

# Book Guides for AAC Awareness Month

## PURPOSE

To raise awareness about Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and promote inclusion and acceptance of all forms of communication through reading and reflection. Each book included in the guide features diverse characters who communicate using AAC.

## AAC AWARENESS MONTH

International AAC Awareness Month is celebrated around the world each October. The goal is to raise awareness of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and to inform the public about the many different ways in which people communicate.

ISAAC Canada and the nation would love to hear how you participated in this year's virtual festivities. Please share your stories and photos by sending them to [admin@canada.isaac-online.org](mailto:admin@canada.isaac-online.org) with the subject line "AAC Awareness 2024".

## WHAT ARE ISAAC AND ISAAC CANADA?

The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) was founded in 1983 by a group of therapists, teachers, people using AAC, parents, engineers and other professionals from many countries. ISAAC Canada is one of many national chapters of ISAAC. It aims to make people aware of the potential that AAC has to change the lives of individuals around the world who are unable to speak, and to find new approaches and technologies to help people communicate in different ways.

## WHAT IS BREAKING THE ICE?

Breaking the ICE (BTI) Canada hosts consumer-focused virtual and in-person events for people who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). The goal is to provide youth and adults who use AAC with opportunities to come together and learn from each other, create meaningful relationships in the community, and have a platform to share ideas and feelings.

# KEY LEARNING POINTS

## 1. What is AAC?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to the various ways individuals who cannot speak may communicate their ideas. Some individuals may be non-speaking from birth due to disabilities such as cerebral palsy. Others may become non-speaking later in life due to other disabilities like strokes or brain injuries from car accidents.

2. Individuals may use various combinations of alternate methods of communication such as displays with pictures, alphabet or words, gestures, sign language, computers, and electronic talking devices.
3. Even if individuals have complex communication needs, they can participate actively in life through the use of AAC tools and strategies. Children go to school and participate. Adults do meaningful work. They make their own choices. AAC allows them to express their wishes and feelings and control their lives. AAC gives individuals opportunities, which many of us take for granted: social interaction, intimate expression, and communicating effectively in an emergency.
4. For more detailed information, please visit the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's page on Augmentative and Alternative Communication](#).

# MYTHS ABOUT AAC

Debunking the Myths of AAC by Chelsea Hagen: [ISAAC – AAC Awareness Month 2023](#)

Chelsea Hagen, an AAC communicator, is a writer and student at the University of Athabasca. She enjoys reading, cooking, crafting, and has aspirations of becoming a famous author. Chelsea is also a board member for ISAAC Canada and ISAAC International, advocating for AAC communicators. Chelsea addresses ten myths about AAC communicators:

1. Not all AAC communicators are the same. They have individual personalities and interests.
2. AAC communicators can learn to read and spell. Chelsea shares her own journey of improving her reading skills and emphasizes that literacy is achievable.
3. Secondary education is possible for AAC communicators. Online education has been a game-changer, allowing her to study at her own pace.
4. Eye gaze isn't for everyone. Chelsea prefers using two switches for communication.
5. Using an AAC device doesn't prevent speech development. It supports communication and self-expression.
6. AAC communicators are sociable. Conversations just require more time for them to respond.
7. AAC communicators are intelligent. Nonverbal does not mean unintelligent.
8. 'Adult language' is necessary. As adults, AAC communicators should have the same language options as everyone else.
9. AAC communicators aren't daydreamers. They need time to process and respond, not because they're distracted.
10. Robot voices aren't ideal. AAC communicators desire more natural-sounding voices that represent their individuality.

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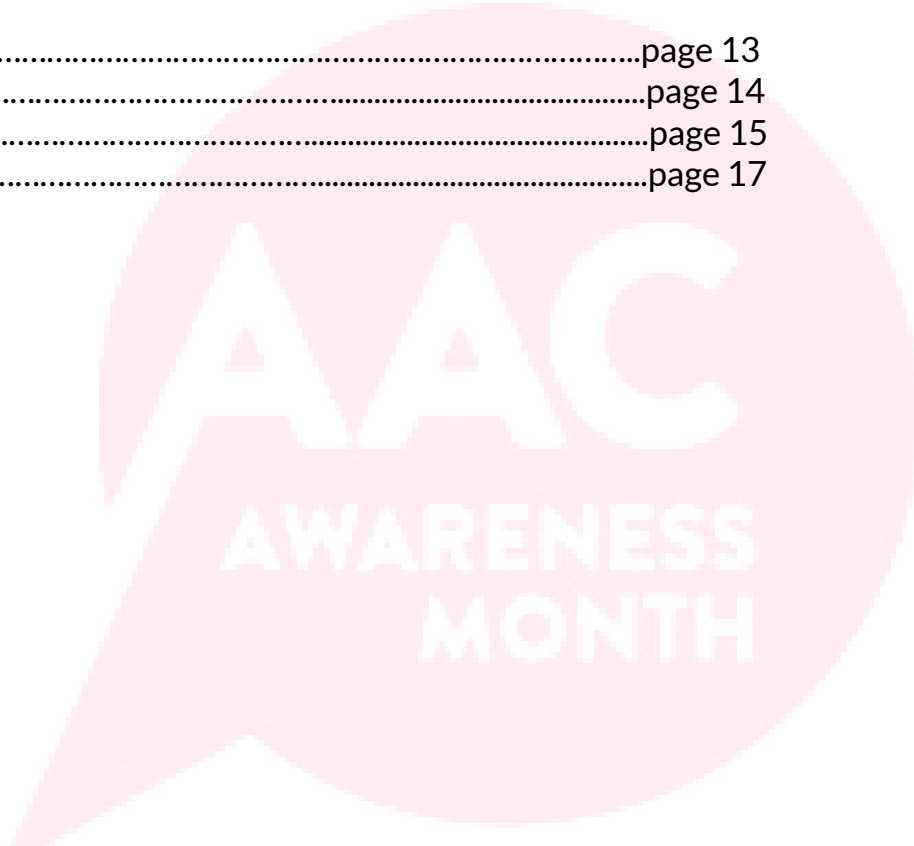
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# I Talk in Different Ways



**Author:** Amanda Hartmann

**Year:** 2022

**Age Group:** 0-5 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

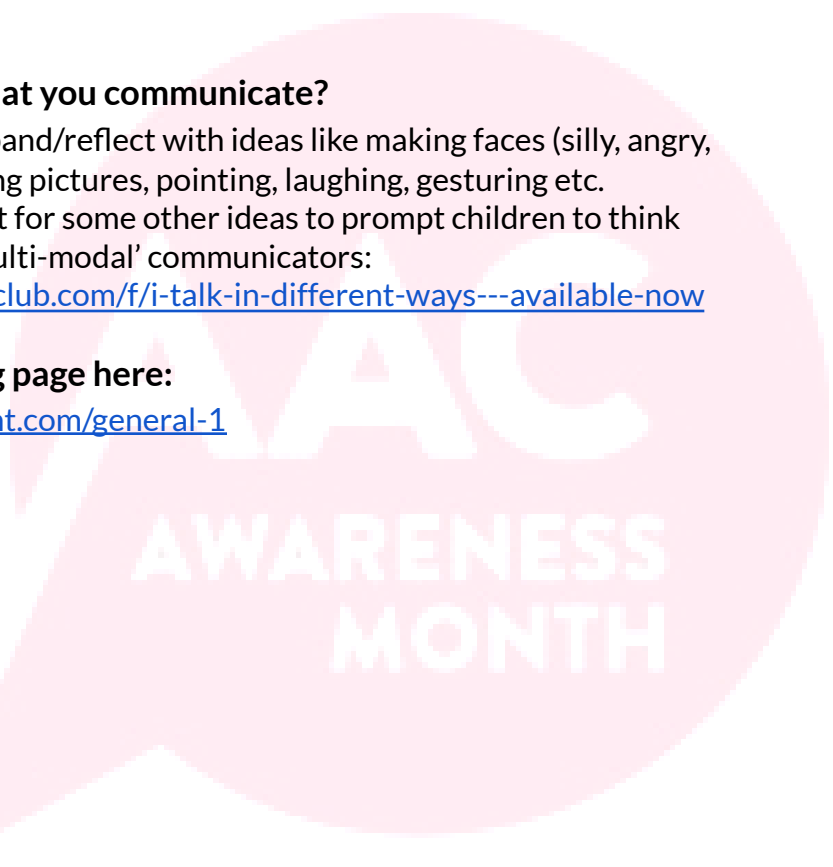
### 1. What are different ways that you communicate?

- Prompt children to expand/reflect with ideas like making faces (silly, angry, sad etc.), crying, drawing pictures, pointing, laughing, gesturing etc.
- Take a look at this chart for some other ideas to prompt children to think about how they are 'multi-modal' communicators:

<https://aacenthusiastsclub.com/f/i-talk-in-different-ways---available-now>

### 2. Find a fun 'talker' colouring page here:

<https://www.eddietheelephant.com/general-1>



# AAC Rhyme Time



**Author:** Amanda Hartmann

**Year:** 2021

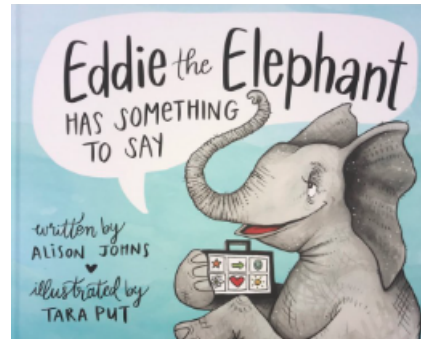
**Age Group:** 0-5 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. **Ask children “what do you see?” on each page**
  - Point out rhyming words to them; say the words out loud so they can hear them rhyme
2. **Have children use gestures to try and show you what they see on the page (kind of like charades)**
  - They might pretend to hold a carrot and chew it, or pretend to be sailing on a boat, or barking like a dog, etc.
  - Point out how they can express themselves through movements and gestures, even without talking!
3. **Find a fun ‘talker’ colouring page here:**  
<https://www.eddietheelephant.com/general-1>

For additional reading by the same author, check out [AAC Alphabet Adventures](#).

# Eddie the Elephant has Something to Say



**Author:** Alison Jones

**Year:** 2020

**Age Group:** 6-9 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

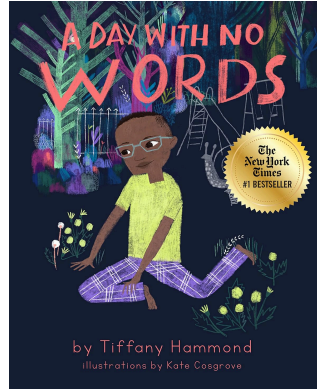
1. How would you feel if you weren't able to communicate by speaking?
2. Besides speaking, what are some other ways that you communicate?
  - Prompt children to expand/reflect with ideas like making faces (silly, angry, sad etc.), crying, drawing pictures, pointing, laughing, gesturing, writing etc.
3. If you were not able to talk, what are some creative ways that you could share your ideas?
4. If you could design your own communication device, what words would you want to include?
5. As you read through the story, look at the thought bubbles and read the italicized text that shares Eddie's thoughts and ideas. Sometimes Eddie and his friends are thinking about different things, and this leads to misunderstandings. Think of a time when you and a friend had different ideas or were thinking about different things. How did that make you feel? What did you do to solve the problem?
6. What are some clues that help you make a guess about what someone else is thinking about?
7. What can we do to be more inclusive of people who communicate in different ways?

**Find some fun themed colouring pages here:**

<https://www.eddietheelephant.com/general-1>

- Encourage children to complete the 'Design Your Own Talker' page. Have them think about what things are important to them and what they would want to include in their 'talker'

# A Day with No Words



**Author:** Tiffany Hammond      **Year:** 2023      **Age Group:** 6-9 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

### Before Reading:

- Cover and Title Prediction: What do you think the story is about based on the cover and title? Who do you think Aidan is, and what might he want to say?
- Personal Connection: Have you ever struggled to say something? How did it feel?

### During Reading:

- Understanding Challenges: How does Aidan feel when he can't speak like his friends? Why is it hard for him to communicate?
- Introduction to AAC: What is AAC, and how does it help Aidan? Can you find the moment in the story when Aidan starts using AAC? How does it change things for him?
- Emotional Journey: How does Aidan feel before and after using AAC? How do his friends react when they understand him?

### After Reading:

- Understanding AAC and Communication: Why is it important for everyone to have a way to communicate? How can we help friends who have difficulty speaking?
- Empathy and Inclusion: How would you feel if you were in Aidan's place? What can we do to ensure everyone has a voice, like Aidan?
- Applying the Lesson: Have you ever used a tool or asked for help? How did it make things easier? What would you do if you met someone who couldn't speak but wanted to communicate?
- Future Actions: How can we ensure everyone feels included, even if they communicate differently? What could Aidan teach his friends about patience and understanding?

Check out this [online activity](#) for further learning!

# How Katie Got a Voice (and a cool new nickname)



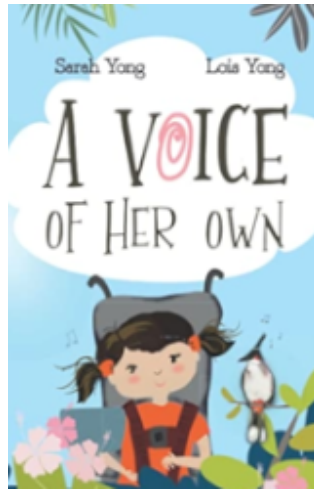
**Author:** Patricia L. Mervine    **Year:** 2012    **Age Group:** 6-9 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. **What are different ways that you communicate?**
  - Prompt children to expand/reflect with ideas like making faces (silly, angry, sad etc.), crying, drawing pictures, pointing, laughing, gesturing etc.
2. **What would you want your nickname to be?**
  - Prompt children to think about what they love, what makes them unique
3. **How do you think Katie felt *before* she got her 'talker' (augmentative communication device)?**
  - Prompt children to think about what feelings might come up when you have trouble expressing yourself (anger, loneliness, frustration, etc.)
4. **How do you think Katie felt *after* she got her 'talker'?**
  - Prompt children to think on themes of inclusion, acceptance, importance of being able to communicate
5. **Find a fun 'talker' colouring page here:**  
<https://www.eddietheelephant.com/general-1>



# A Voice of Her Own



**Author:** Sarah Yong & Lois Yong    **Year:** 2021    **Age Group:** 10-14 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. In what ways do you think Mei and Kakoo's experiences are similar? In what ways are they different?
2. What are the main themes that come out in this story?
3. What are some challenges that Mei experiences with her communication? How does having the device help her overcome these challenges?
4. Why is it important for everyone to have a way to communicate? How can we help ensure everyone feels comfortable communicating in their own unique way?
5. Have a discussion about what it means to be inclusive. Discuss how Mei's story might change the perceptions (and myths) about communication and disability?

# The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family



**Author:** Sarah Kapit

**Year:** 2021

**Age Group:** 10-14 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. Why did Lara not want Caroline to be involved in the detective agency?
2. Do you think there are any challenges or misunderstandings about using AAC that are highlighted in the book? How do the characters overcome these challenges?
3. Reflect on the importance of having diverse characters with diverse experiences in stories. In what ways would reading about different people's experiences be beneficial to support inclusivity and acceptance?
4. Often characters with disabilities are stereotypically portrayed. How do you think the author avoided this, to ensure the characters were fully formed and believable?

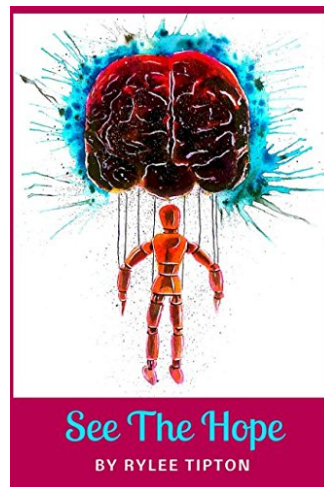
### Exploring AAC:

1. What is AAC, and how does it help Caroline communicate?
2. How does the use of AAC change her life and the way she interacts with others?
3. What are some of the different ways people can use AAC to communicate?

### Additional Resources

- Check out this [Q&A with the author](#) of the book!

# See the Hope



**Author:** Rylee Tipton

**Year:** 2017

**Age-Group:** 10-14 years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

### General Understanding:

1. What is the main message of the book?
  - How does the author convey hope throughout the story?
2. What challenges does the main character face?
  - How do these challenges affect them emotionally and mentally?

### Themes and Emotions:

3. What does "hope" mean to you after reading this book?
  - How does the author show hope in difficult situations?
4. What are some ways the characters in the book found hope or positivity in their situations?
  - How can you apply this to your own life?
5. How do the relationships in the story contribute to the sense of hope?
  - Can you think of someone in your life who has given you hope?

### Character Analysis:

6. How do the characters change from the beginning to the end of the book?
  - What causes this growth or shift in their perspective?

### Critical Thinking:

7. Why do you think the author chose the title *See the Hope*?
  - What are some moments in the book where "seeing" hope is a central idea?
8. How does the book inspire you to find hope in difficult situations?
9. What strategies or lessons did you take away from the characters' experiences?

### Exploring AAC:

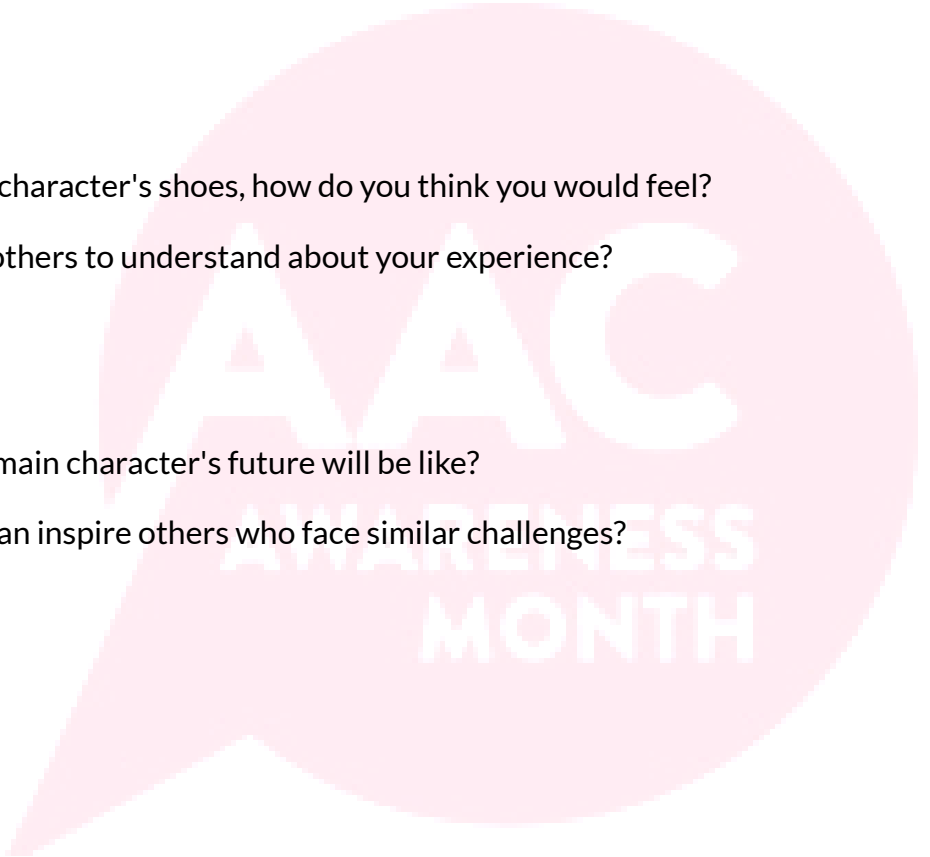
- What is AAC, and how does it help the main character communicate?
- How does the use of AAC change her life and the way she interacts with others?
- What are some of the different ways people can use AAC to communicate?

### Personal Reflection:

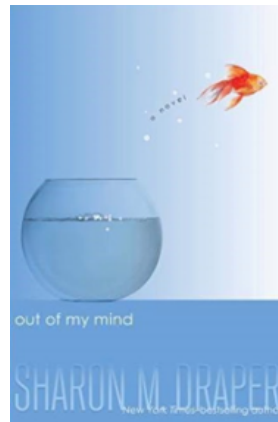
- If you were in the main character's shoes, how do you think you would feel?
- What would you want others to understand about your experience?

### Future Aspirations:

- What do you think the main character's future will be like?
- How do you think she can inspire others who face similar challenges?



# Out of My Mind



**Author:** Sharon M. Draper

**Year:** 2010

**Age Group:** 15+ years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. The novel opens with a discussion of the power of words and language. How does this help capture the reader's attention? What predictions/assumptions did you make about the narrator of the story?
2. Who are your favourite secondary characters in this story and why? In what ways do they positively and/or negatively interact with the main character?
3. What is significant about the story of Ollie the fish? How does Ollie's life mirror Melody's?
4. How does the inclusion program change Melody's school experience? Describe both positive and negative results of the program.
5. This book gives the impression that only 'smart' people can use AAC. How do you feel about that?
6. How might this book perpetuate harmful stereotypes about people with disabilities, and people who communicate with AAC?

# I'll Do It Myself



**Author:** Glenda Watson Hyatt    **Year:** 2013    **Age Group:** 15+ years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. Why do you think the author gave the book the title “I’ll Do It Myself?” What is empowering about that title/message?
2. Glenda’s family was very supportive and encouraging. How do you think her relationship with her family may have impacted her life?
3. What do you think motivated the author to write this autobiography?
4. What are the central themes of this book? How does the author explore these themes through their experiences and reflections?
5. How does the historical and cultural context influence the author’s experiences and narrative?
6. Were there any passages or quotes that stood out to you? Why did they resonate with you and how do they reflect the author’s character?

# The Things We Cannot Say



**Author:** Kelly Rimmer

**Year:** 2019

**Age Group:** 15+ years

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

### AAC and Communication:

1. How does Eddie's use of AAC (communication boards, technology) affect the way his family communicates with him?
  - How does it shape Alice's understanding of language and communication?
2. What role does AAC play in helping Alice connect with Eddie on a deeper level?
  - How do the struggles with communication between Alice and Eddie mirror the broader theme of "things we cannot say" throughout the novel?
3. How does the use of AAC affect the dynamic between Alice and her husband, Wade?
  - What challenges do they face as they try to communicate with Eddie, and how do they overcome them?
4. In what ways does Eddie's use of AAC give him a voice in the story, despite being non-verbal?
  - How does technology empower him and change how others perceive him?

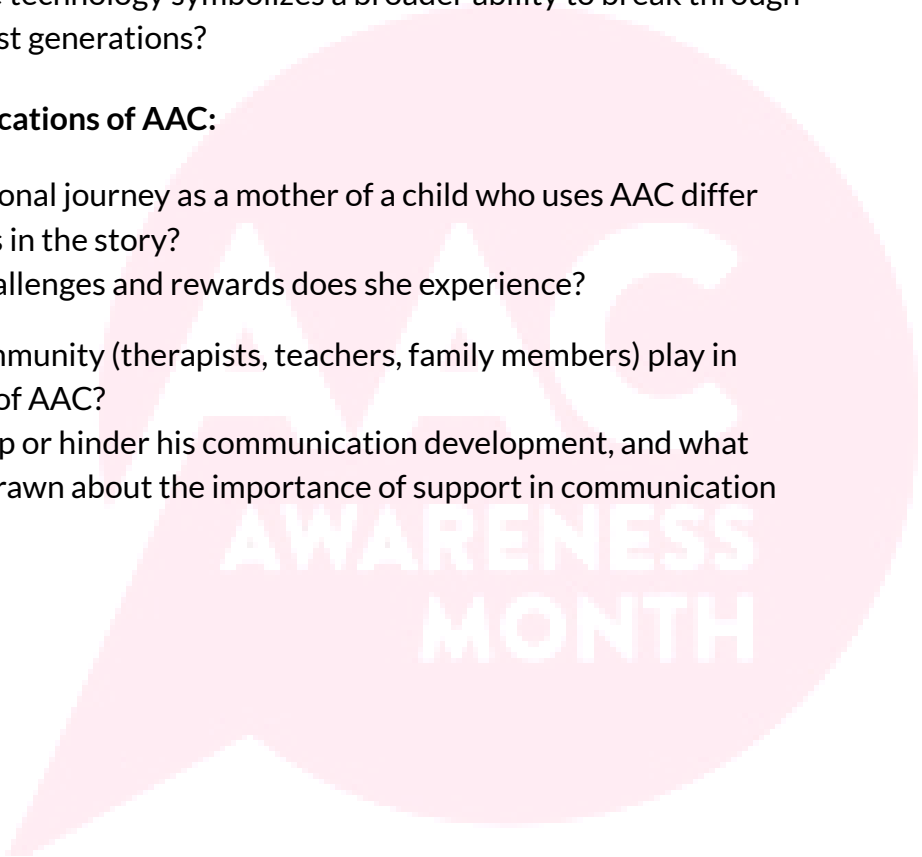
5. What do you think the author is trying to convey about the importance of alternative communication methods through Eddie's character?
  - How does this reflect the broader theme of finding ways to express ourselves when words fail us?

### **Comparison to Other Communication Barriers:**

6. How does Eddie's use of AAC parallel the communication challenges faced by other characters in the story, especially Alina during WWII?
  - Are there moments when Alina or other characters face situations where they "cannot say" what they want or need to?
7. How does Alice's experience with Eddie and AAC shape her understanding of silence and the unspoken words of her grandmother, Alina?
  - In what ways does the lack of verbal communication in both time periods affect relationships?
8. How does the presence of AAC in Alice's life influence her journey to uncover her family's secrets?
  - Do you think the technology symbolizes a broader ability to break through the silence of past generations?

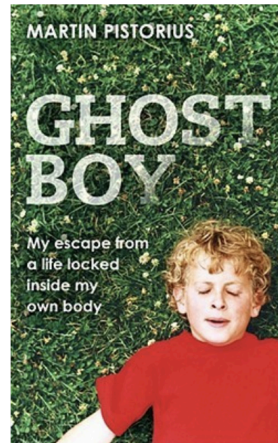
### **Emotional and Practical Implications of AAC:**

9. How does Alice's emotional journey as a mother of a child who uses AAC differ from the other mothers in the story?
  - What unique challenges and rewards does she experience?
10. What role does the community (therapists, teachers, family members) play in supporting Eddie's use of AAC?
  - How do they help or hinder his communication development, and what lessons can be drawn about the importance of support in communication needs?





# Ghost Boy



**Author:** Martin Pistorius

**Year:** 2013

**Age Group:** 15+ years

**\*Content Warning:** This book deals with difficult topics like abuse. Please read with care.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES

1. What do you think about the various caretakers in the book? Why do you think they acted the way that they did?
2. Multiple people in this memoir show amazing faith in Martin's abilities. Who do you think had the greatest influence on Martin's rehabilitation?
3. What attracted Joanna to Martin and why do you think she pursued the relationship?
4. What amazed you most about Martin's story?
5. Marin uses different forms of AAC to communicate (technology and non-technology) throughout the book. Why do you think he chose to use different modes of communication in different environments?