



Sally Rippin, author of the Polly and Buster series, offers discussion topics with respect to *The Wayward Witch* and *the Feelings Monster* and *The Mystery of the Magic Stones*.

Learning difficulties:

Polly the witch is an undiagnosed **dyslexic** and struggles at school. This often makes her frustrated and angry but, like many dyslexics, once she discovers her own unique strengths, there is no stopping her.

The series contains complex storylines written in **accessible language** for confident younger readers or struggling older readers. Each page contains an illustration or word art to catch a reluctant reader's eye and hook them in, and the story is **fast paced** to keep children turning the pages. Potentially, this series could be considered a bridge between the Billie B. Mysteries and Harry Potter.

Emotional intelligence:

Polly's best friend, Buster, is a "feelings monster." He feels Polly's feelings and changes shape and size accordingly. This is a powerful way of describing **empathy** to young children. Many young children, especially boys, feel ashamed to show their true feelings or allow themselves to be vulnerable for fear of being teased. In this story, Polly and Buster show the reader that **kindness** and empathy are a strength, not a weakness, and something we can all practice more.

Social and historical themes:

These books have been written so they can be read on different levels. For a beginning or independent reader, they can be read as an adventure story between two unlikely friends set in a magical world. For an older child, or a child sharing the book in a classroom or with an adult, there are many interwoven **themes** that can become good discussion starters. Many of these themes are based around **acceptance** and **tolerance** and there are scenes that can be **connected to events throughout history**.

For example, when Buster knows it is his place to sit at the back of the bus, this can be a good moment to talk about racial segregation and apartheid. The scene where Polly's school friends pin badges on themselves can be linked back to when Jews in some places during the Second World War were made to wear the Star of David on their clothing to identify themselves.