told in a way that didn't fulfill the literal oldest disability stereotype. Let's not do that please. Also I should mention that, while both Jewish people and disabled people were targeted in the Holocaust and it's important to talk about disabled people during that time cause it's not talked about nearly enough, tying the oppression of Jewish people to that of disabled people is like saying that black people inherently understand transphobia. They're different kinds of oppression and therefore not really comparable. So with all of that being said, inspiration porn and disabled representation is typically worse in Hollywood than it is in books so I have approximately zero hope for this film, and RJ Palacio you are an excellent writer. You are. But please stop writing disabled characters without doing the most basic research into the issues with various disability narratives. And that goes for all other writers too. I'm working on a guide for you all to make that easier so stay tuned for that, but also this is the equivalent of writing a story where the girl becomes hot when she takes off her glasses. It's not hard to not do that, please stop, sincerely, disabled people.</p>
Sep	6	Finding Dory	<p>I know, I know, we've talked about Dory before. But Dory's memory loss in Finding Nemo is incredible for disability rep, and the entirety of Finding Dory is an absolute trainwreck for disability rep. So thank you for</p>

			<p>that, Disney. If you're thinking "but they had so many disabled characters, how could it be bad?" Let's talk about the ending of this film. You know, the one where all the disabled fish and whales just believe they can do it so suddenly they can and don't have disabilities anymore. Cause if you're disabled you should just try harder to not be disabled. Cause obviously that's a narrative people don't see enough and doesn't cause immense harm to people because it's so pervasive that people will tell disabled people it's their fault that they're disabled because it's just a result of their laziness. You know, just positive disability representation over here. The other theme that made me angry was the very clear vibes of "we take all the disabled fish out of the world because they can't do it on their own and so they need to be cared for always" which on the surface isn't terrible because that is how conservation centers work? But they portray it in a way that makes it very clear that these disabled creatures cannot be trusted to be autonomous because they're just poor little things that don't know how to do anything for themselves and need us to shelter them from the harsh reality of the wider world. Which is very institutional. But also don't worry because actually if you tried harder you wouldn't be disabled anymore and then you'd be allowed into the world because now you're not broken! Seriously Disney, who did this. Who approved this. Who thought this was fine. THIS IS WHY YOU SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE WRITING ROOMS aH</p>
Aug	6	Sex Education (Isaac)	<p>This was a rewatch because I last watched this show just pre and during the onset of my memory loss, wasn't as emotionally destroyed as I expected revisiting these characters so cheers for that, but I seem to remember that Isaac was just a straight up menace and it really bothered me because the trope of disabled villains whose villainy stems from their anger at being disabled and they also get away with things because people pity them, but based on my recent watch, he's just a multifaceted guy. He can be kinda rude, he can be kinda stubborn, he does point out accessibility issues but not in a mean way, and it doesn't really feel like his rudeness is anywhere related to his disability. It feels a lot more like he's just had a rough life aside from being disabled and it's hardened him up a little bit. He's seen as desirable and not the object of pity throughout the show which I obviously loved, and he had a life, he got out and did things. Gosh all of these things are such low bars to cross. But they did! Speaking of low bars, the actor is disabled in real life. But anyway, overall I liked it as disability rep in the sense that his disability had nothing to do with anything really. You could've swapped his character out for an able-bodied one and his story and narrative and every piece about him would be exactly the same. And that's honestly what we need so much more of and simply never get. This show is full of a lot of those things. It's so so good.</p>
July	5	Deaf U	<p>UGH what a show this was incredible. It's executive produced by Nyle DiMarco and 50% of the behind the scenes peeps are Deaf so I'm not surprised that I loved it so much. It's a docu-series following a few Deaf students at Gallaudet University and it shows the messiness of their relationships, the messiness of just being a young adult, there's queerness and dating and they laugh and joke about inaccessibility and discussions of identity that are wider than just disability, including race and queerness in the discussion as well. There were some frustrations that there were no black women in the cast, but the team said it was hard to find students who were comfortable being filmed and while they'd love to have black women in the future, they don't want to force anyone into doing it just to check a diversity box which I respect. I also really liked how they didn't try to paint the Deaf community as a perfect rosy inclusive place - like any other small minority community, the Deaf community can be really really toxic and people try to hide that to make it more palatable to abled audiences and I really liked how they didn't do that. And this is going to</p>

			<p>sound weird but it brought me so much joy to see the parents of these kids actually parenting them!! I worked at a Deaf school for a very very short time in my life and the amount of parents that let their kids do whatever because they were like “yeah but they’re disabled” and therefore the kids were super rude and entitled was the majority so it made me happy to not see that here. My one critique would be that they put music over the signed interviews, presumably to keep the flow and I think they did achieve that, but I really think hearing people need to get more comfortable with what signed conversations sound like cause it makes people feel really weird for some reason. Also music plus reading the signs was too much sensory input for my silly brain to take in at once. But anyway, this show is a huge deal and I’m so excited that it’s super mainstream!</p>
Jun	4	Speechless	<p>In case you haven’t seen this show, what are you doing go watch all of it right now it’s amazing, it’s a comedy about a wildly dysfunctional family, and one of the kids has cerebral palsy and is non speaking so he uses an AAC board and a laser on his glasses to point to the words and he’s actually played by an actor with CP which is a very low bar to cross but it does so cheers for that. Anyway dysfunctional family, kid with CP, the mom is aggressively an activist for her son to be treated like a human being but she does it in a way that is so over the top it’s hilarious and I love it, and honestly this is the kind of disability comedy the world needs. Like everything that happens is very realistic and would happen but then they pump it up to like 10 times what it would normally look like so it’s almost farcical and I’m so here for it. The entire town is like OH MY GOODNESS DISABLED PERSON LETS DO EVERYTHING FOR YOU YOU’RE SO INSPIRING and they give him a one-on-one aide who is the actual worst so he gets rid of her and chooses a different person because he thinks that person is cool and he acts like a regular teenage boy and I really just keep gushing about this and should probably tone it down a little bit because I will accidentally spoil the entire plot for you, but for real, it’s incredible. Or maybe after everything else I reviewed this month my bar is low? Anyway head to Hulu, go watch the show - heads up that the first episode is kind of a lot a lot but it’s toned down for the rest of the episodes, anddddd let me know what you think!</p>
Jun	3	Wonder	<p>To begin with, I loved this book growing up. I read it at least four or five times, I have the sequel, I thought the writing of the same stories from different points of view was really cool, and the writing is incredible. And the content, at least for me back then, was awesome and very relatable - Auggie has Treacher Collins which I don’t have, but the experience of being the disabled kid that stuck out and wanted to just disappear sometimes was something I really related to. When the film came out, I was struck by how odd it was that they decided to have a conventionally attractive child in prosthetics play the character rather than, you know, giving the opportunity to an actual disabled kid, but I loved the movie too. Now as an adult who knows things about disability and now has words to put to my own experiences, again the storytelling is great, but the actual content really really bothers me. Obviously the crippling up is an issue (though he’s an actual child so let’s fault the casting director please) but the levels of inspiration porn in this story are truly stunning. Like Auggie gets an award? For existing? Also, when comparing the book to the movie, they took so much of his actual disability out of the film, to the point where he just looked different and that was kinda it. Rewatching the movie I was just struck over and over again by how much the “burden” narrative was pushed through the whole film and I realized how much of that I internalized as a kid and how much I just stopped talking about my struggles because of this story. And like, yeah, I felt seen? But I also felt really disgusting and self-loathing the whole time. In summary... ew</p>

May	2	Crip Camp	<p>Not sure why it took me so long to finally get around to watching this documentary, but oh my goodness is it stunning. I talked about this in my disability rights timeline video, but basically this documentary follows a group of disabled people who went to Camp Jened in the 50s and 60s, a summer camp for disabled people that ended up being the birth of the disabled civil rights movement because such a huge community of disabled people was created and they all began to understand each other's experiences and realize that we all deserve better than how we've been treated in the past. So by the time they were adults, they started to become advocates for disability rights and ultimately are the reason we have the Americans with Disabilities Act. The film really shows the personalities of everyone and the authentic silliness and messiness of the disabled community. A lot of media about us, even documentaries, kinda sanitizes disability to make it more "digestible" to a wider audience and this film felt like it didn't do that - these people had dating lives, had sex lives, were honest about what they could and couldn't do and supported each other with various things, they had group conversations and sometimes they couldn't understand other people and instead of pretending to do so and moving on they took the time to figure it out, and it was kinda the first media I've seen that truly fully represents the disability community. It is on Netflix and I simply cannot recommend it enough.</p>
May	1	Special	<p>I will be honest that I've only seen a few episodes of this show because a lot of it is relationship stuff and I have a hard time with that kind of content, but I really enjoyed how it broached the topic of having an invisible disability and trying to hide it so that people will like you and the fear of being found out but also the level of relief when someone does notice. I find that narrative to be pretty rare in disabled media. Though that's likely because disabled people don't usually make disabled media. Also it is Very Queer which is always a plus in my book, the main character who has cerebral palsy is played by someone who actually has cerebral palsy, he also created the show, and the whole thing is very short and sweet and easily digestible. Also hilarious. It's really really funny and relatable as a fellow young person with a mostly invisible disability trying to learn to exist in the world. I don't really have any critiques for the show cause I really liked it, and if you want to watch it and let me know what you think, it's streaming on Netflix!</p>