

Written content for A Story of Discovery by Madeline Spicer

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A Story of Synesthetic Discovery  
Madeline Spicer

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For my mom and sister, everyone who has helped me through my own discovery, for all other synesthetes who share in this gift, and to those who have yet to discover their gift.

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“Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant?”

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synesthesia, n.

Forms: Plural synaesthesiae /-i/.

Also synesthesia.

1. Psychology

- a. A sensation in one part of the body produced by a stimulus applied to another part.
- b. Agreement of the feelings or emotions of different individuals, as a stage in the development of sympathy.
- c. Production, from a sense-impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of a sense-impression of another kind: see quot. 1903.

2. Literature

The use of metaphors in which terms relating to one kind of sense-impression are used to describe sense-impressions of other kinds; the production of synaesthetic effect in writing or an instance of this.

3. Linguistics

- a. The expression of more than one kind of sense-impression in the same word.
- b. The transfer of the meaning of a word from one kind of sensory experience to another.
- c. The relationship between speech sounds and the sensory experiences that they represent.

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Foreword

by Anne Spicer

“Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant?”  
Henry David Thoreau

When God gifted me with two amazing daughters, I naively thought that we would all see the world in somewhat the same way. I realized as Matty grew up that she was going about life in her own way. At age four I noticed that she had no interest in reading; however, she could recite a book verbatim after hearing it read to her only a few times.

Matty attended a Montessori school which afforded her the freedom to complete her school work in whatever order she wanted and in the amount of time she needed. Then when she entered seventh grade and school became more structured, her teachers noticed some deficiencies. When the teachers stated that Matty had auditory processing issues, I reached out to our support system to learn more. One of my book club friends had just completed her master’s in young adult literature, and she recommended several books for Matty to read over the summer. She felt it would be entertaining and help keep her progressing in her reading proficiency.

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One of these books was about a girl who had synesthesia, and this became the defining moment we recognized Matty’s unique gift and the cause of her struggles. After consulting with several technical books, I was left feeling lost, scared, and worried that Matty’s synesthesia was caused by a brain tumor. Thankfully, this was later confirmed to not be the case. I then turned to the internet and was able to get in touch with Carol Steen, an artist and professor from New York City.

Coincidentally, Carol had been the individual interviewed by the author of the book Matty had read that summer.

We traveled to NYC a few weeks later to meet Carol and her husband, who graciously invited us into their home. Carol pulled out a color-coded alphabet that was considered to be her unique alphabet. In other words, the colors her brain assigned to each of the letters. Matty quickly warmed up to Carol, and she began sharing how certain letters look-ed different to her than what Carol saw. I was so happy that Matty finally had someone who could see through her eyes. I was determined to do the same from then on.

Over the past eight years, Matty has been able to share some of the things she experiences with her synesthesia. Each time, I feel as though I get a glimpse into her world. Matty has turned into an intelligent, compassionate, generous, considerate, faithful, ambitious, adventurous, empathetic, sincere young woman. One of her best qualities is her ability to empathize with people she meets and to step into their shoes. I hope Matty and her story of discovering the root of her struggles as the gift of synesthesia will inspire more people to do the same.

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#### **Preface**

Welcome synesthetes and those desiring to learn more about synesthesia. I would like to invite you into this space of discovery, creativity, and colorfulness. Whether you are desiring to learn more about synesthesia, are supporting someone you know, or you are a synesthete yourself, this storybook is for you. I have created this book to give a glimpse into the world of a synesthete's brain. I wanted to share with others how helpful it was for me when I discovered I have synesthesia. This book is a way for me to share the many ways that synesthesia can affect the lives of those with this condition.

I also recognize that my story looks very different than yours might look like. Every synesthete has a different experience of synesthesia. I wish that I could represent more of the various and incredible types that fill the lives of synesthetes; however, I simply could not do so within this short book. Therefore, I have showcased several types that I have myself as a synesthete, which will hopefully provide a glimpse into the lives of all types of synesthetes.

Some synesthetes do not discover they have synesthesia. This is often due to the fact that it does not conflict with or hinder their everyday activities or because they simply did not have the means or access to discover their synesthesia. I hope this storybook will help you more deeply understand the challenges but also the gifts that synesthesia can bring. I also hope it supports those who know someone with synesthesia and provides a deeper understanding of the condition. Most importantly, I hope that it finds its way into the hands of those who need it the most—just like Carol's book did for me.

—Madeline Spicer

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And now you shall see, through my middle school eyes, a story of a synesthete discovering her colorful gift...

**Page 17**

And now you shall see, through my middle school eyes, a story of a synesthete discovering her colorful gift...

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Interesting name, but they already got all of the colors wrong, not a good start.

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Wait, the main character of the book is acting like colored letters and numbers aren't normal...MOM! What color is your 'a'?

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So, it turns out not everyone has colored letters, numbers, sounds, smells, days of the week, tastes...and, it turns out this condition has a name. My mom and I continued our research quest...

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And...we happened upon a test. Apparently, I have about nine different types of synesthesia. Who knew? Maybe more people have synes-synthe-synesthesthia. Wait, synesthesia.

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Then, we were told that synesthesia is some sort of mixing of the senses, which is why I see the colors all the time. This is where they tested my colored letters—they even timed it.

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So, I started keeping track of what I see in this special book my mom gave me.

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To share with others what I experience, I drew what the connections of the senses look like to me, such as pains, and sounds...

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...and...temperatures, more sounds, pains...

**Page 35**

...and...everyday smells, sounds...

**Page 37**

...and...tastes, smells, pains...

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...and even more...temperatures, and smells.

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In addition, I colored all of my letters! Some of the letters have multiple colors in them, so it was a little difficult to find the perfect combination.

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I also colored my numbers and characters.

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In order to understand more about synesthesia, I decided to consult some of the founders of the field. I first learned about these founders, Richard Cytowic and David Eagleman, from a woman my family and I met in 2013.

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Her name is Carol Steen. She has synesthesia as well. She and her husband are both artists living in New York City.

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She helped me and my family understand more about synesthesia, which definitely made my mom feel better.

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Over the years, I have continued **researching** about **synesthesia** and **sharing** my everyday experience with others in order to help people understand...

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...what...synesthesia is and how colorful it makes my life.

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“Could my synesthesia be the reason why I felt driven to work in certain ways?”

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“Could my synesthesia be the reason why I felt driven to work in certain ways?”

Carol Steen

Visual artist, writer, and synesthete.

Co-founder of the American Synesthesia Association.

Co-curator of Synesthesia: Art and the Mind at the McMaster Museum of Art.

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Endnote

It has been incredibly helpful for me to understand more about my own synesthesia. I hope this book was able to help you catch a glimpse into the world of a synesthete or to further your own story of synesthetic discovery. Although there is a great deal still unknown about synesthesia, there are a number of other resources for those wanting to learn more about the condition of synesthesia and synesthetes alike. You can find more resources on the following page. Thank you again for reading my story and furthering your own education about synesthesia.

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Resources

The Hidden Sense: Synesthesia in Art and Science

Cretien van Campen

Wednesday is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain of Synesthesia

Richard Cytowic and David Eagleman

Synesthesia

Richard Cytowic

The Man Who Tasted Shapes

Richard Cytowic

Synesthetic Design: Handbook for a Multi-sensory Approach

Michael Haverkamp

Synesthesia. The Fascinating World of Blended Senses

Lyndsay Leatherdale

A Mango–Shaped Space

Wendy Mass

The Frog Who Croaked Blue: Synesthesia and the Mixing of the Senses

Jamie Ward