

Welcome to ‘Newt’s World’

Teacher’s Book Offers a Lesson in Understanding

by Nathan Spicer

As a self-proclaimed “nerd” growing up, Susan Womble recognizes the significance of understanding and accepting the differences in others.

“I was always considered a ‘smart kid,’ and I would kind of try to hide that because I wanted to be accepted,” she says. But the exceptional-education teacher at Godby High School has come to realize that “it’s OK to have some things that are different about you. It’s important to accept that about yourself and others.”

Which is why she wrote her book, “Newt’s World: Beginnings,” and created the character Isaac Newton “Newt” Willis: a smart, wheelchair-bound 12-year-old with a passion for video games and invention. As for why she created a character with a disability, “I feel it’s important to have a character that isn’t perfect because none of us is perfect,” Womble says.

Newt begins the story immersed in the virtual world of his own video game program. After his parents enroll him in a charter school where he meets his two best friends, Caleb and Marcus, he shares his program with them. Problem is, an international espionage ring discovers it.

The story focuses more, however, on relationships between the students, especially Newt’s friendships and the hardships created by a bully named Mike Barrett.

“It’s all about acceptance and tolerance of people that are different than you,” Womble says. “Everyone is not perfect and is not a Superman.”

Although it has a universal appeal, Womble specifically wrote the book to interest boys at about the fourth-grade level.

“I didn’t feel like there was enough fiction for boys,” she says. “I have mostly boys in my class, and I have a hard time getting them interested in books to read.”

A 32-year veteran of the classroom and nationally certified in exceptional student education, Womble wrote “Newt’s World” with teachability in mind. There are lesson ideas in the back of the book, and she is “working out all the kinks” on a companion workbook after using the book as a teaching tool in her own classroom.

She has written the second installment of Newt’s story. The first book’s characters remain, but the new story is “longer – and I added some girls into the mix,” Womble says.

As an added attraction, the book is set in Tallahassee. Readers may recognize some of the landmarks mentioned, including the Museum of Florida History.

“Newt’s World” is priced at \$13.95 and is available on amazon.com or bn.com.