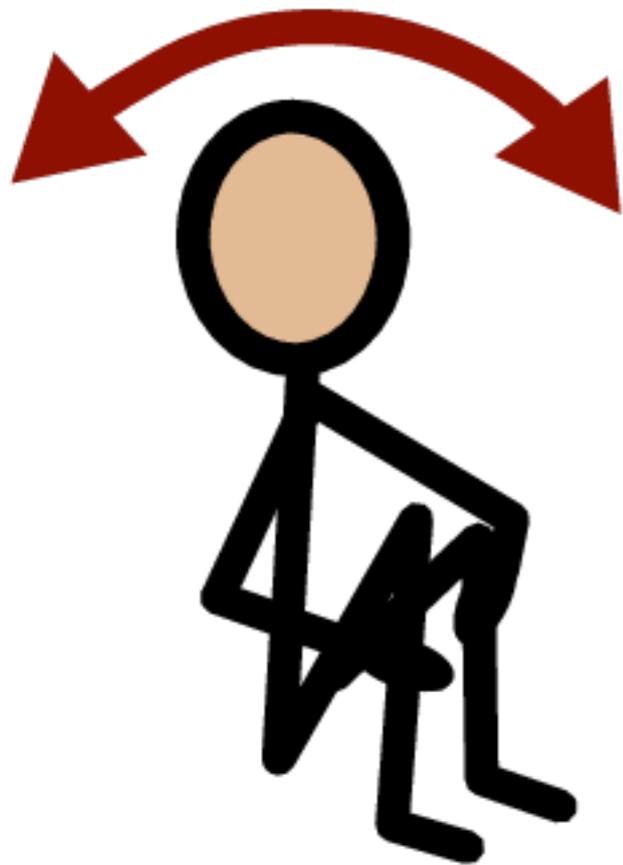


**Disability  
is not a  
dirty word**



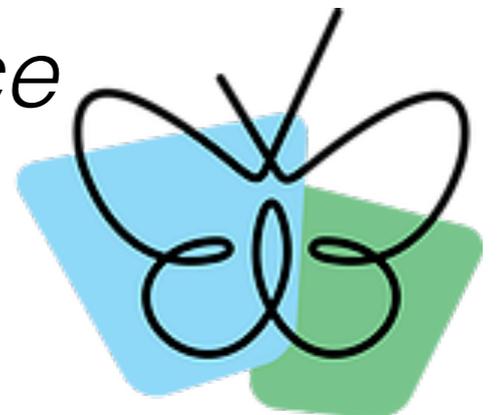
Rabbi Ruti Regan

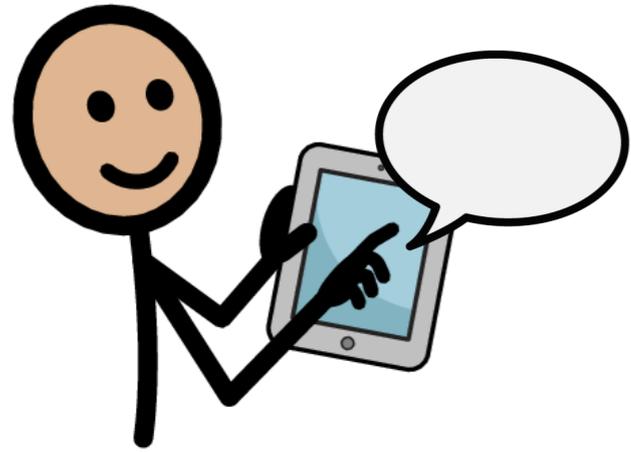
*Rabbinic Disability Scholar in Residence*

[www.matankids.org](http://www.matankids.org)

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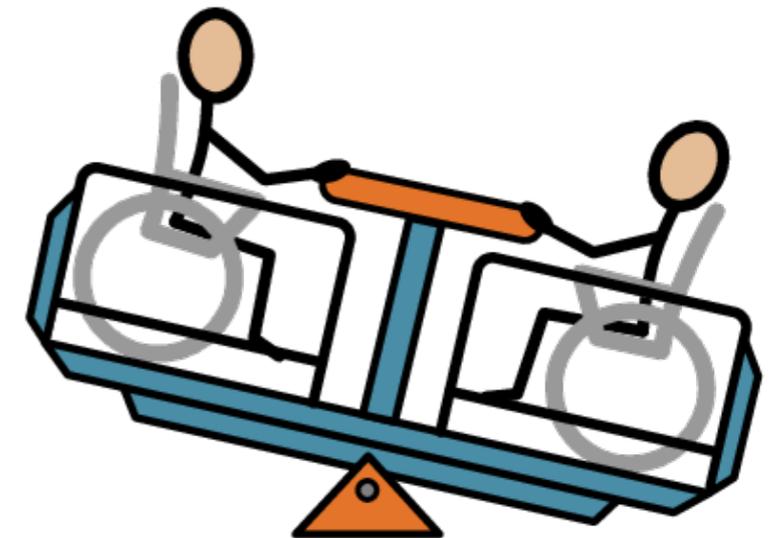
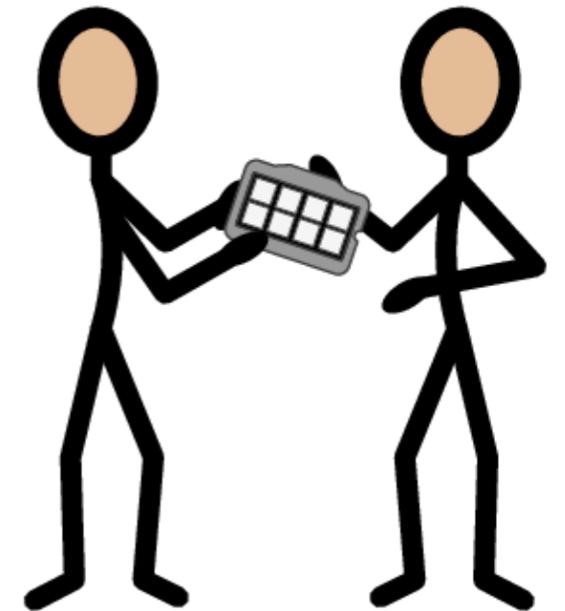
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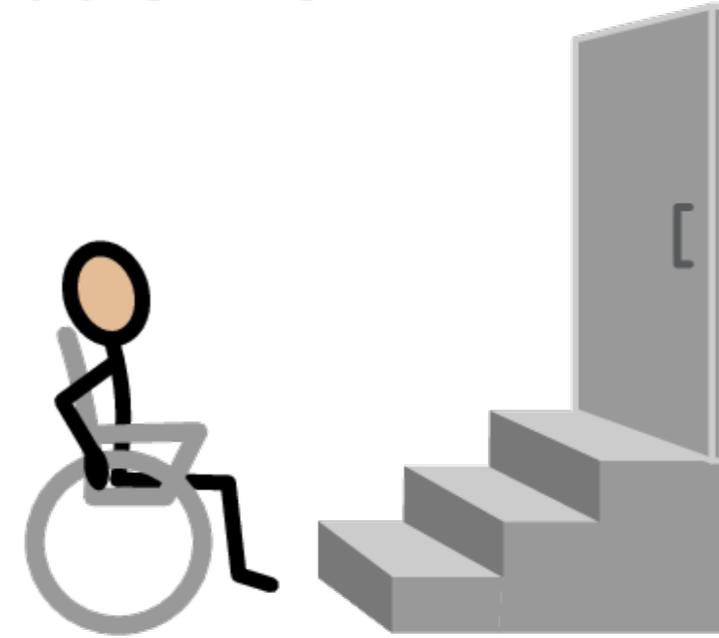
# Inclusion can't make disability irrelevant.

- Disability matters because brains and bodies are important.
- Inclusion doesn't make everyone the same — and it doesn't need to.
- When we stop trying to do impossible things, a lot of things become possible.



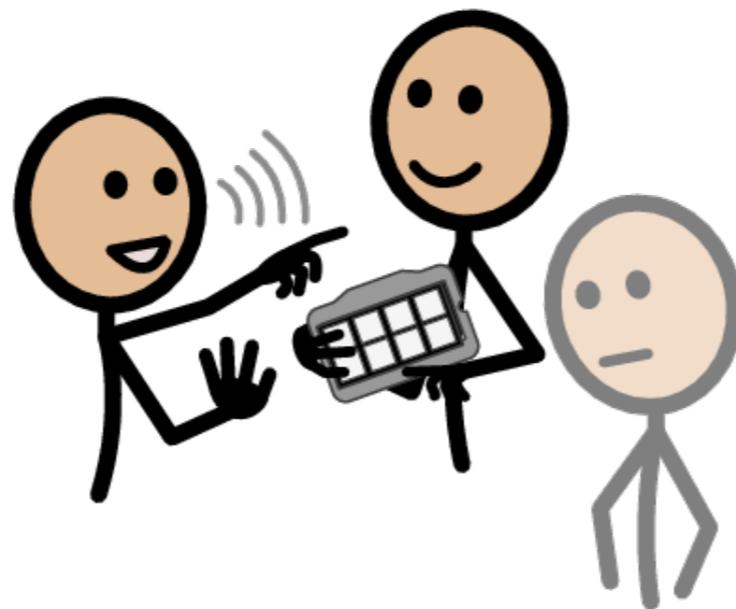
# Inclusion makes room for the fact that disability matters.

- Our education system was built with the assumption that everyone who belongs can do the same things.
- When their disabilities mattered, kids were almost always excluded.
- The fact that disability matters is not the problem.
- The problem is that we spent so many centuries choosing to exclude people.



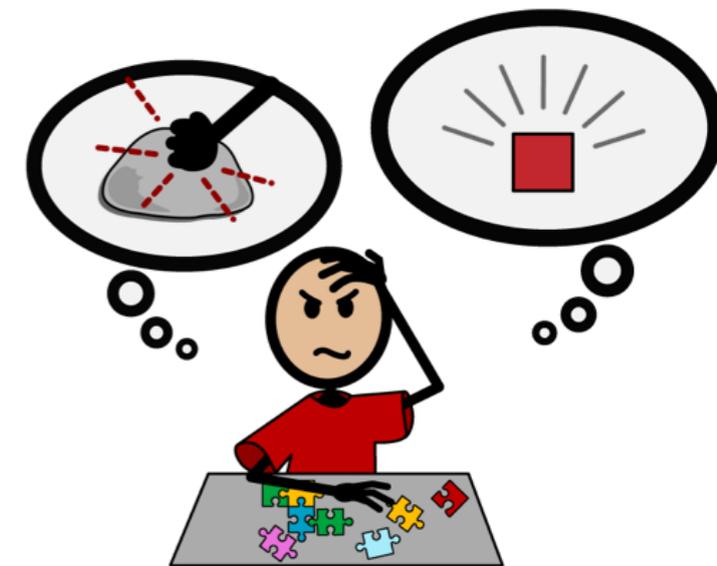
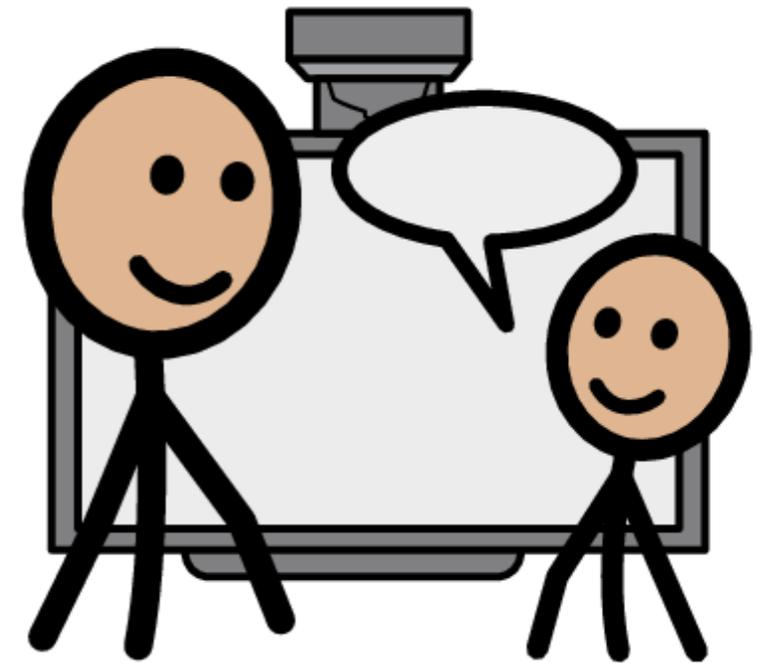
# “Unique” isn’t enough.

- Everyone is unique and different. Not everyone is disabled.
- We don’t know enough about teaching disabled kids. We need to figure it out.
- “Unique” won’t get us there.



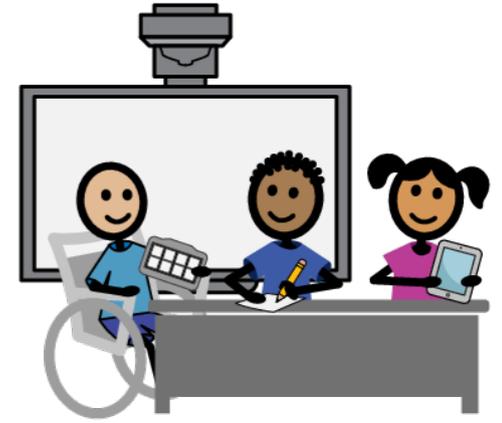
# We don't know as much as we should about teaching kids with disabilities

- Teachers learn what the previous generation of teachers knew, add to it, and pass it down to the next generation of teachers.
- When kids with disabilities were excluded from school, teachers weren't figuring out how to teach them.
- We are the people who have to figure out how to fix this.





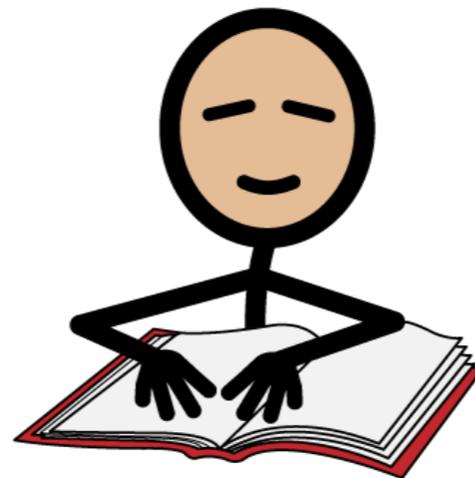
It's like developmentally appropriate practice...



- Every kid is unique — and that's not all you need to know.
- Two year olds are different from ten year olds.
- There's a particular range of difference you expect in typically developing kids the same age.
- Kids with disabilities are more different than that.

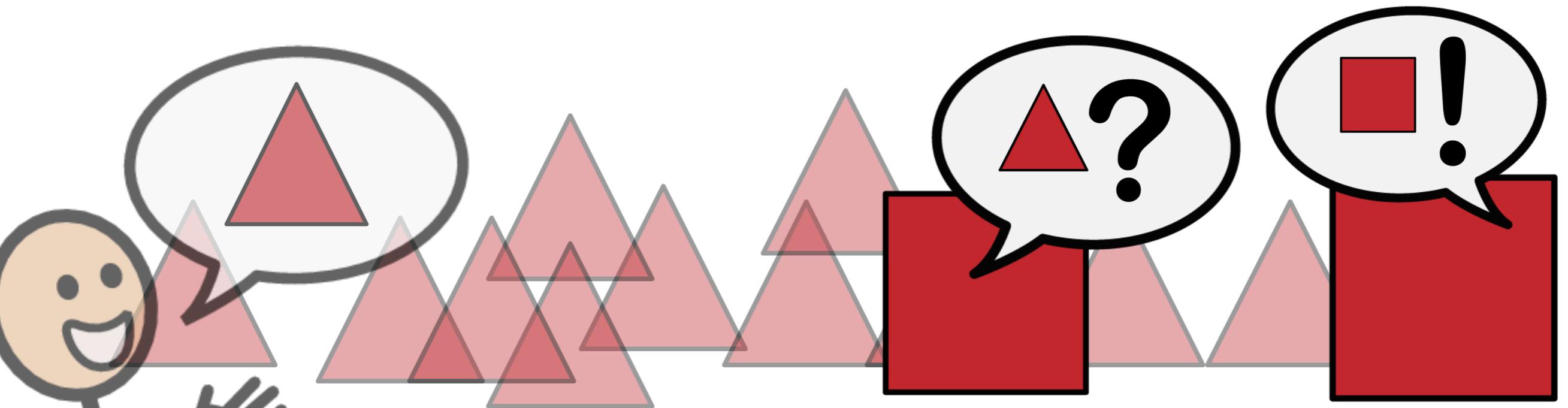
# Disability-related similarities matter too.

- Similarities between disabled people mean that the same access strategy can work for a lot of different people.
- If everyone needed a 100% unique solution, accessibility would be a much harder problem.
- (Teaching methods in general exist because kids have certain things in common.)
- Braille, wheelchairs, ramps, ASL, captions, and text-to-speech software are useful because of similarities between disabled people.

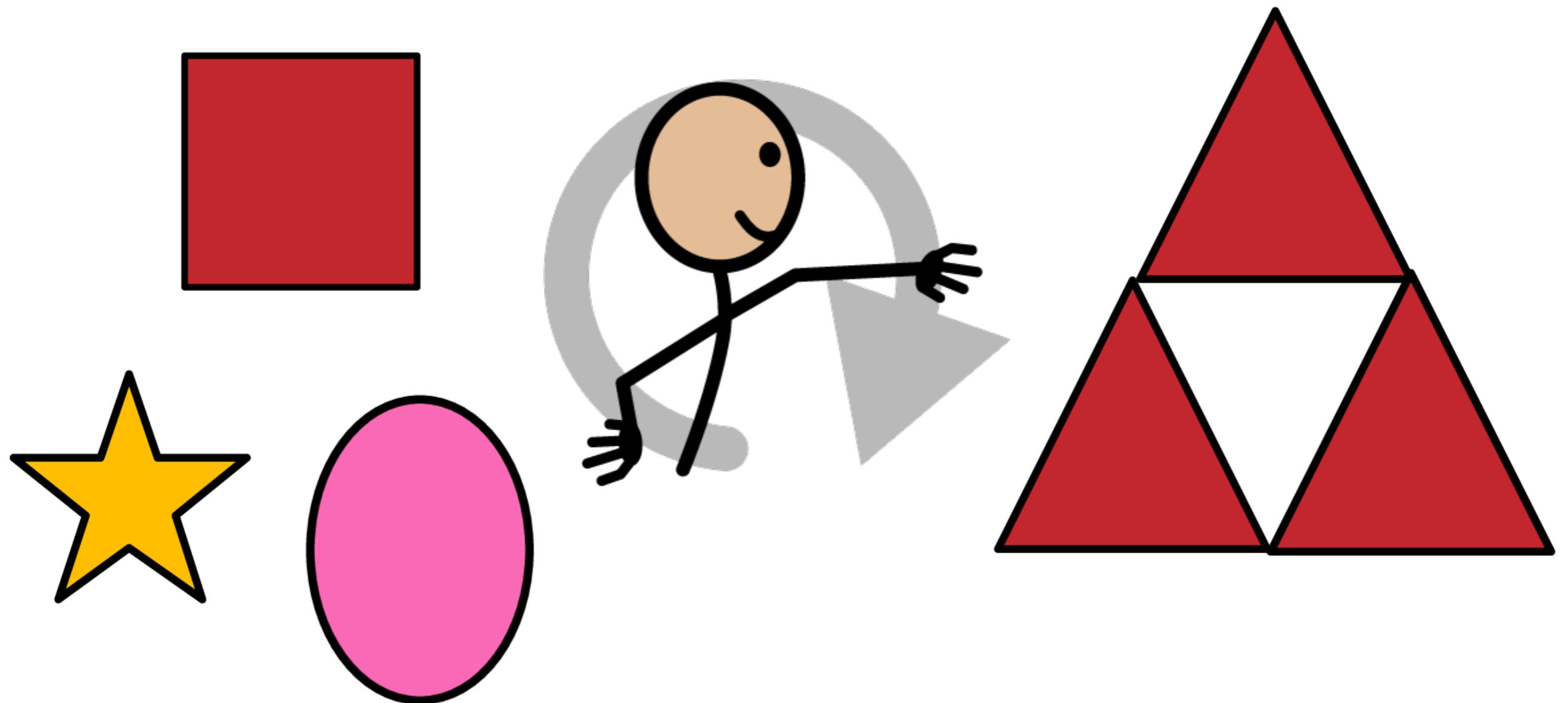


# “Unique” is a burden too heavy for our students to bear.

- “Unique” means “you’re the only one”. That’s a lot to carry.
- Kids with disabilities need to know that there are other people like them.
- It’s hard to live with experiences that no one in your life can relate to.
- When you live in a world full of triangles, it helps to know that you’re not the only square.



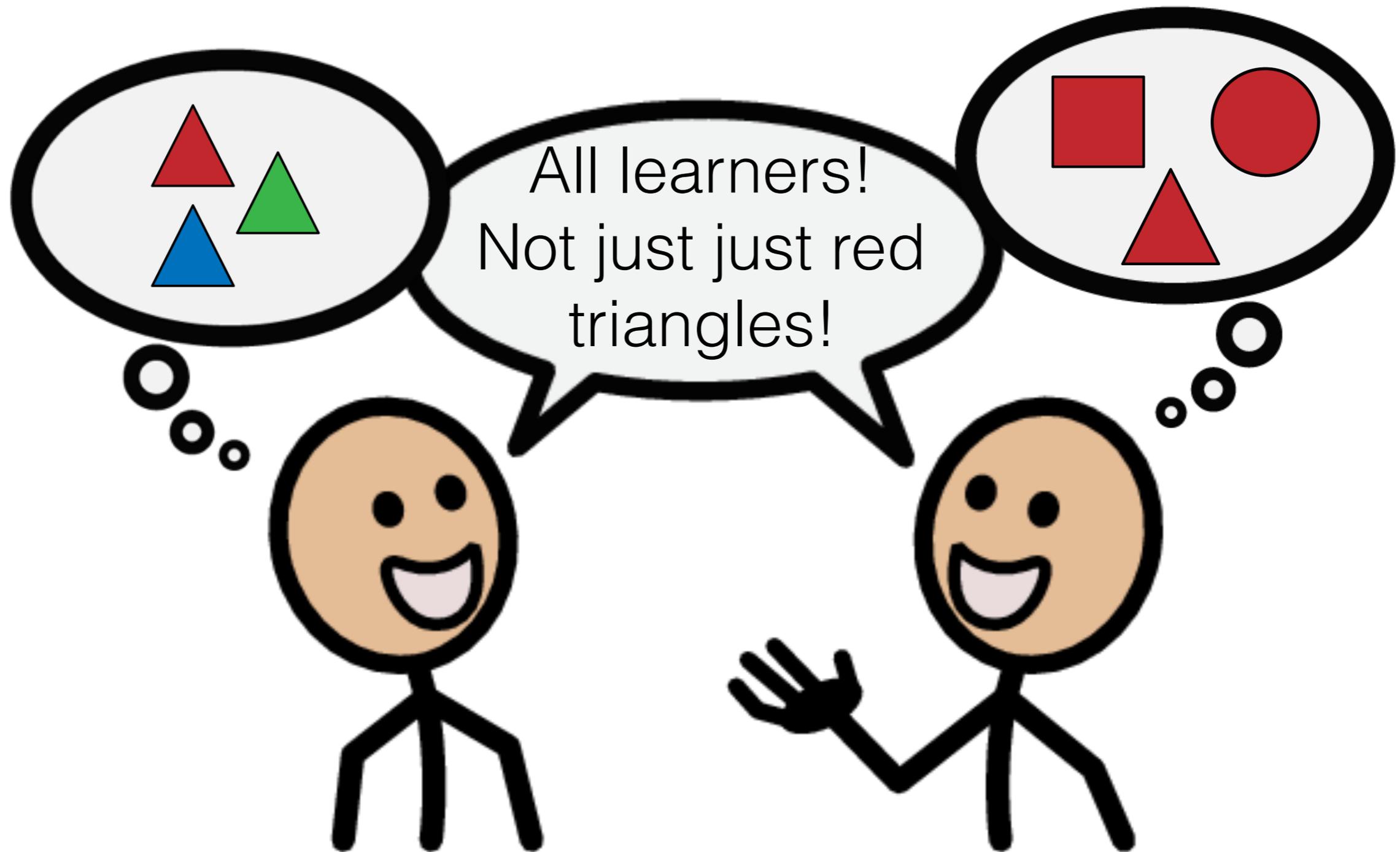
Our system was designed for red triangles. We need to think about the other shapes and colors too.



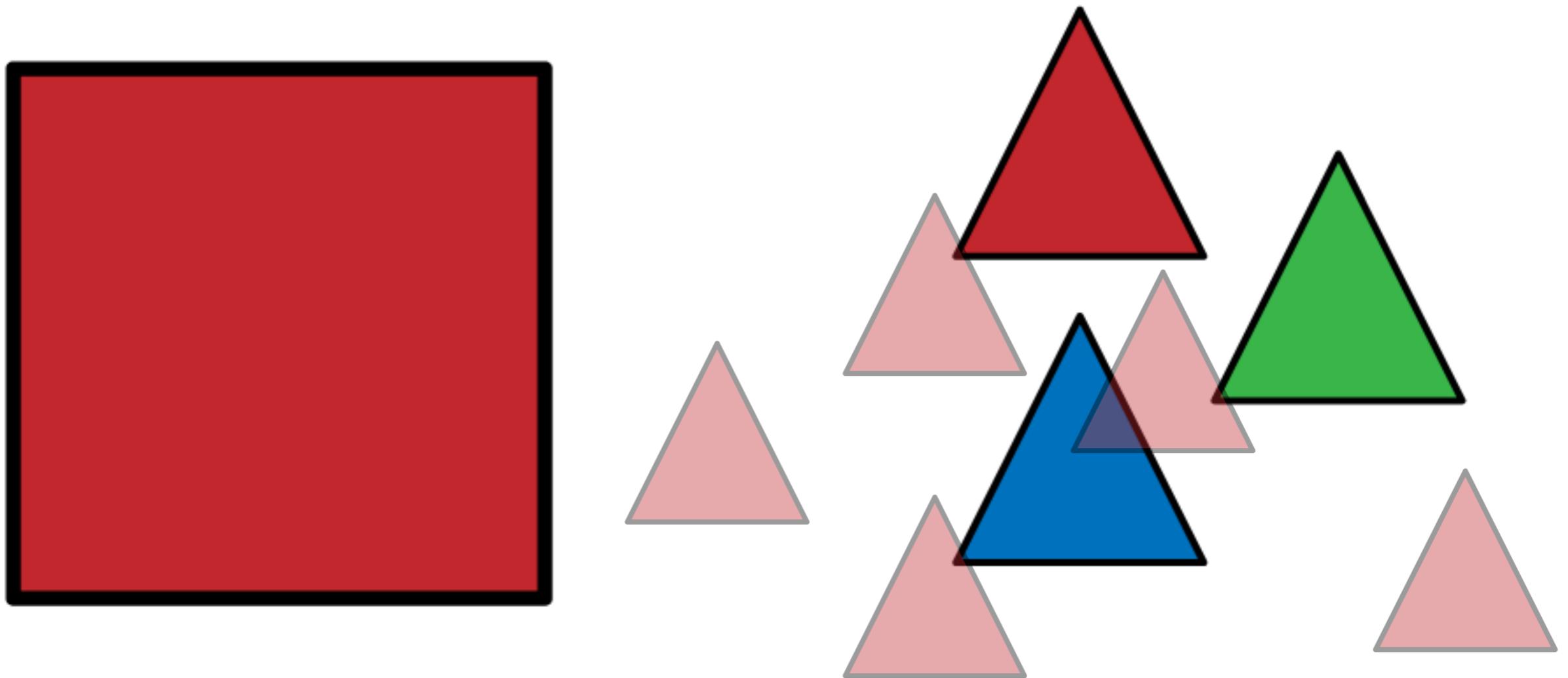
When people aren't willing to talk about disability, "inclusion" conversations become meaningless.



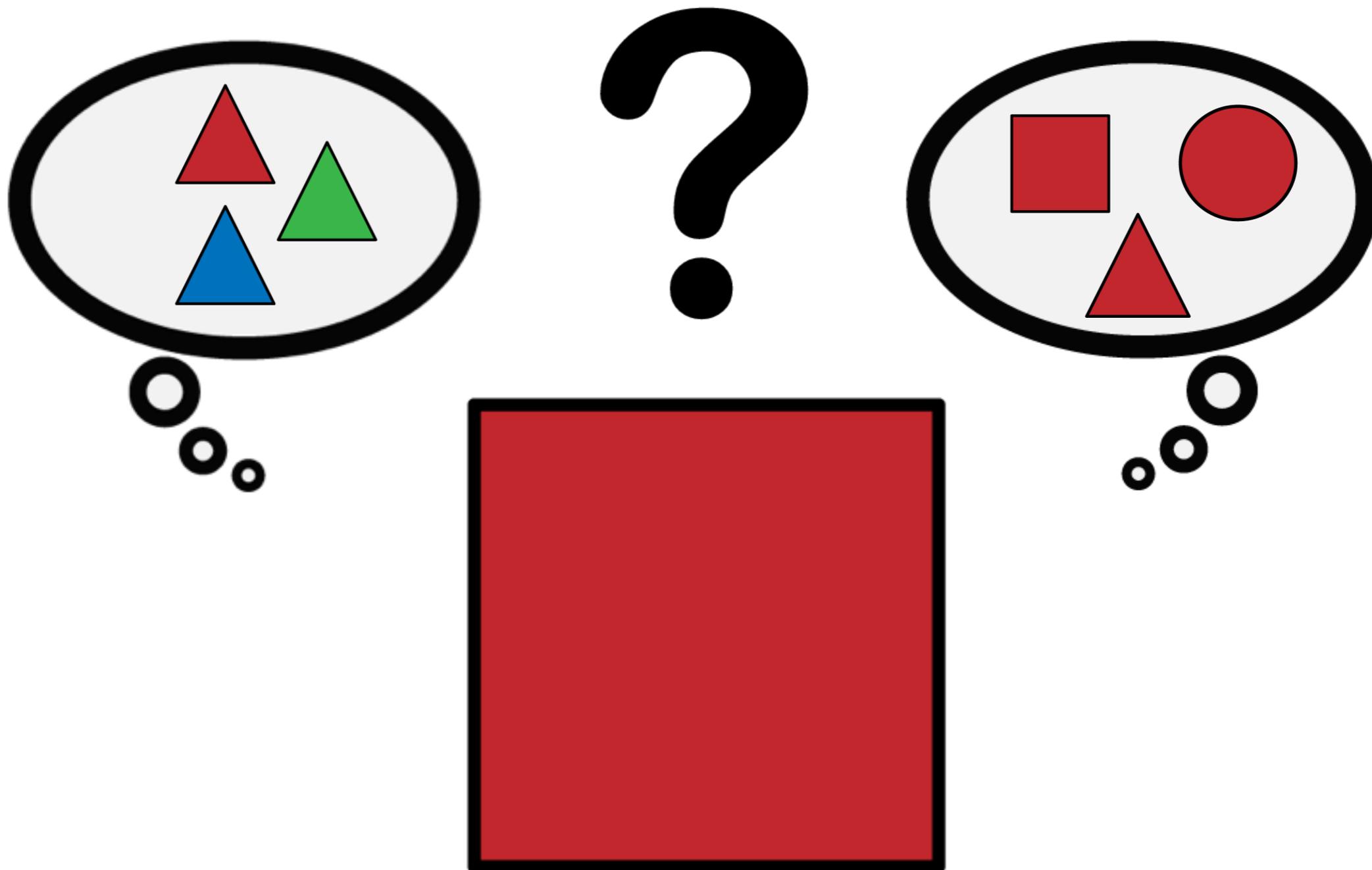
The specifics are important — and we need to be able to communicate about them.



For example: “All” leaves this square with a lot of unanswered questions...

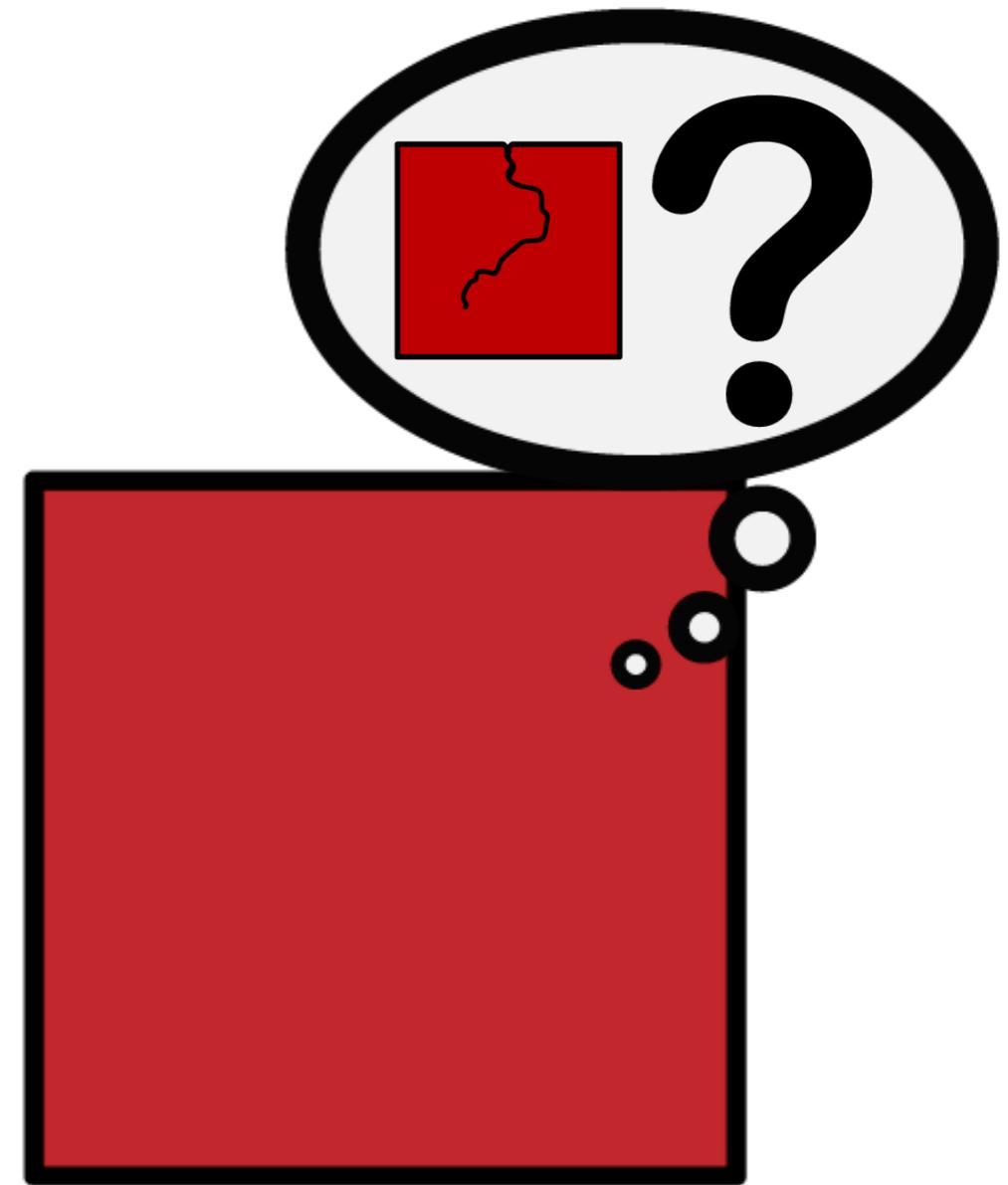
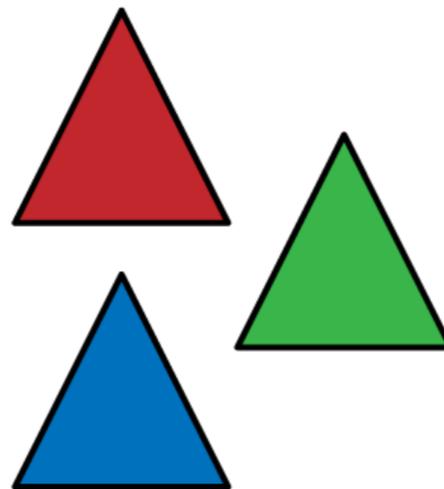


Has the person who said “all learners are welcome” thought about squares?

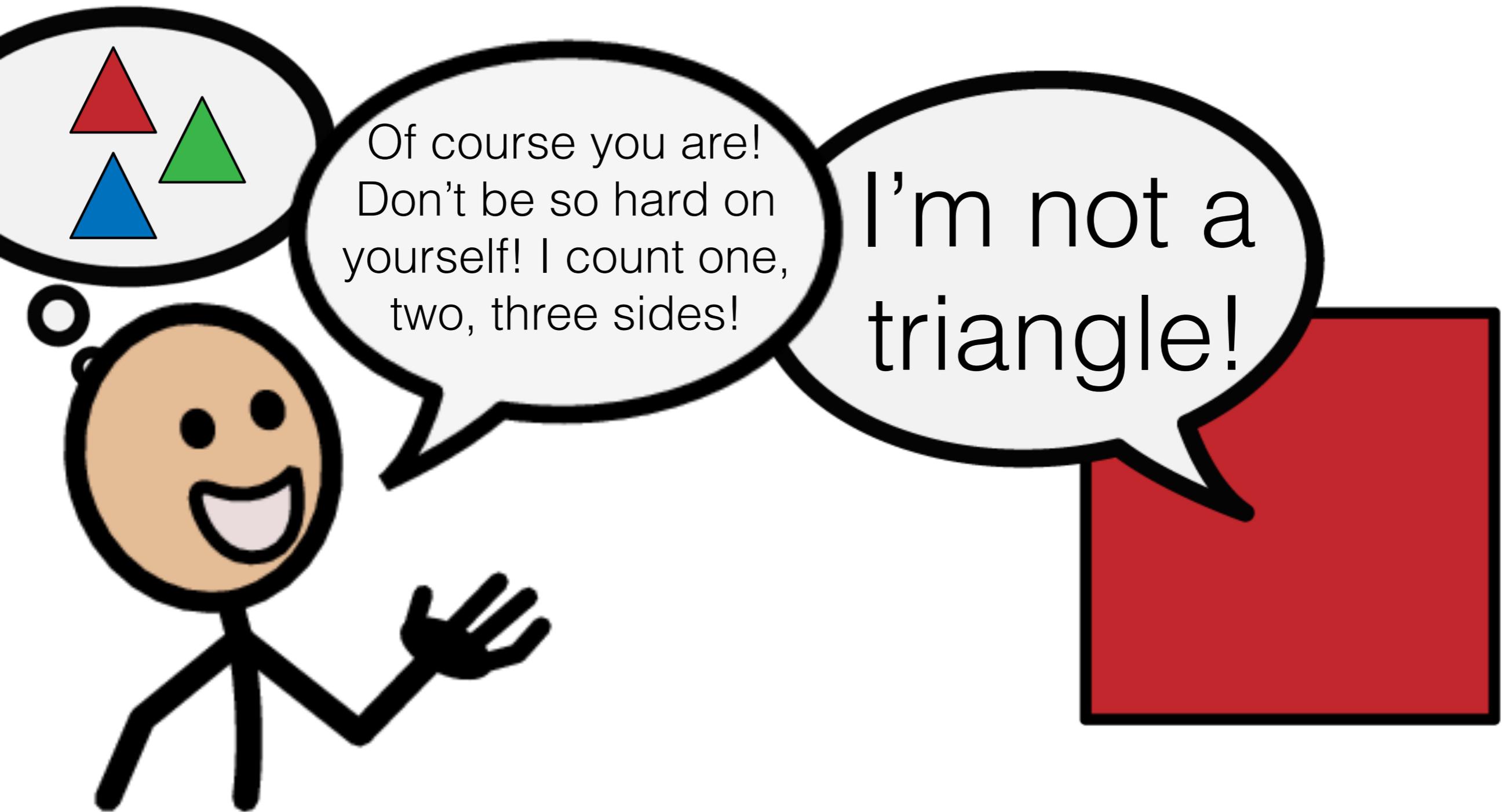


# What if including me would mean making big changes?

Our curriculum teaches Jewish kids to understand how important it is to be a triangle! All shapes are welcome!

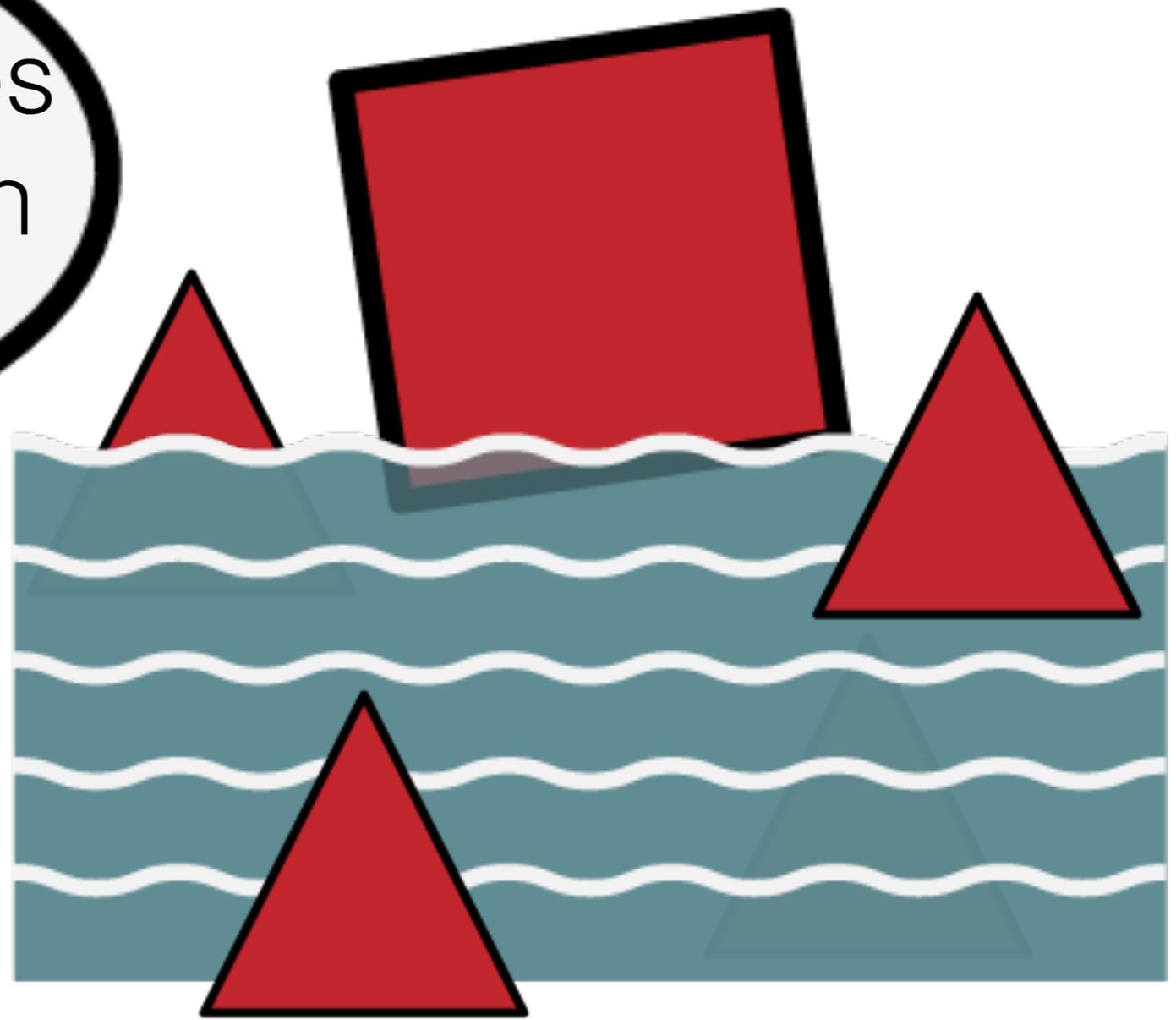
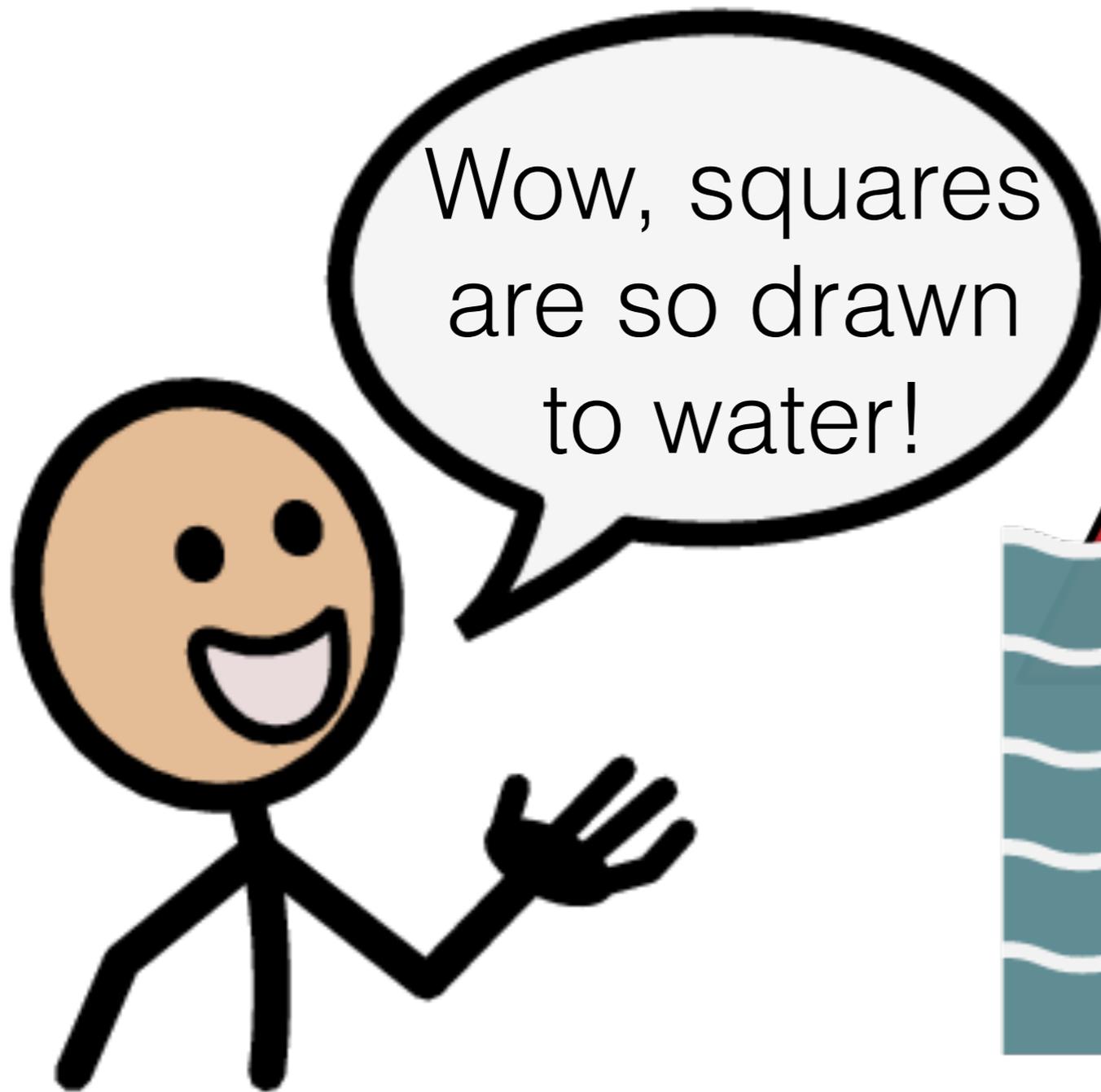


Will my teacher make me pretend to think I'm a triangle?

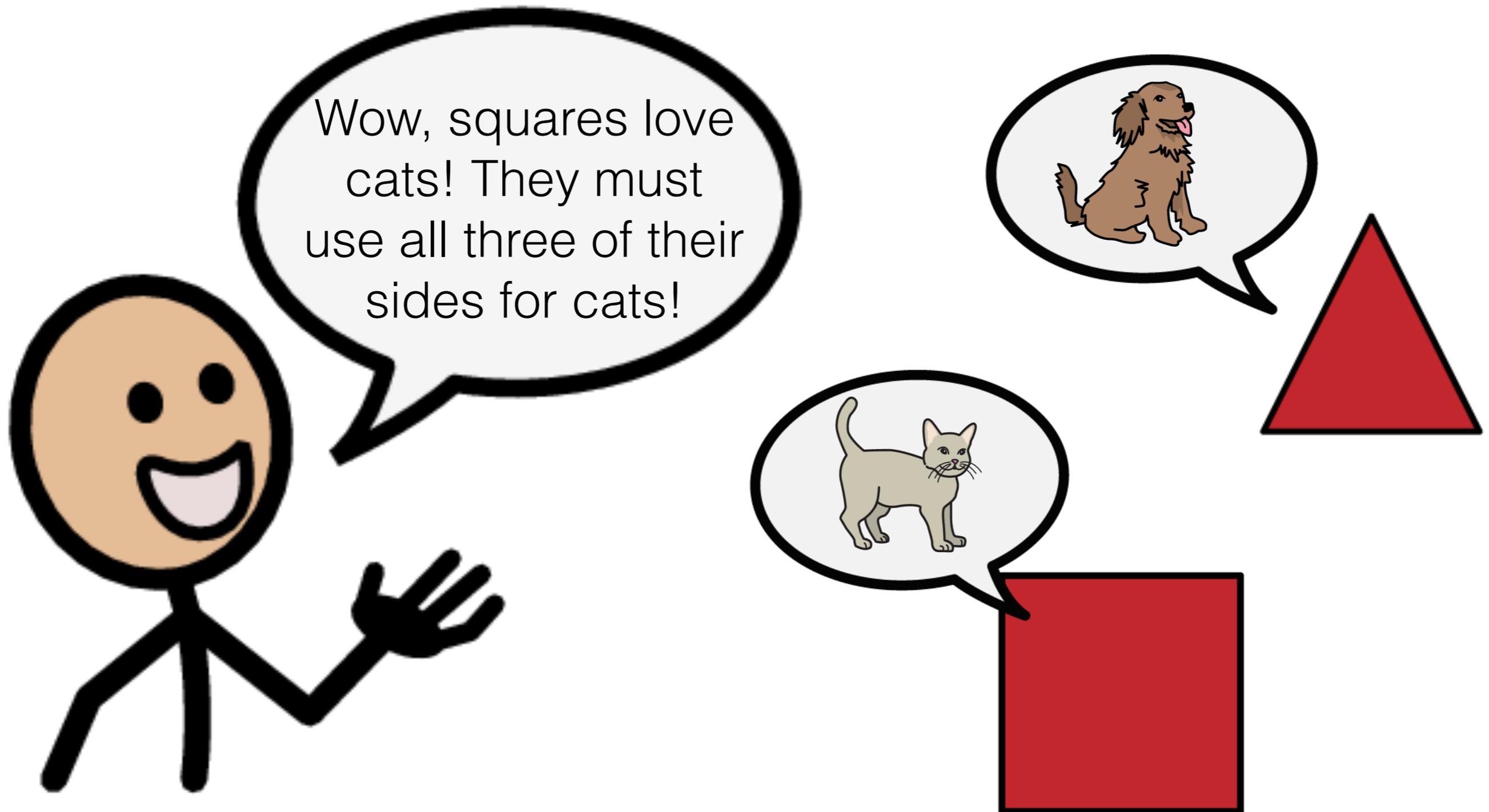


I'm not a triangle!

Will my teacher have weird ideas about squares?

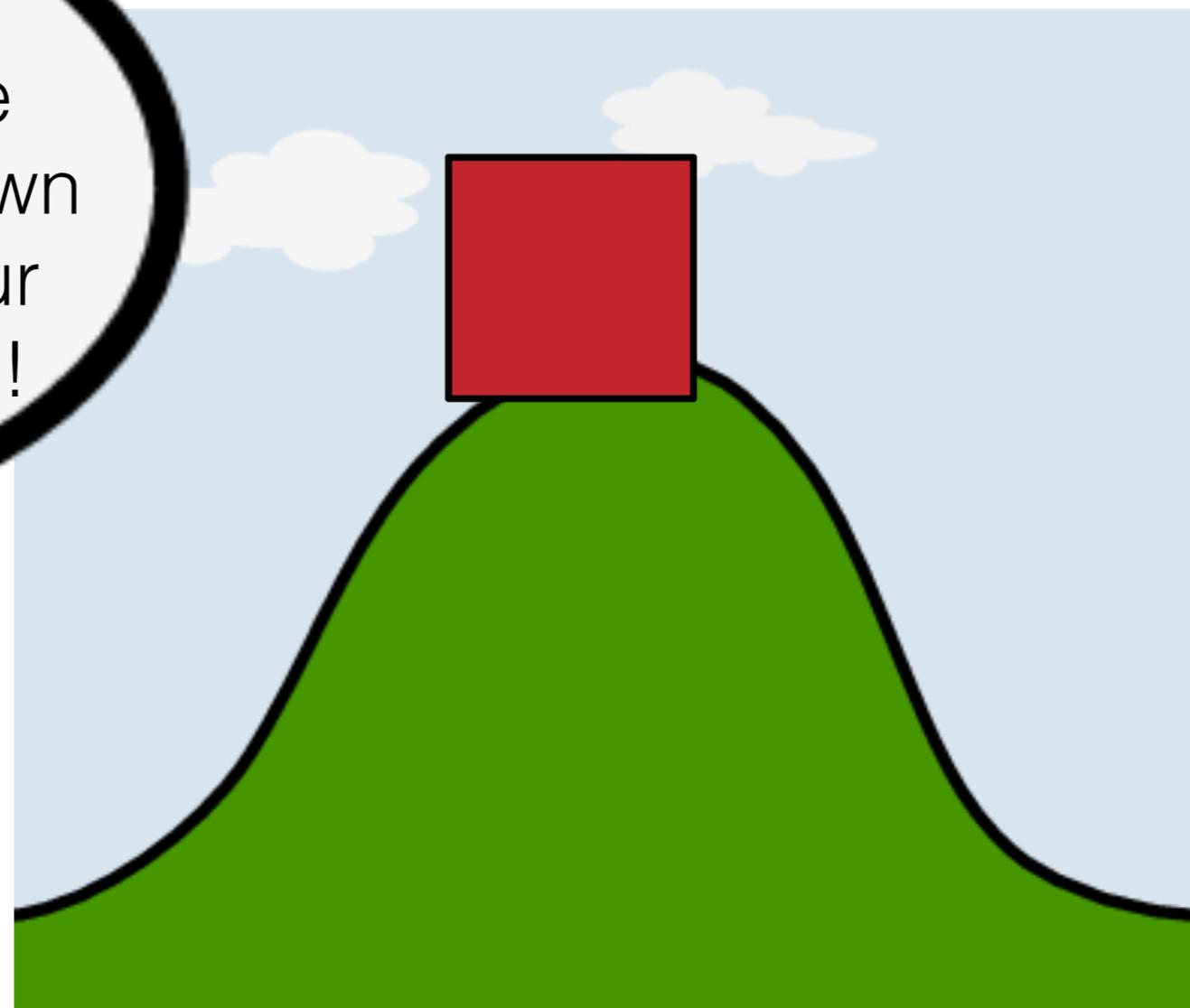


Will everything about me turn into a theory about squareness?

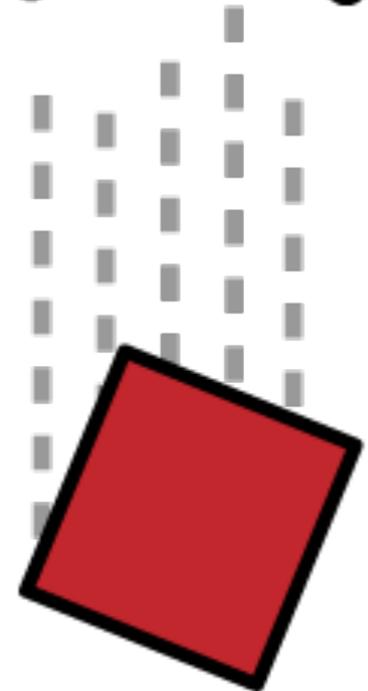
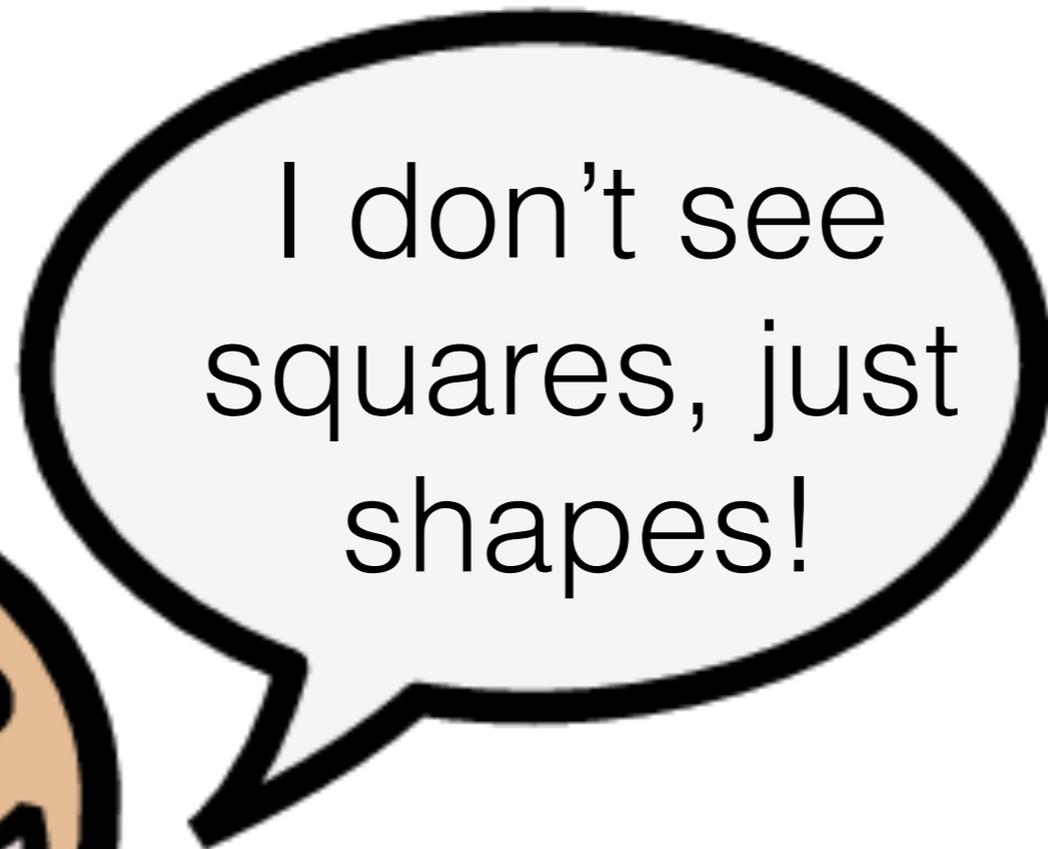


Will my school get attached to inaccurate assumptions about what will be helpful?

No one has to be a triangle here! We've arranged a rolling down the hill contest for our very special shapes!

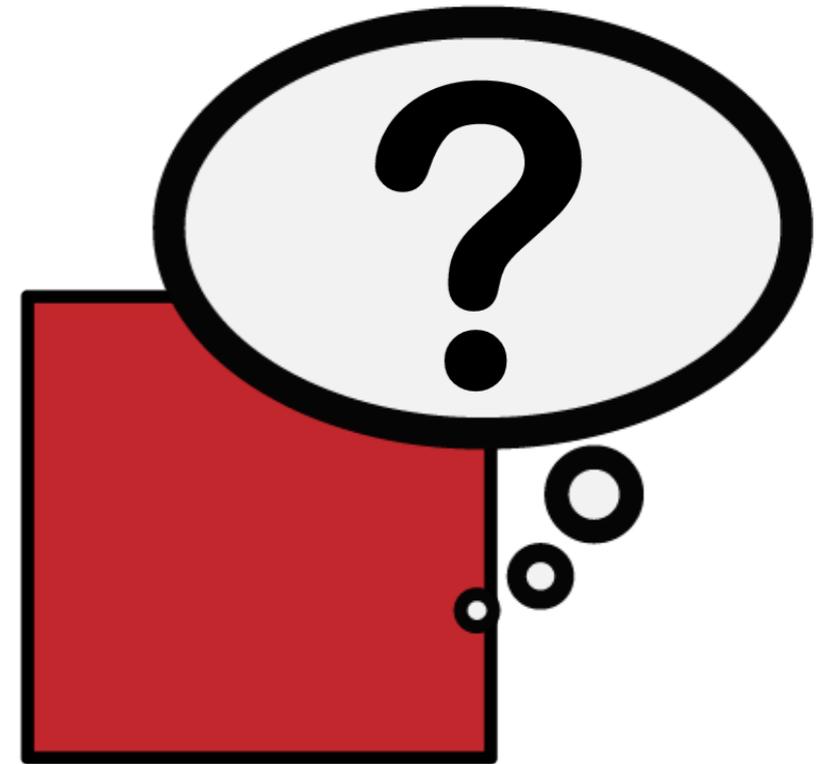
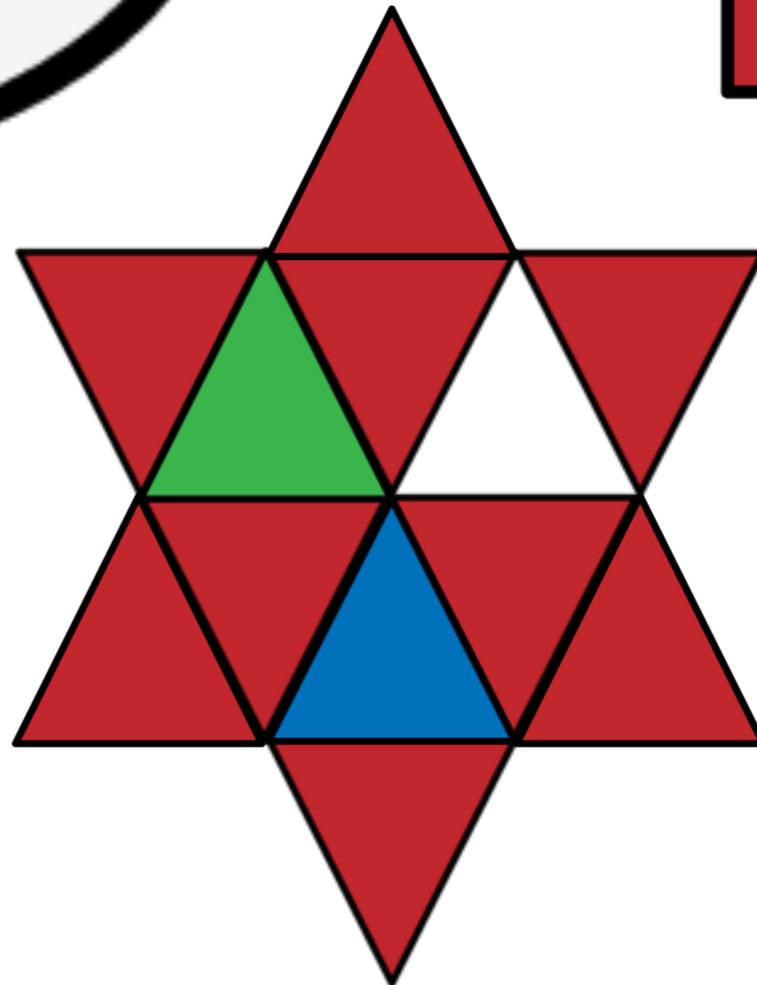


# Will I be safe?



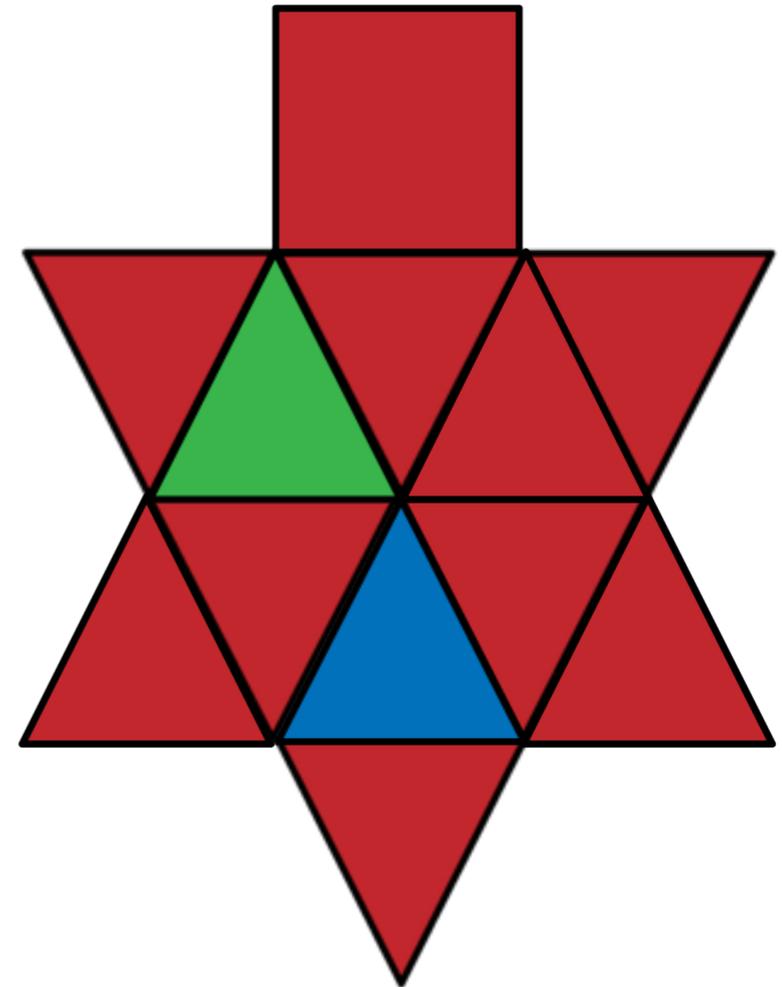
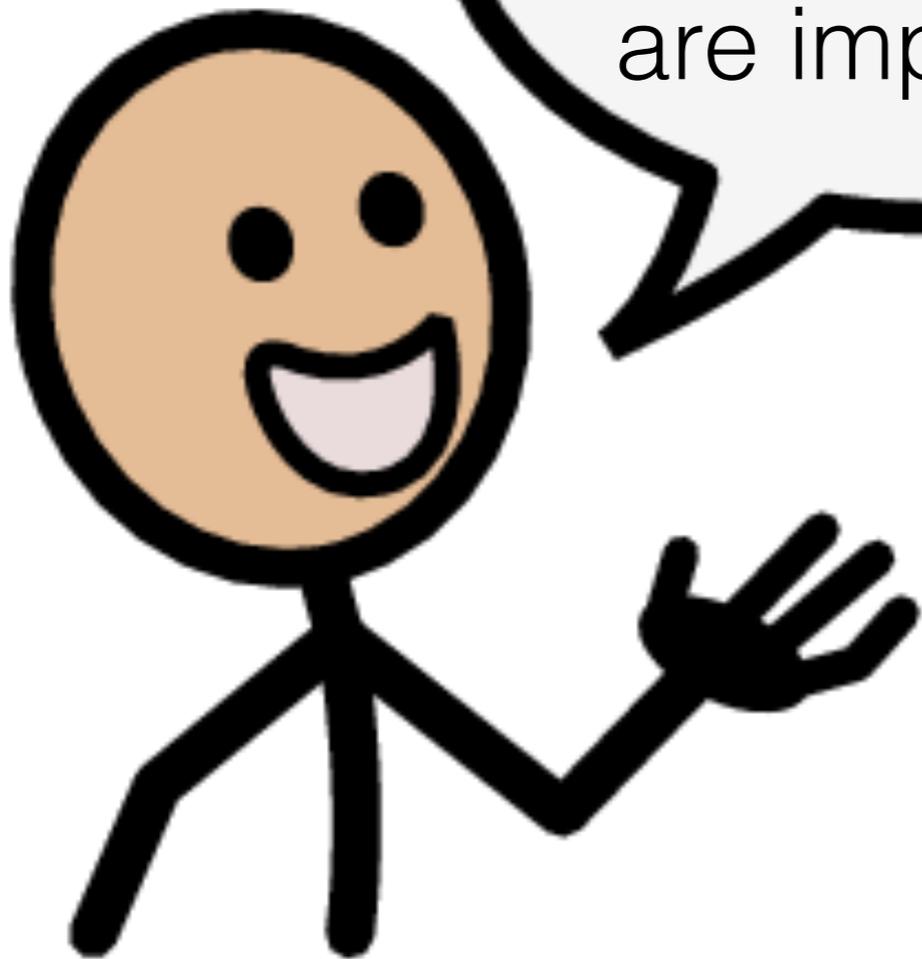
# Will I get to actually learn things?

Ok, shapes, triangle up into a Magen David!



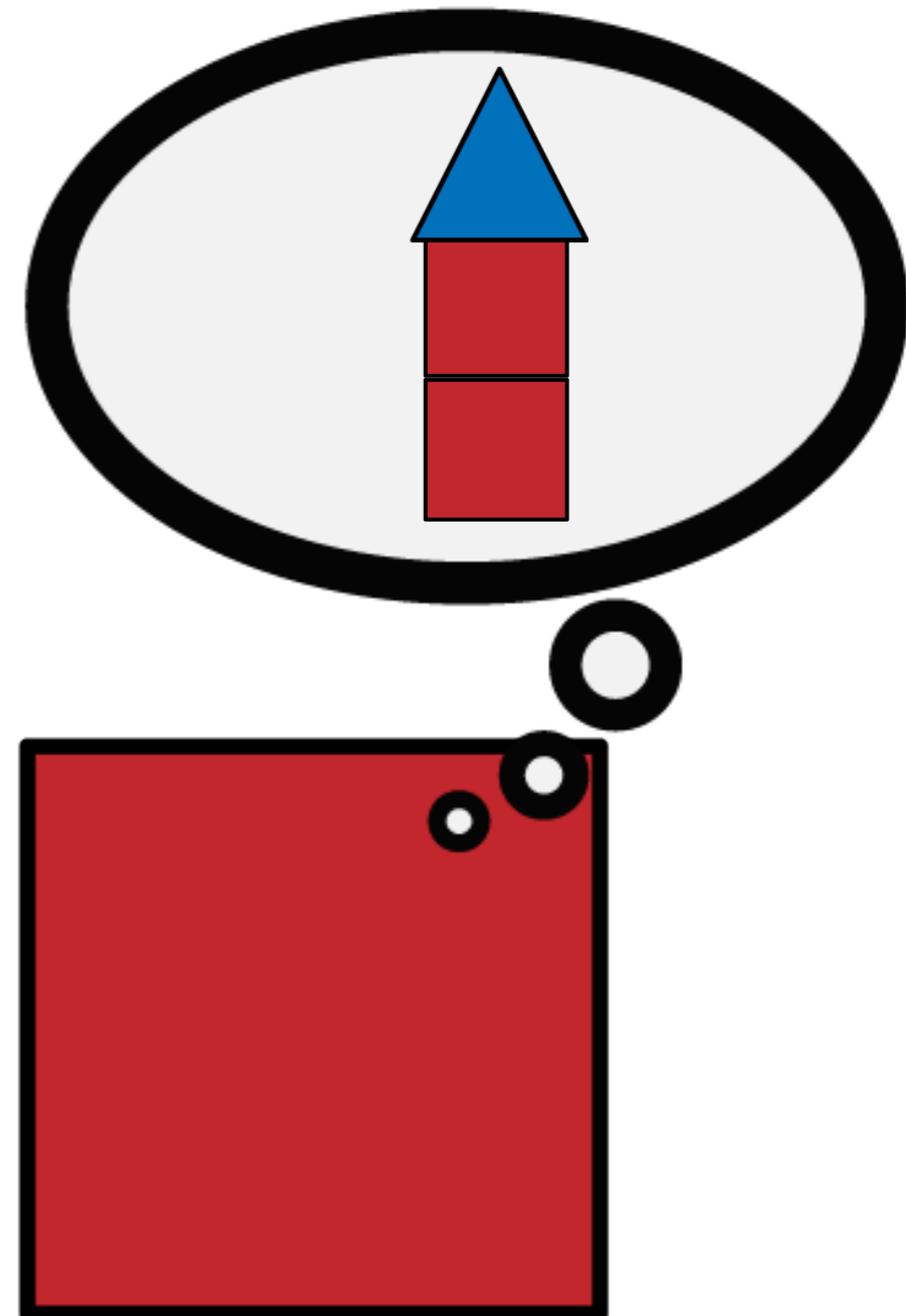
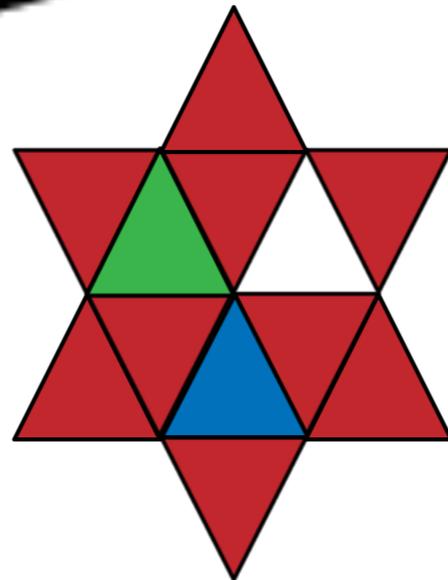
# Will I be blamed when things are inaccessible?

Ok everyone, stop goofing around. Stars are important!



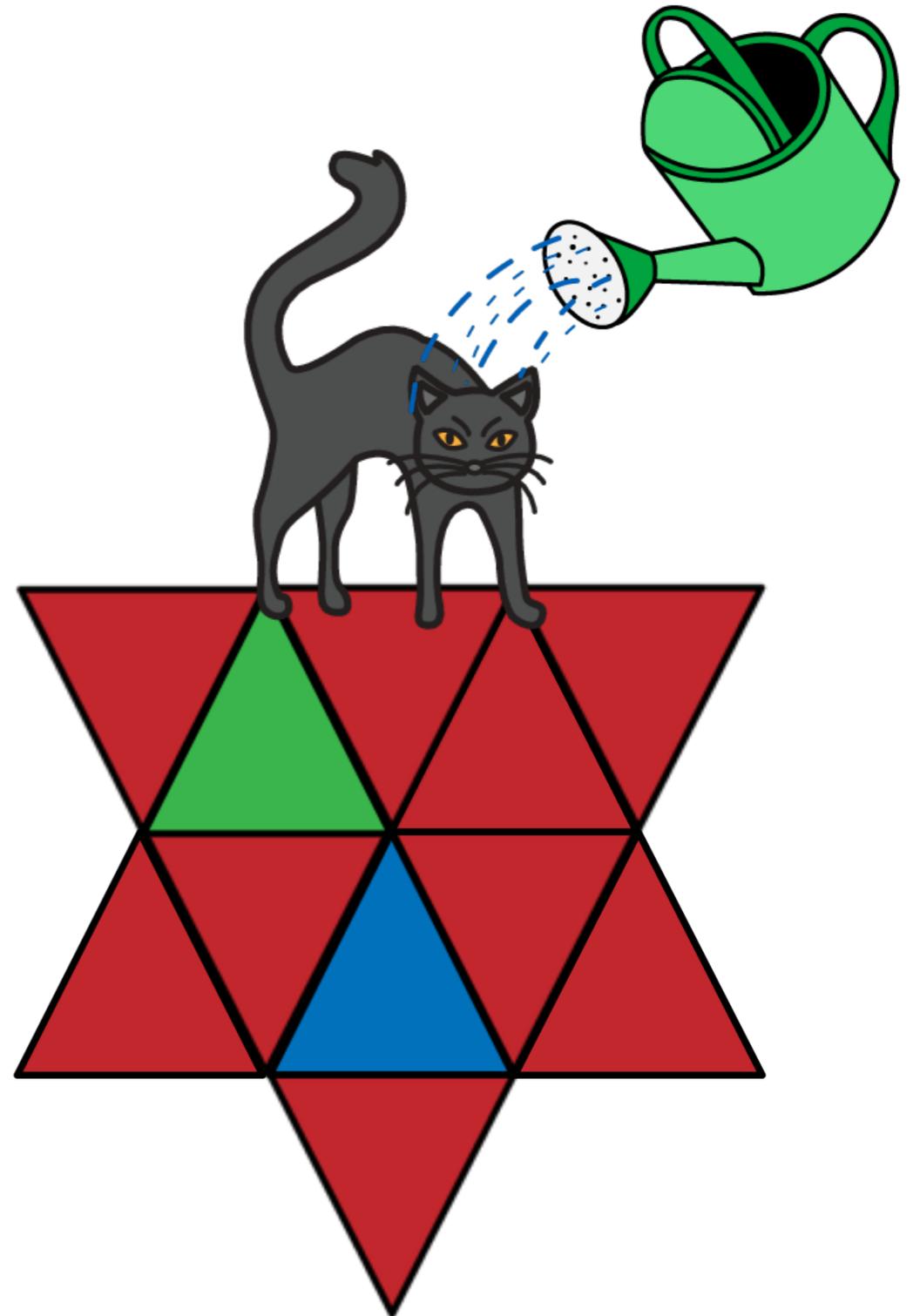
Will my teacher try to talk about  
“difference” instead of squareness?

We're all different! Some  
triangles like vanilla ice  
cream, and some like  
chocolate. Some triangles  
like stacking, and some  
don't!



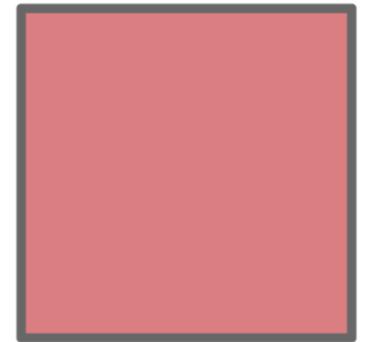
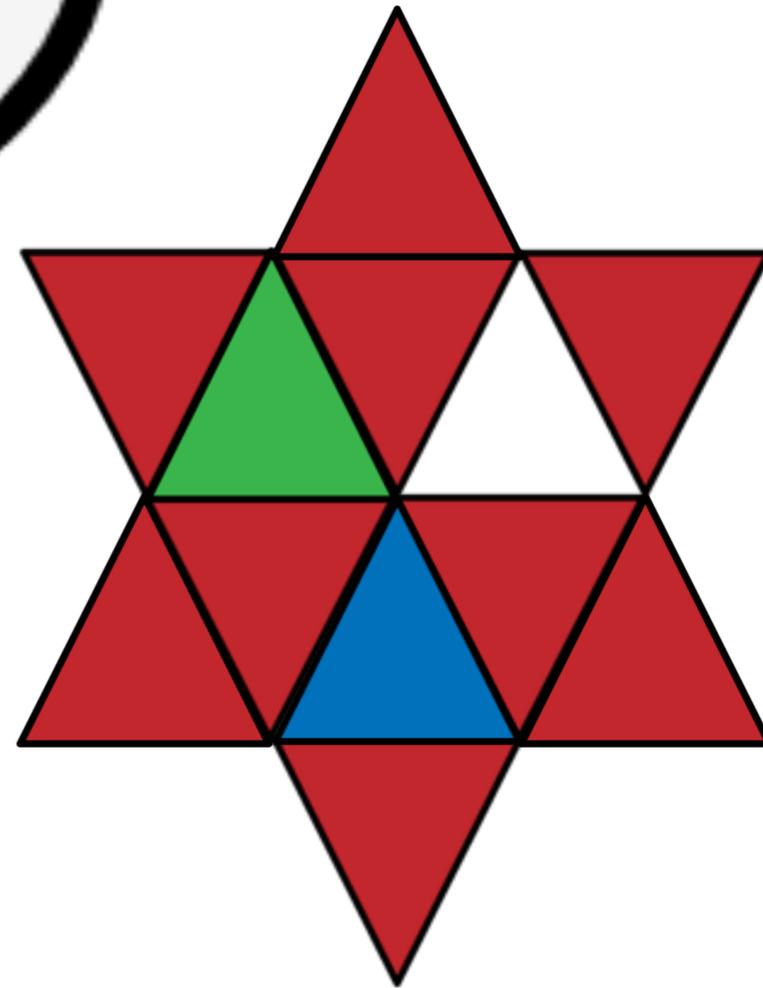
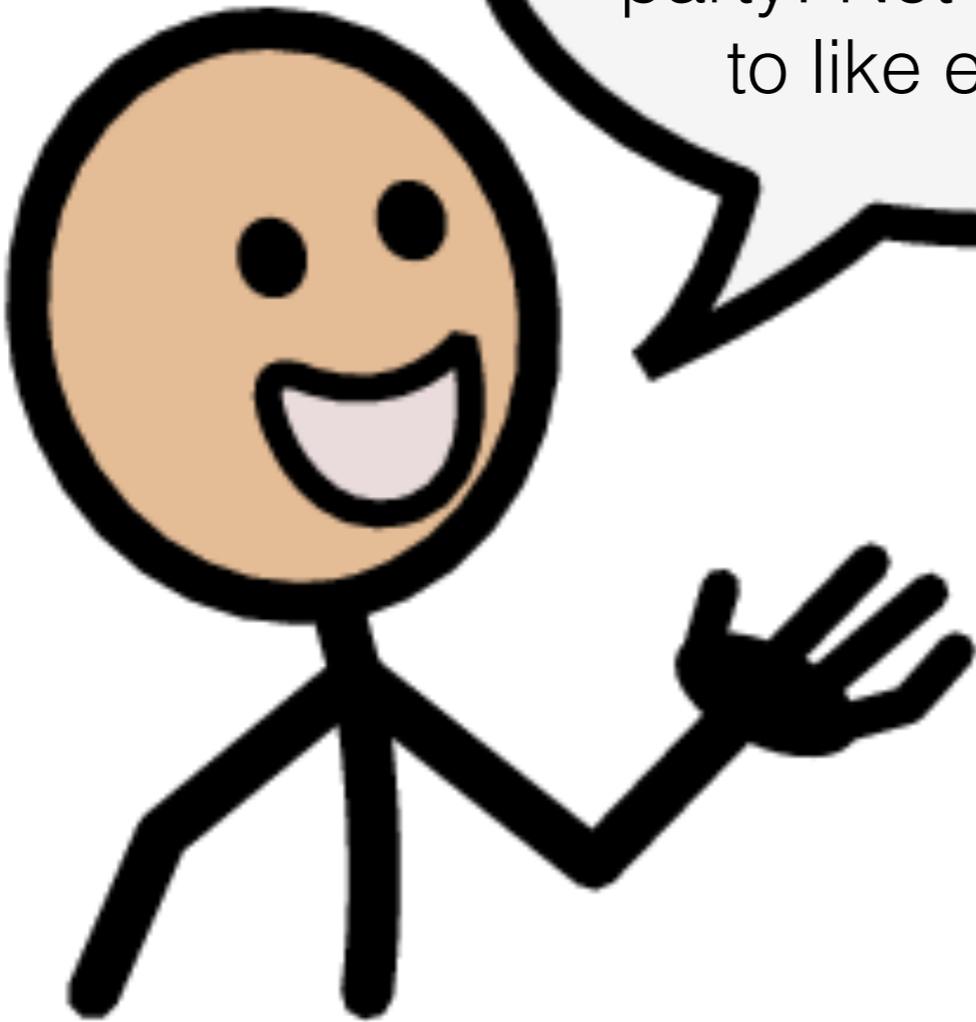
Will people grasp at ridiculous straws to avoid acknowledging my different shape?

She'll feel comfortable participating if we add some water and cats.



# Will I be expected to act like being left out is my choice?

It's ok if you don't want to participate in the big end-of-year triangle-stacking party! Not everyone has to like everything!

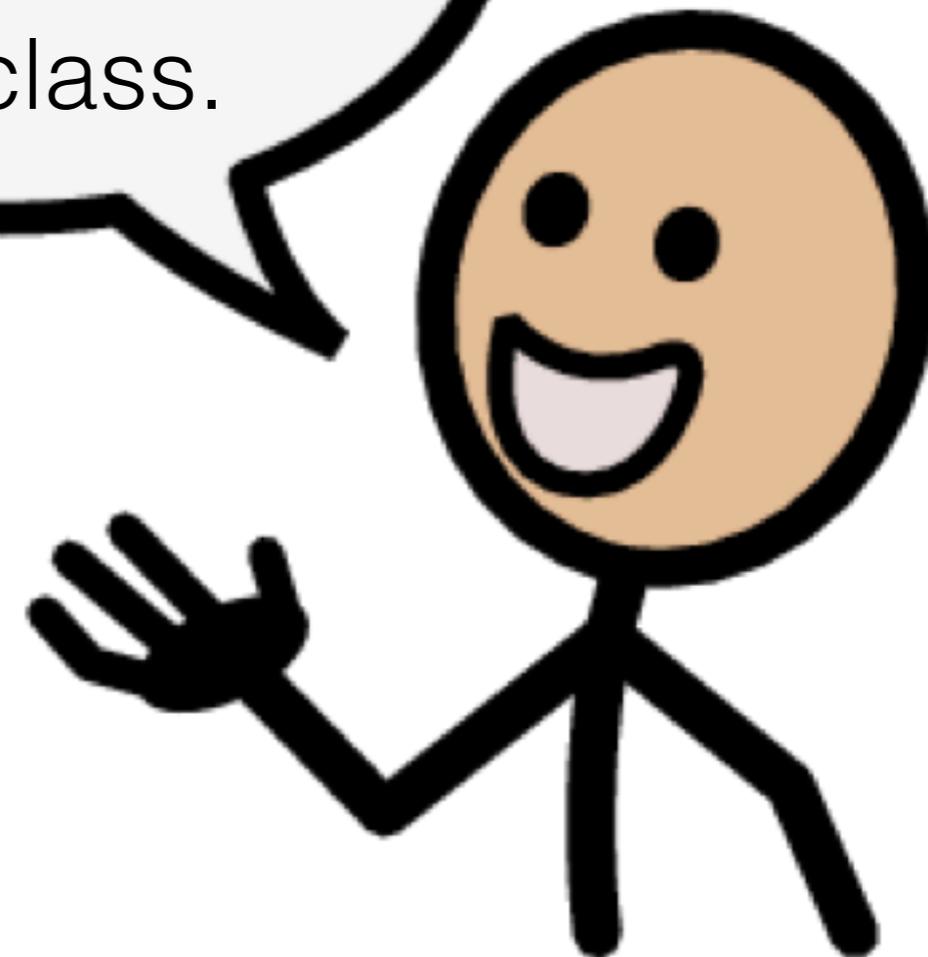
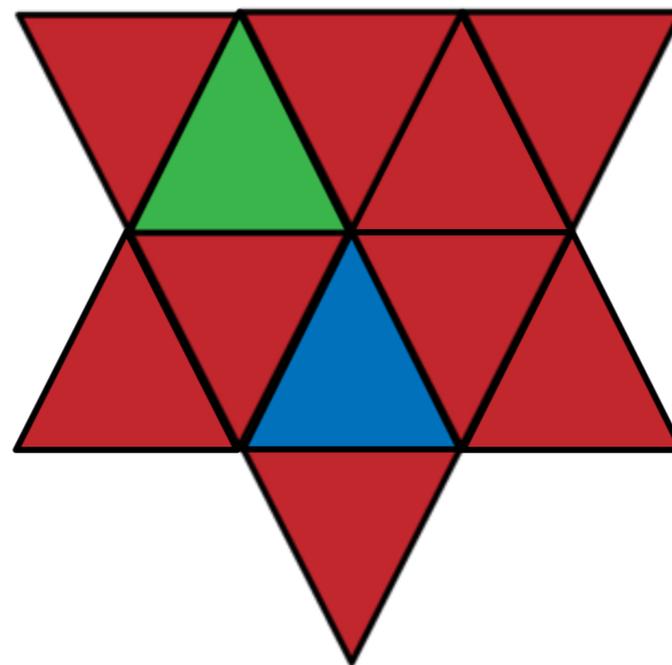


How much can I advocate for myself without being seen as a burden?

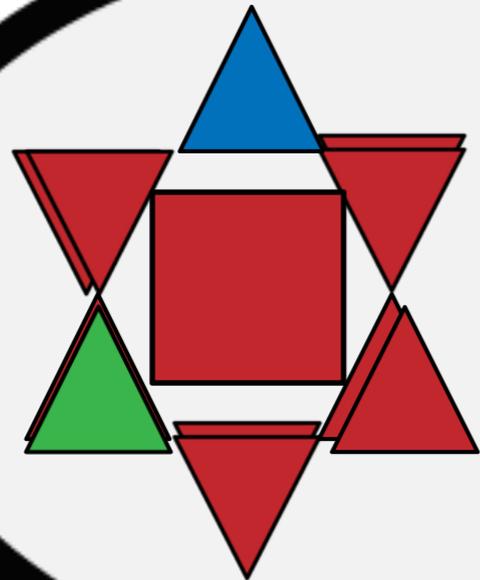


I can't triangle up. We need to do something different.

It's not just about you! There are other students in this class.

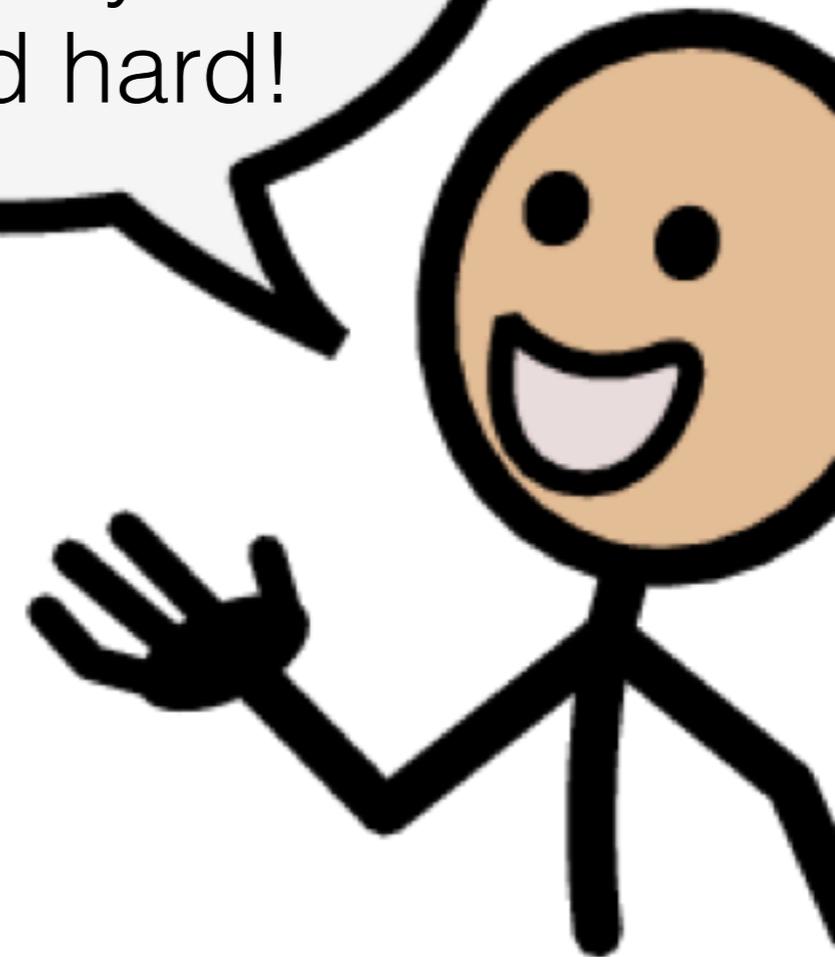


Will my attempts to solve problems  
be seen as a character flaw?



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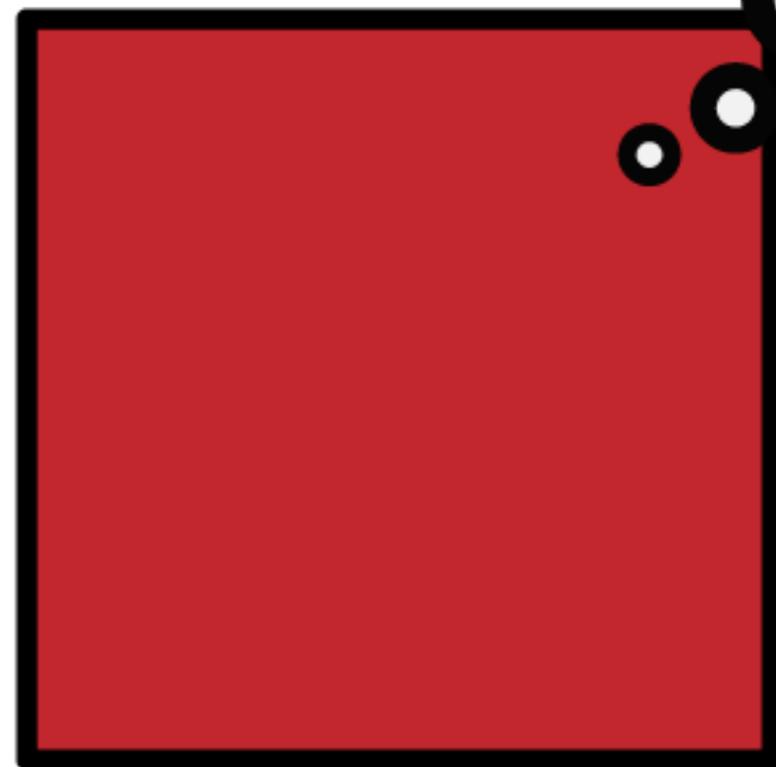
We can't just put  
you in the center  
of it. Everyone  
worked hard!



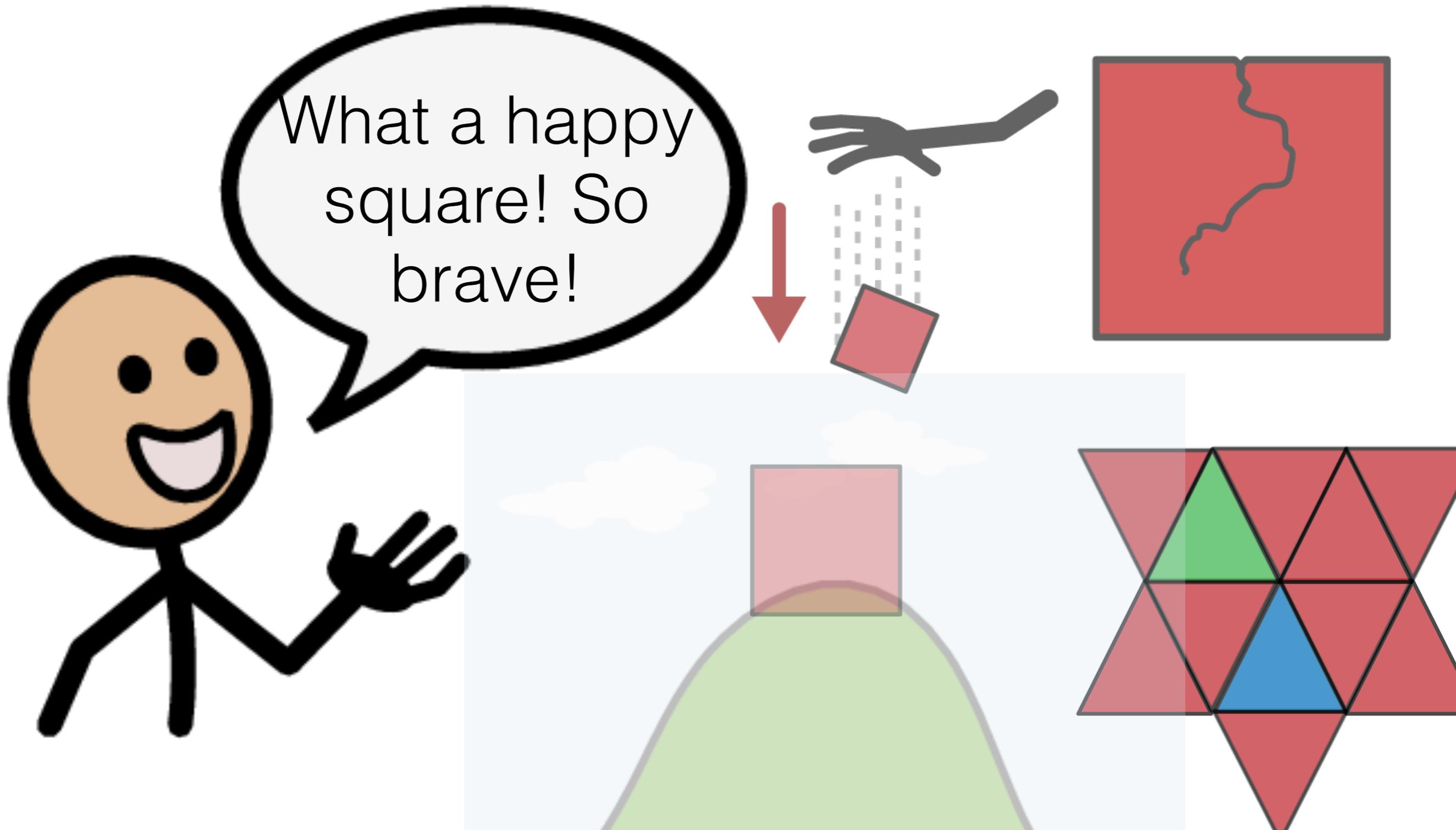
Will teachers forget that they're the teachers and I'm not?



Please tell me how I can teach you what a star is.



Will I be allowed to be upset  
when upsetting things happen?



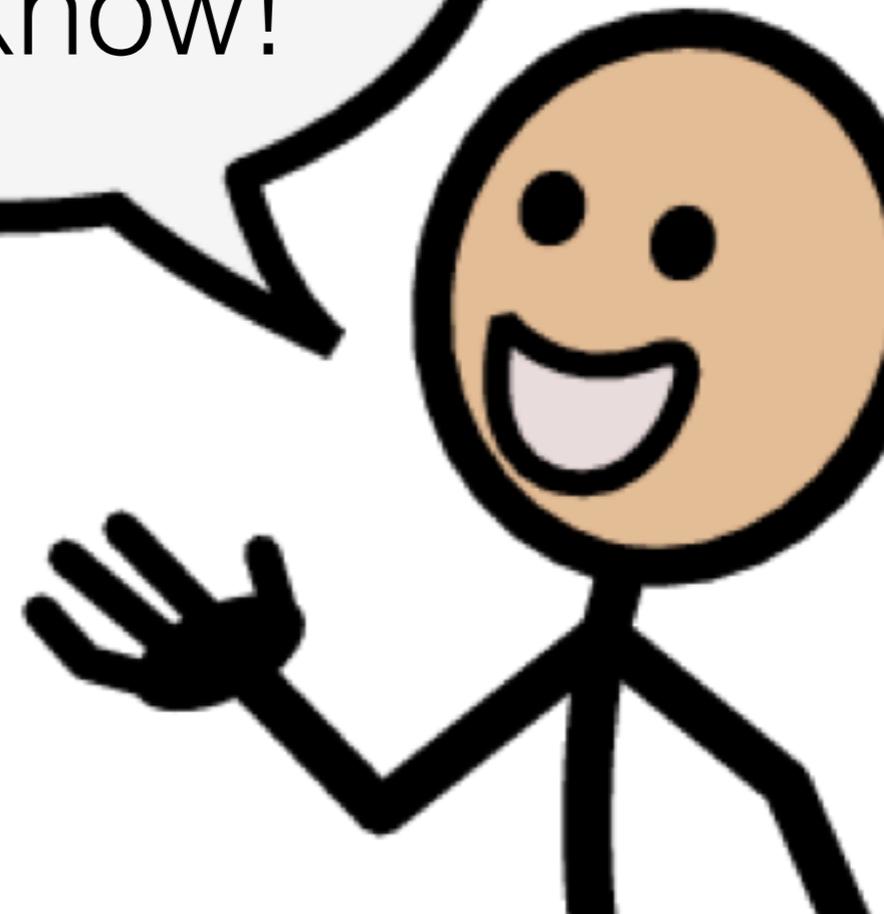
Will I have to take care of people who should be taking care of me?



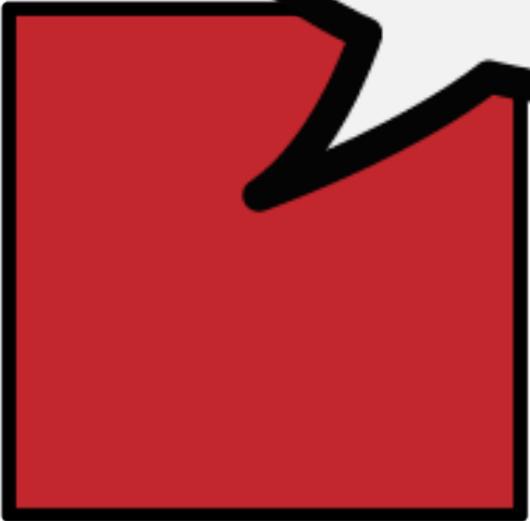
I hate having wet cats on my head!



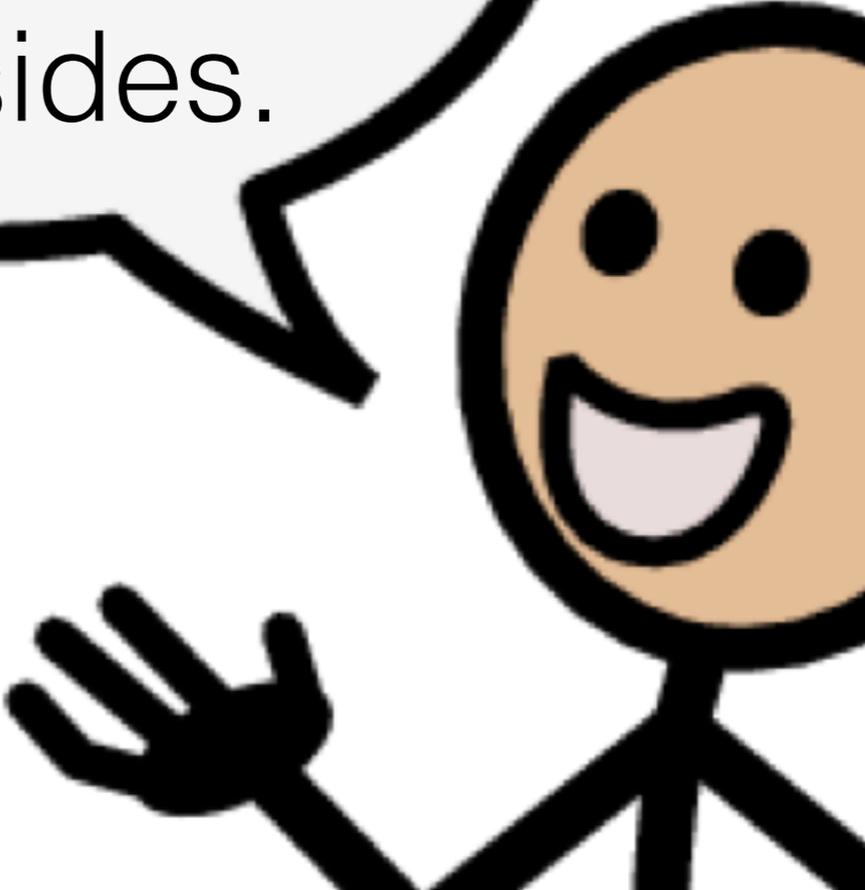
I have feelings too you know!



Will anyone acknowledge that being a square matters?

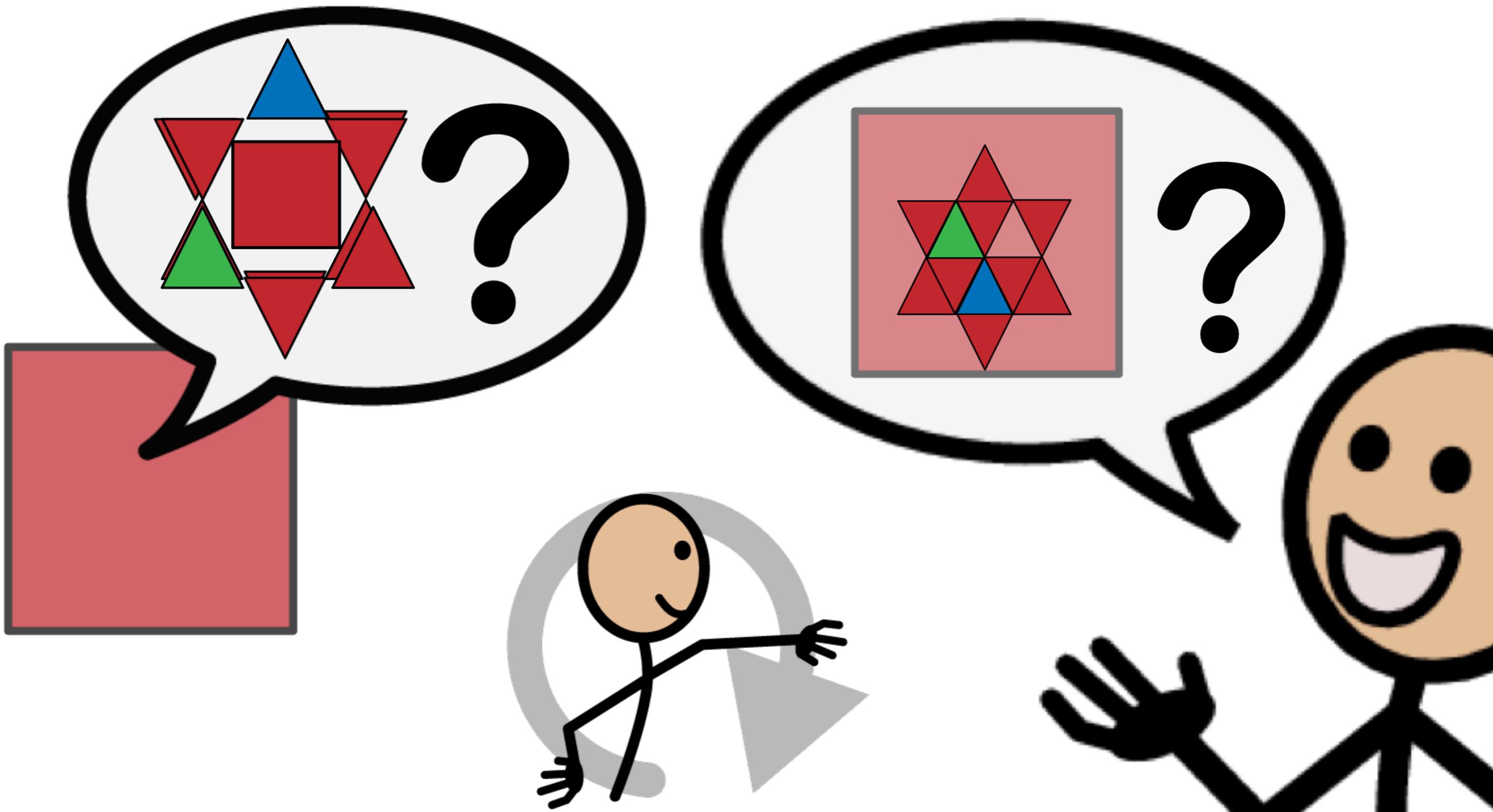


I'm a square!

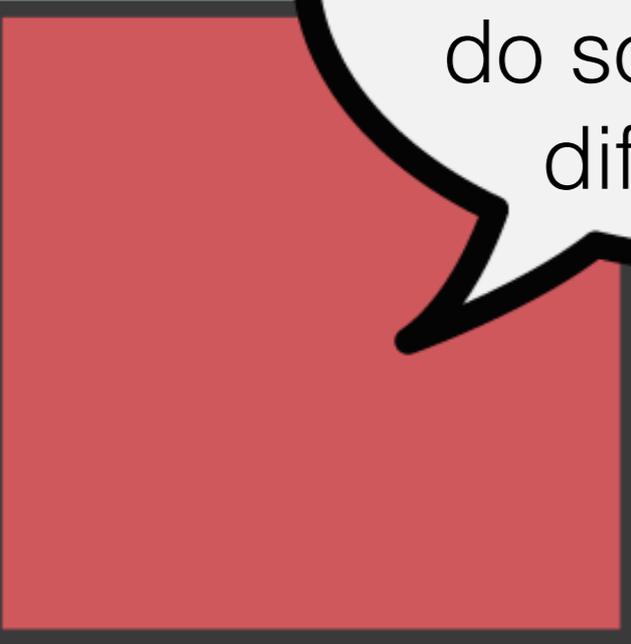


Our program needs to work for people with four sides.

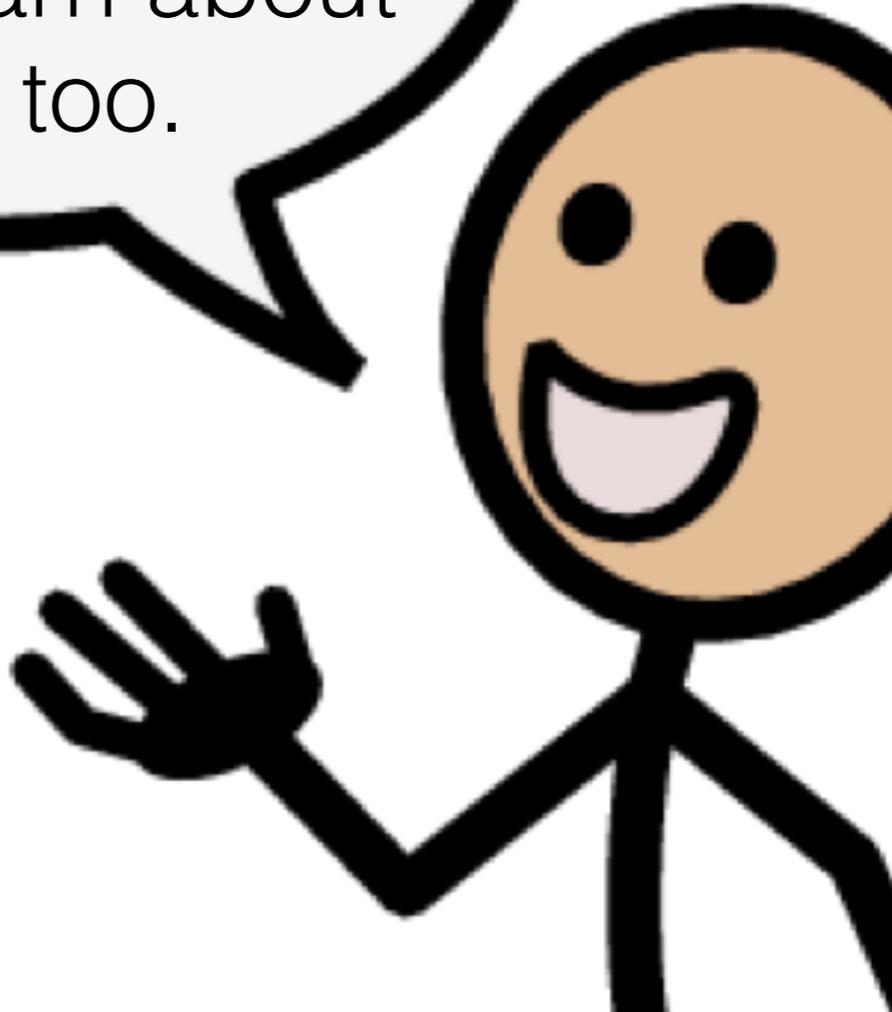
Will teachers work with me to solve accessibility problems?



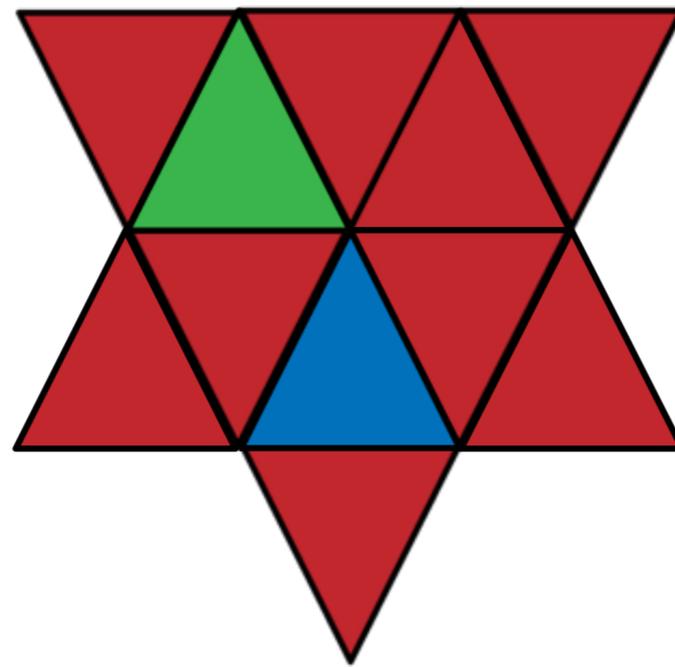
# Will anyone say "sorry"?



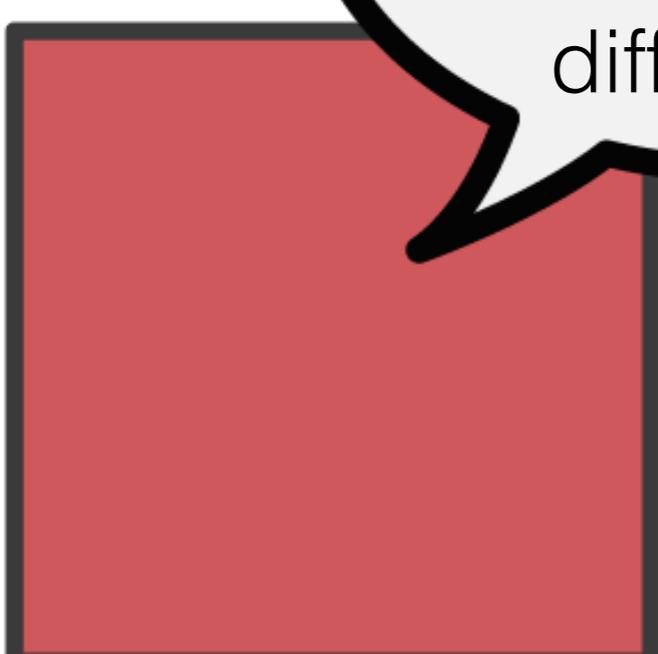
I can't triangle up. We need to do something different.



I should have thought of that. I'm sorry. You have the right to learn about stars too.

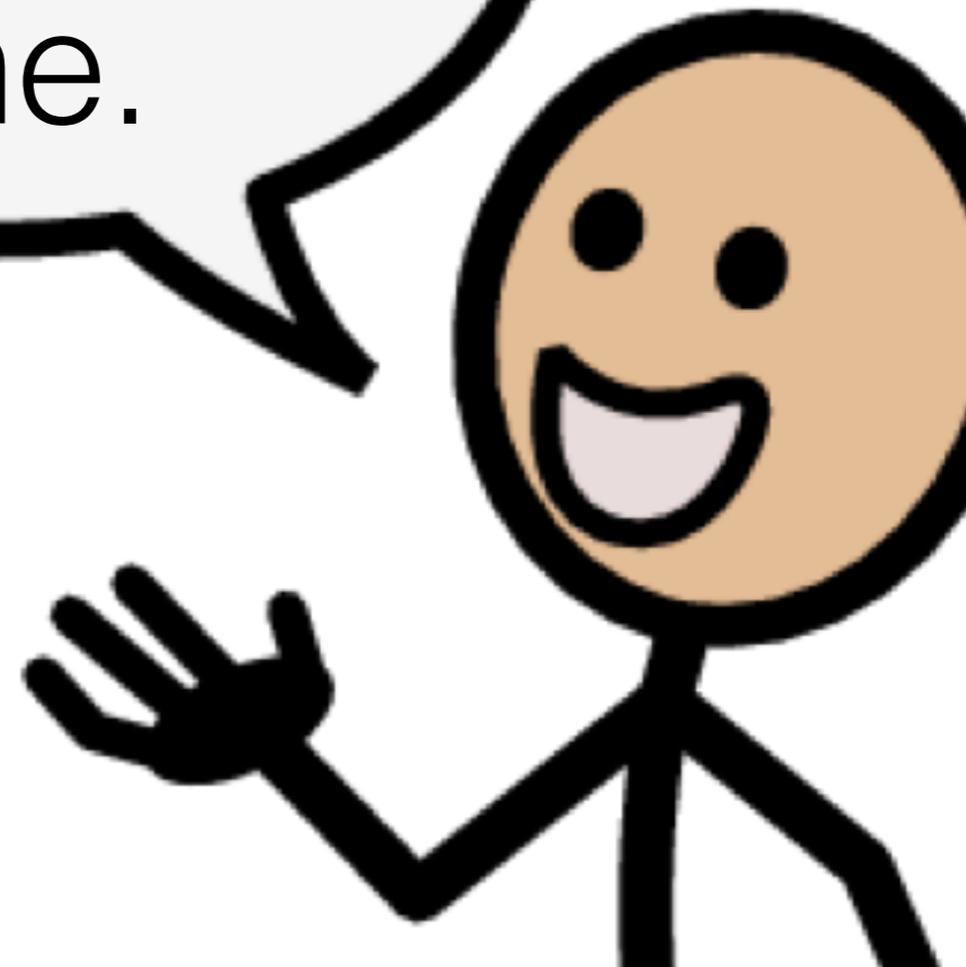
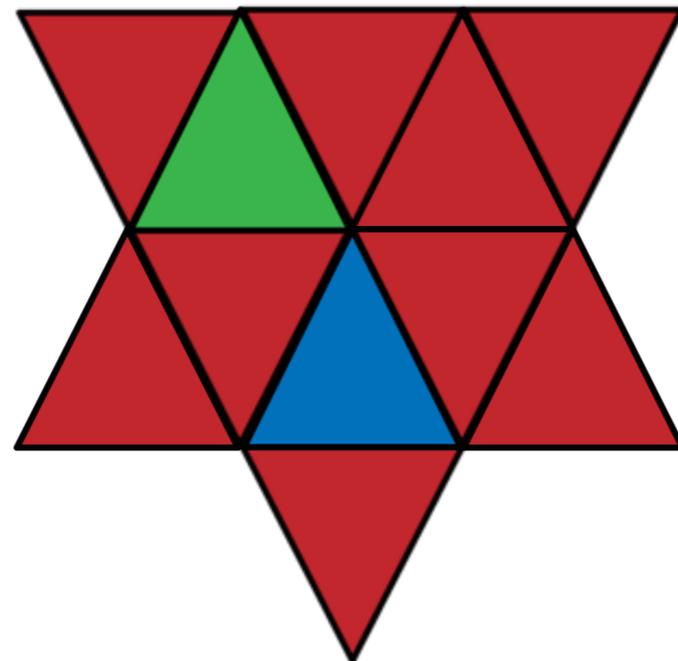


# Will anyone say “thank you”?



I can't triangle up. We need to do something different.

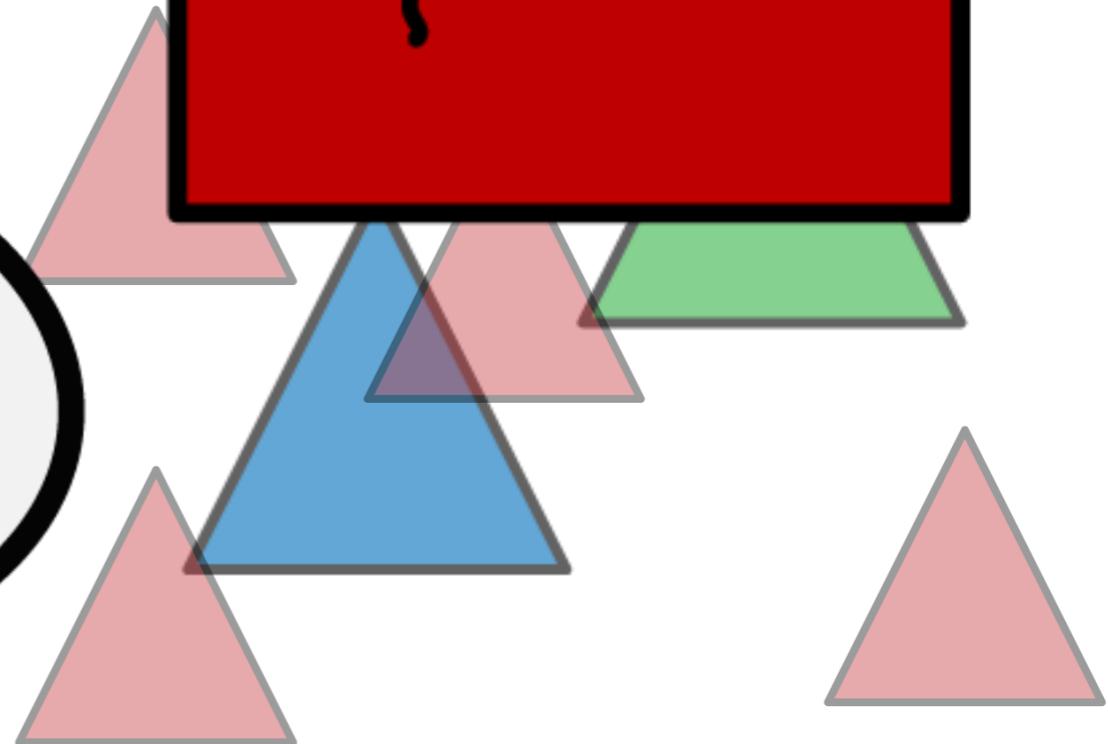
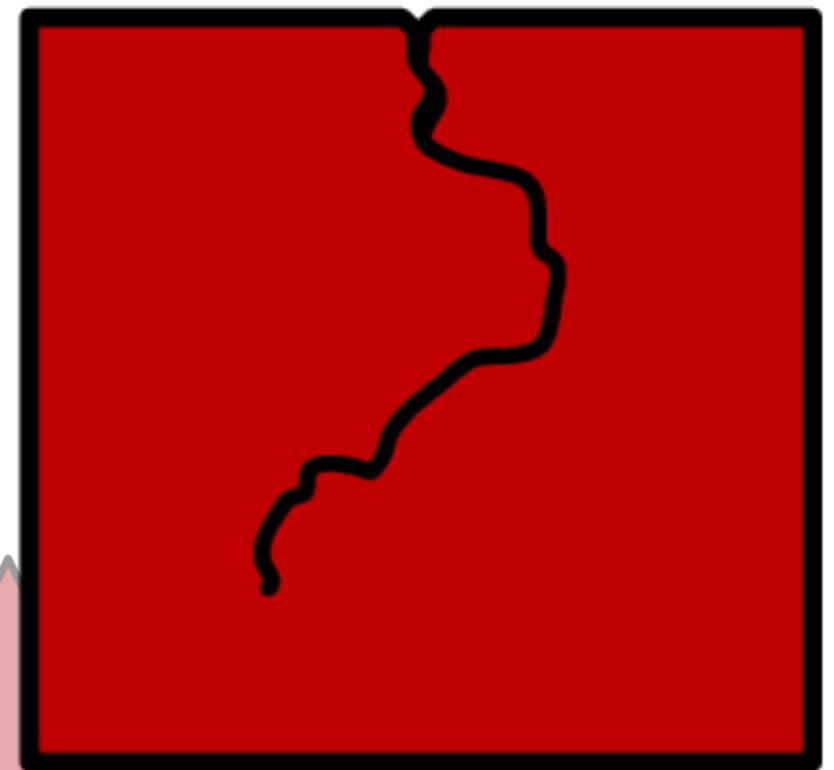
Thank you for telling me.



Will I get credit for the work I'm doing to make the school more inclusive?

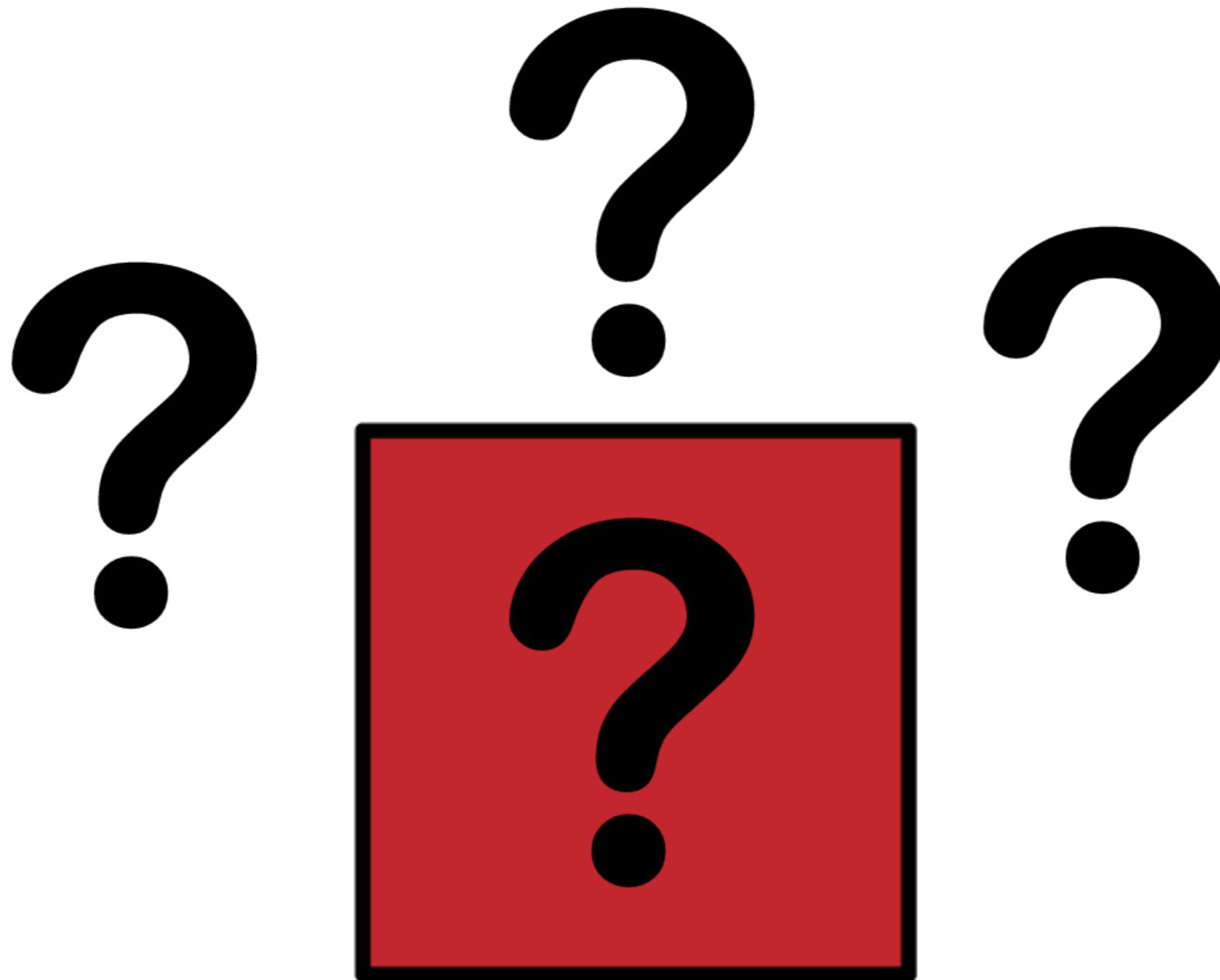
I know it's been hard to be a square here. Thank you for sticking with it.

Your work is making things much better for future squares.



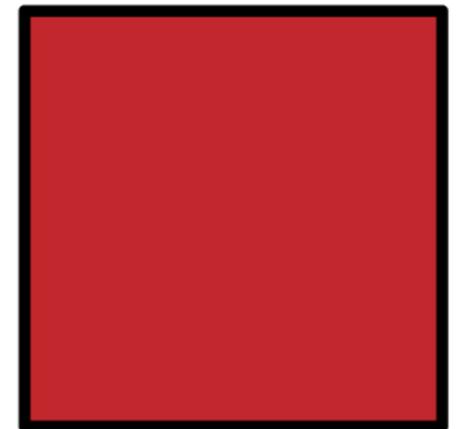
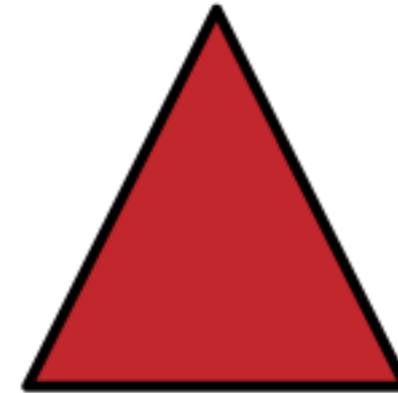
Is it going to be ok to be a square here, even when it means making difficult changes to the program?

**Does “all learners” have room for me?**



# Getting out of the metaphor zone.

- Squares and triangles are metaphors.
- We can't include metaphors in our classrooms.
- We can only include real students.
- Disability is part of reality.





# Disability isn't special. It's just taboo.



- Teaching kids with disabilities is just part of teaching.
- Disability is hard to talk about because it's taboo.
- You don't have to be a special kind of person to get better at teaching kids with disabilities.
- You just have to keep working on improving your skills and solving problems.

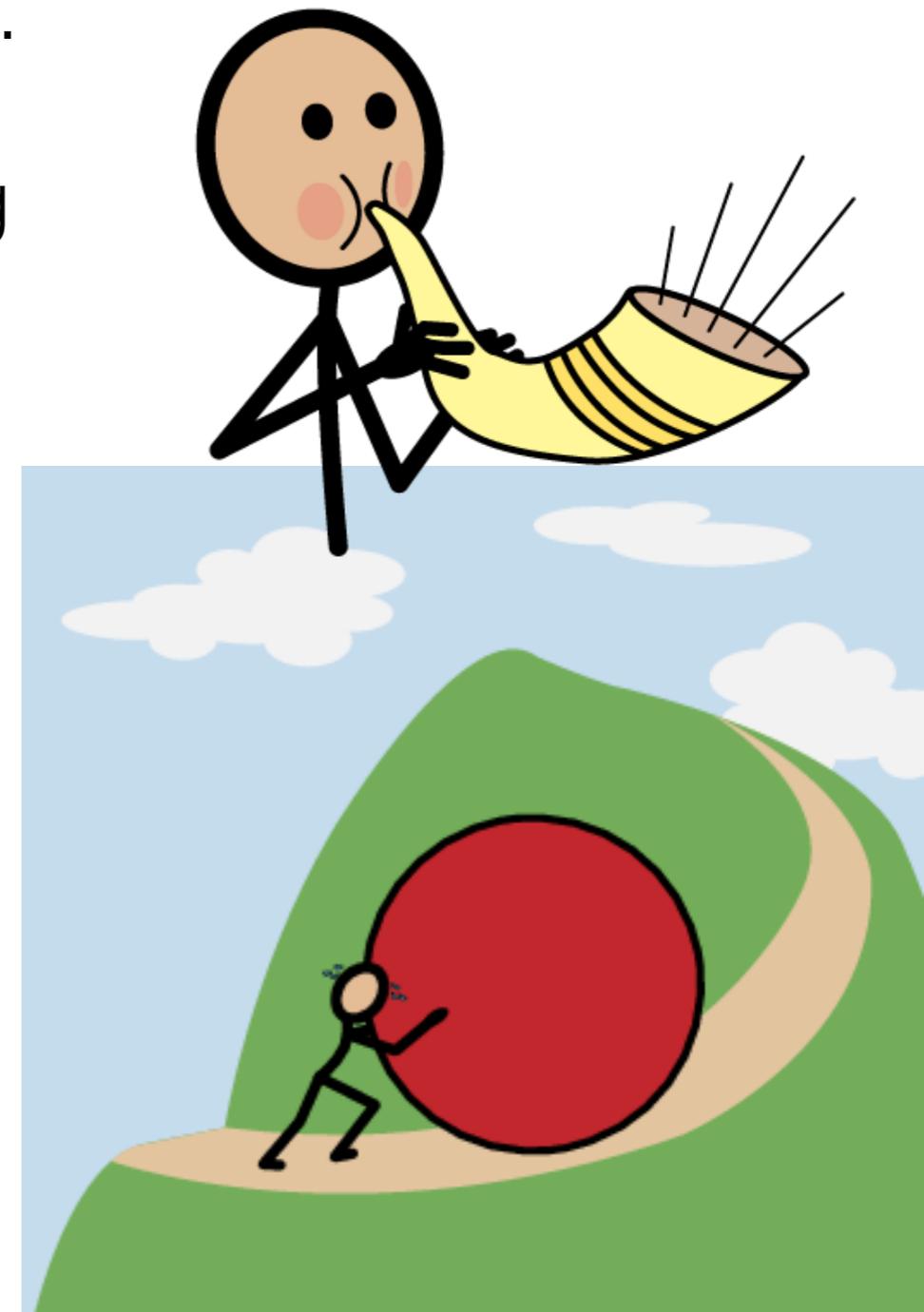
# Remember that your existing skills are useful

- If you're reading this, you probably know how to:
- Respond constructively when students are upset
- Make teaching mistakes and recover from them.
- Adapt activities and lessons for learners of different ages and backgrounds.
- Keep in mind that developmental stages are not personal attacks. (And neither is disability).
- Switch gears midstream when an activity isn't working.
- All of these problem-solving skills, and more, can be applied to new disability-related educational problems.



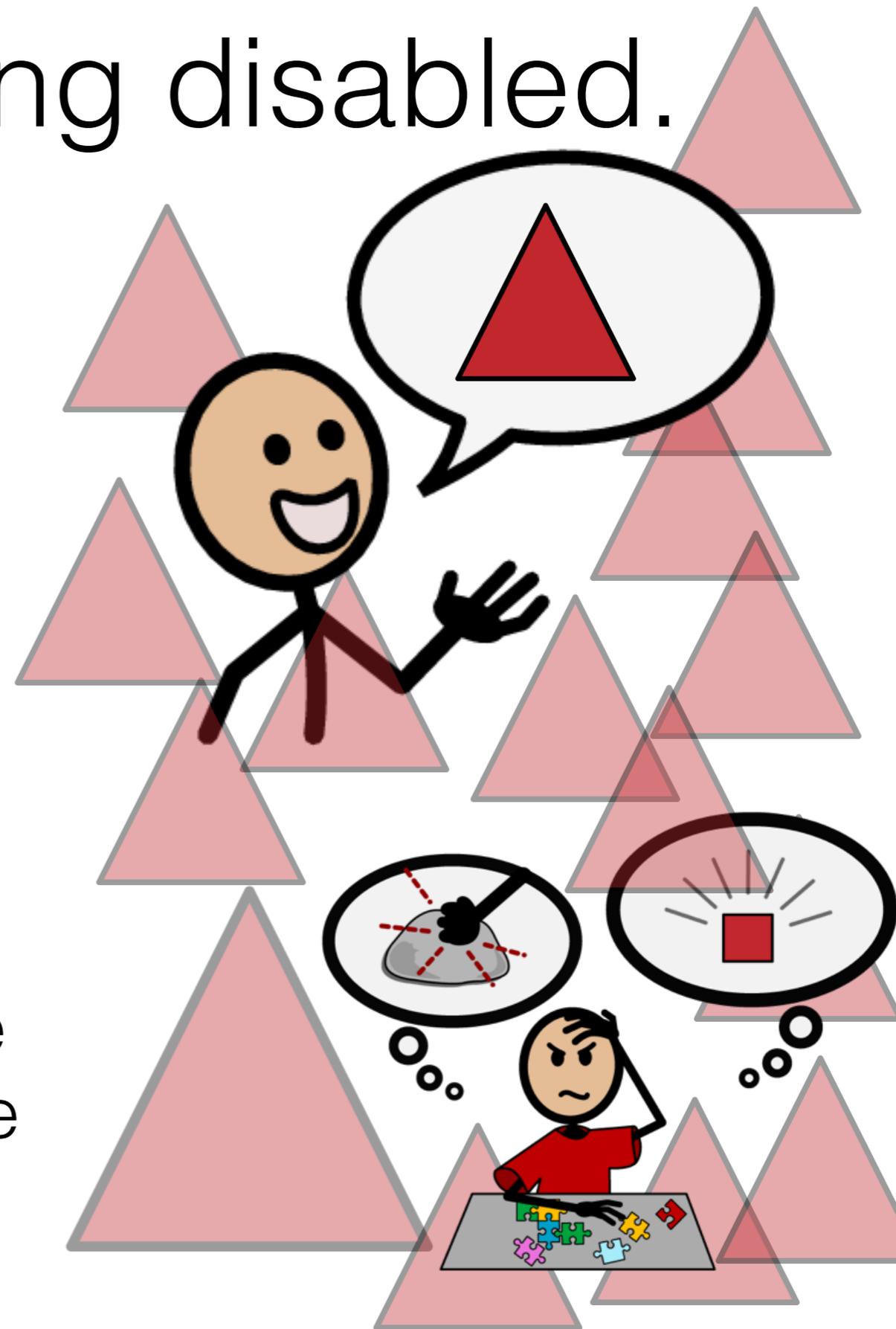
# Teshuva for the sins of previous generations.

- We never had to exclude kids from school.
- We made the wrong choice for a very long time.
- We're scrambling to create infrastructure that should have been built alongside everything else.
- We're scrambling to figure things out that should have been figured out over centuries.
- It's not your fault that this is hard.

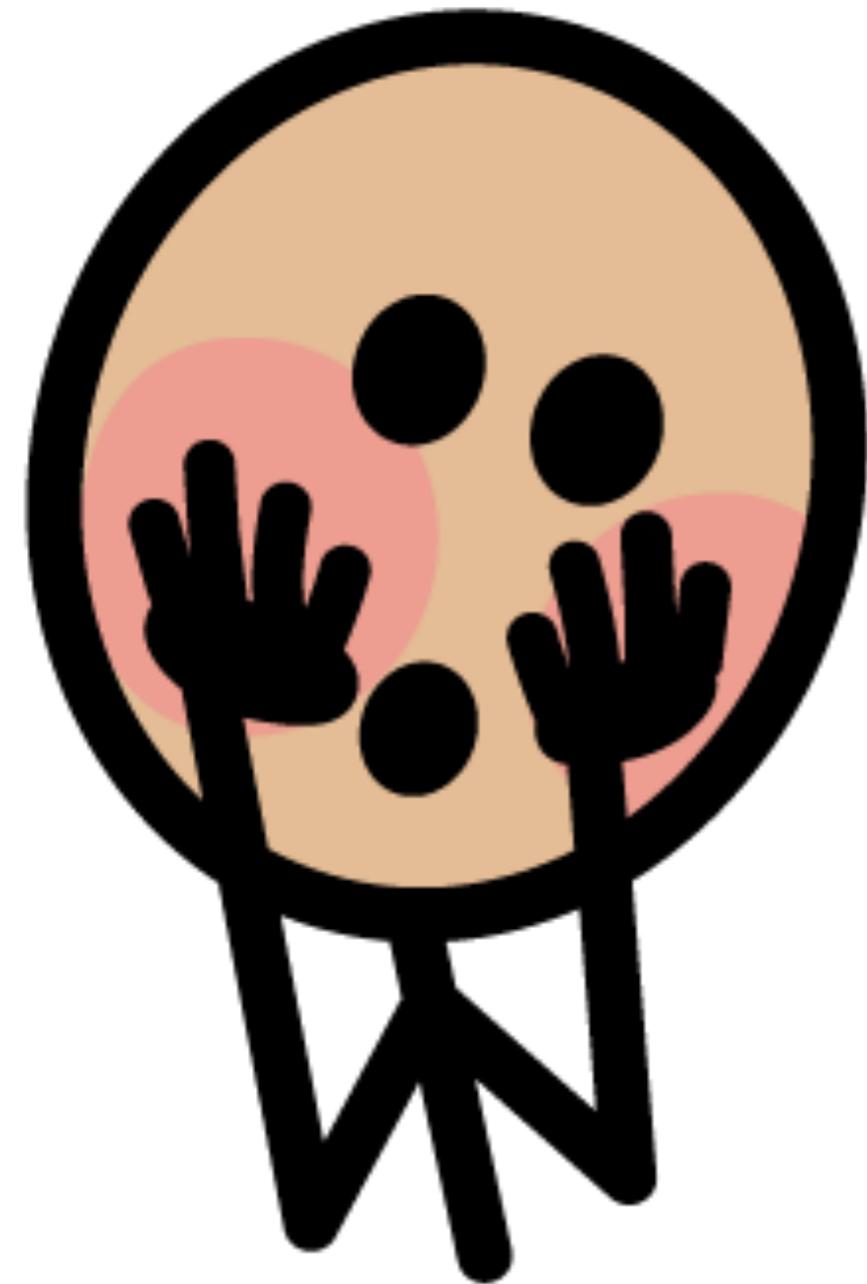


# Disabled kids didn't create this situation by being disabled.

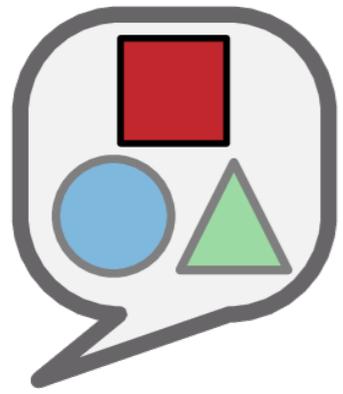
- Kids should be able to assume schools and teachers will know how to teach them.
- Kids with disabilities can't even count on being welcome at all.
- This isn't your fault — or theirs.
- Don't expect disabled kids to be grateful for things kids should be able to take for granted.



# Don't let fear of saying the wrong thing become silence.

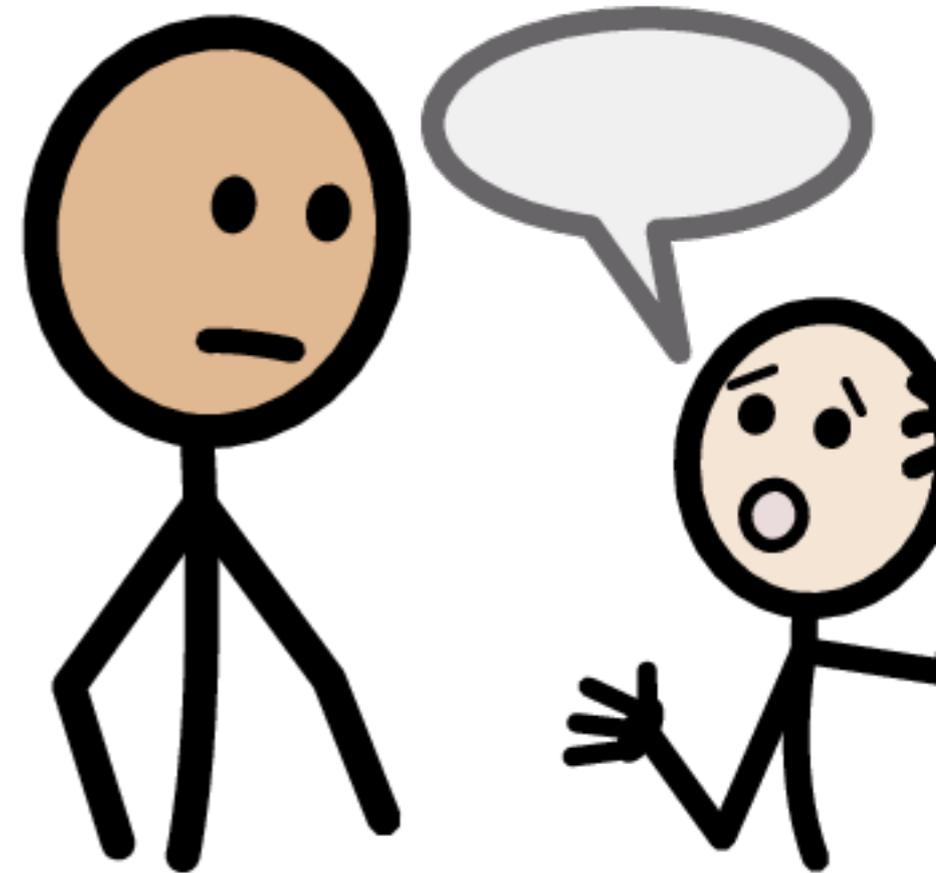


- Disability is a taboo topic.
- \*Anything\* you say is going to violate the taboo to some extent.
- It might feel really embarrassing at first.
- It gets easier.
- As a teacher, you've probably had to learn to discuss other taboo topics.



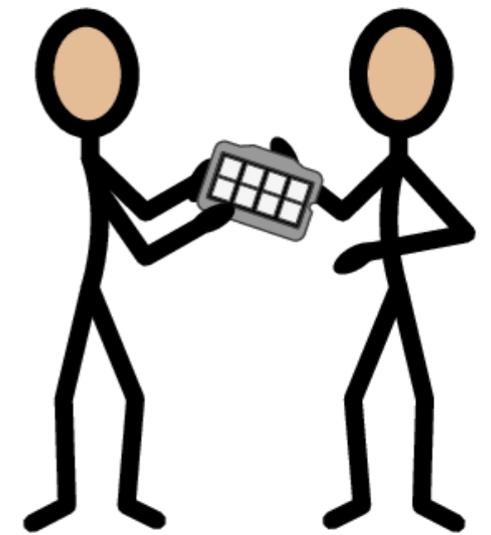
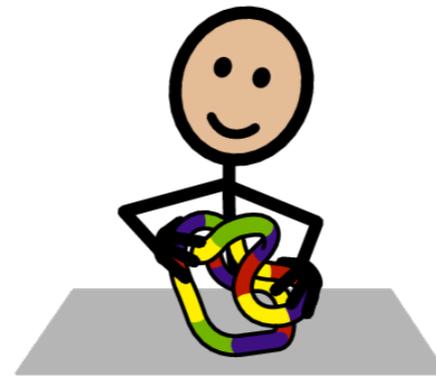
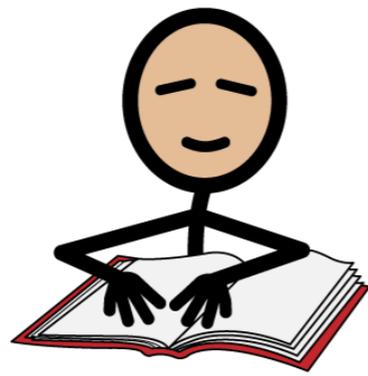
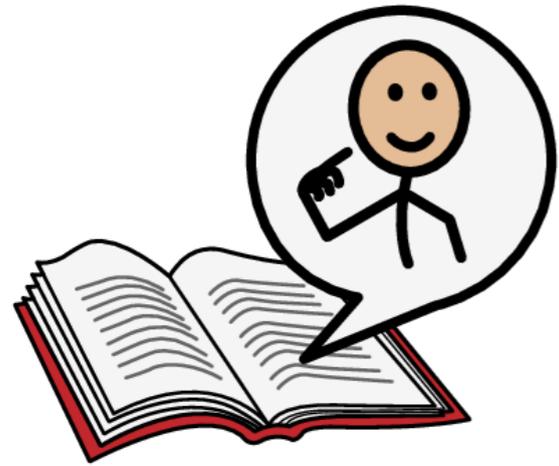
# Upsetting people isn't the end of the world.

- It's impossible to talk about disability without ever upsetting anyone.
- Sometimes you will make mistakes that are hurtful to students with disabilities.
- Sometimes you will upset people who resent accessibility and/or disabled students.
- All of this is better than silence.
- Difficult conversations are part of the work of inclusion.

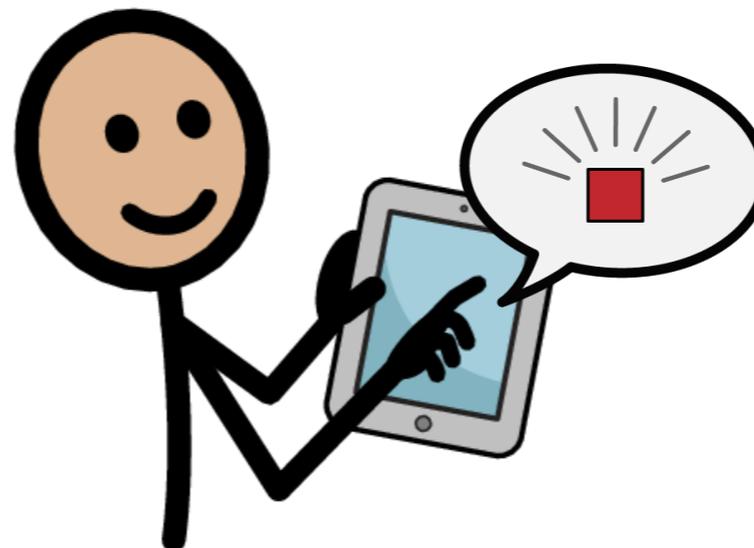
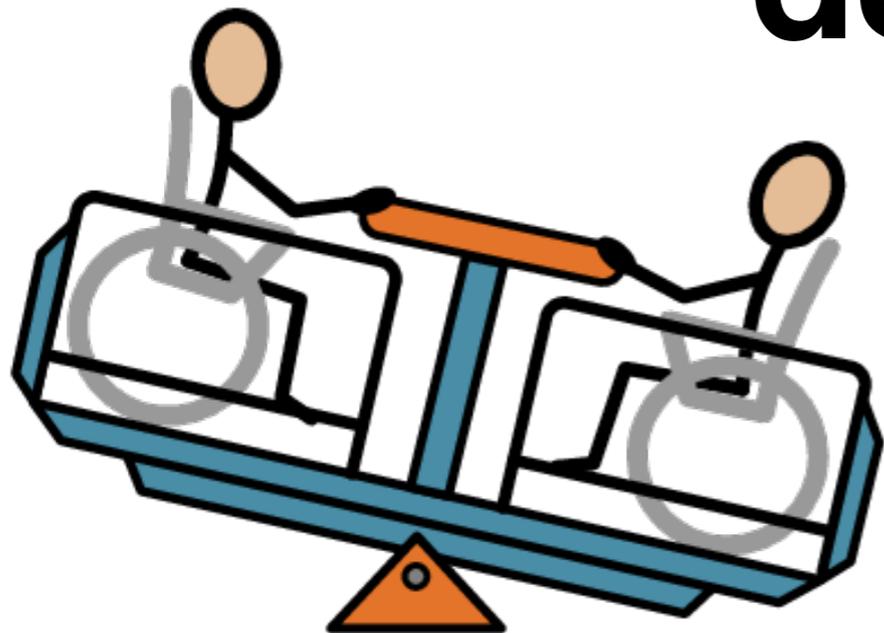
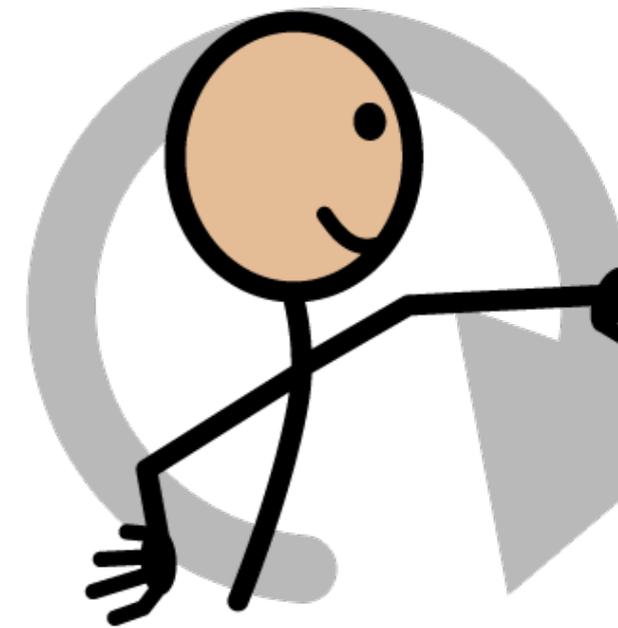
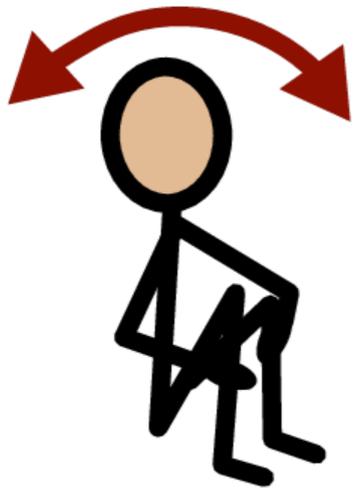


Sometimes inclusion is something we have to fight for.





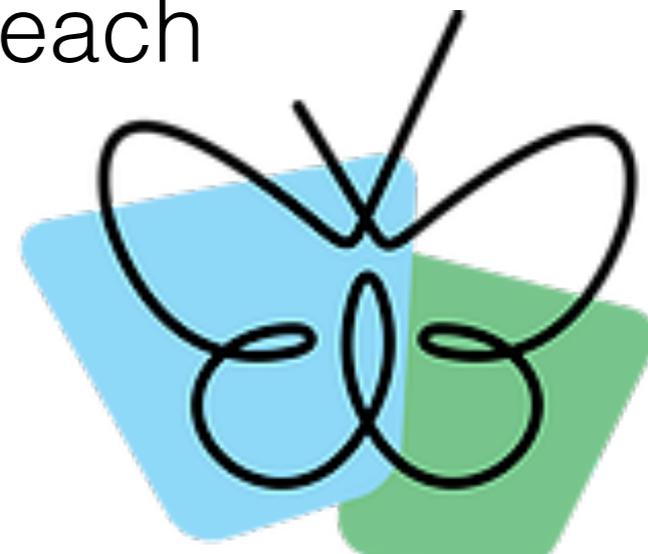
**It is not upon us  
to complete the  
work, but neither  
are we free to  
desist from it.**



# Matan Jewish Disability Acceptance and Inclusion Pledge

- I acknowledge that ability, disability and humanity coexist, and I pledge to see my students as they are.
- I will not look past their disabilities; I will seek to understand. I will not overlook their abilities; I will seek to support them effectively.
- I will not ignore the humanity of my students; I will remember that they have individual interests and a perspective of their own and that they were each created in the image of God.

matan





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- Lots of Jewish content

