

My Learning Disability in Five Vignettes

Alan Rambeau

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Read about *vignette* in the caption below the picture on the right. Share a *vignette* from your school days that evokes a strong feeling.
2. *IEP* stands for Individualized Education Program; *ADHD* stands for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. To learn more about IEP and ADHD, read the boxes on pp. 10-11. *JROTC* stands for Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps.
3. Read about dyslexia in the box on p. 7.
4. Do you know anyone with ADHD and/or dyslexia? What are their gifts and challenges?

Pizza

Mr. Griffin was a great guy. He was my tutor in the fourth grade. That's when they first figured out that I needed an *IEP*. He bought me Domino's pizza every day. He helped me with my math. They did tests on me, and they figured out that I had *ADHD*. But they kept missing my dyslexia.



A vignette is like a snapshot of a moment in your life. In this snapshot, a teacher is giving a boy a pizza. What feelings might a moment like this evoke?

What Is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. The National Institute of Mental Health defines it as a developmental disorder that includes one or more of the following symptoms:

- difficulty paying attention, keeping on task, or staying organized
- moving around a lot, feeling restless, or talking excessively
- being impulsive, such as interrupting or having trouble waiting one's turn

Many people with ADHD think of it less as a disorder and more as a form of diversity. They point to the positive traits related to ADHD, such as having more energy and spontaneity, and being creative, curious, insightful, and resilient.



Sources: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/>; and "Silver Linings of ADHD": <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10551976/>



What Is an IEP?

According to *Education Week*, “An Individualized Education Program, or IEP, is a program tailored to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. The program is written in collaboration between a child’s school district, their parent or guardian, and sometimes the student. The document outlines the special educational needs based on the student’s identified disability. It outlines educational goals, and any specialist services they may need to meet those goals.”

Source: <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/what-is-an-iep-individualized-education-programs-explained/2023/07>

Note: An IEP is different from a 504 Plan. See the box on p. 31 for more information on 504 Plans.

Music

As a kid, I learned that listening to music on my headphones helped me focus. But the teachers never let me use the headphones. They thought it was distracting because my head was bobbing up and down to the music.

Naps

My algebra teacher noticed that I always fell asleep in his class. I told them the reason why: I was in *JROTC*, and it *drained my battery*. So, he and I came to an agreement. If I got my work done, he would allow me to put my head down on my desk and go to sleep. There’s a twist though. I never really understood algebra. But I still passed the class.

Abbreviations

In English class, I was bad at spelling, so I used abbreviations of words. I trained the computers and my phone to understand my abbreviations. They could auto-correct them to fix the spelling. In this way, people could read my writing better.

Seeing and Doing

I learn in a different way than other students who have no disability with their brain. Visual and hands-on learning are better for me. I don’t understand verbal directions. I have to be doing it at the same time I am hearing about it.

Thank you for reading this. I hope it will help you if you have similar disabilities.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What do these *vignettes* tell you about the author’s experience with his learning disability?
2. What accommodations has Alan developed for himself? What accommodations does his teacher offer him?
3. Alan uses metaphor when he says his participation in JROTC *drained his battery*. What does it mean? Try using it in your own sentence. (Read more about simile and metaphor on p. 9.)

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