



## Featured Teacher: Jever Pabilan

*"To any teacher considering a classbook project, I wholeheartedly recommend it, especially if you teach students with exceptional needs."*

### Cast of Characters

Second-grade students in Glendale Campus, AZ.

### Background and Setting

Pabilan has been a special education teacher for 13 years.

### Memorable Learning

"Their smiles, laughter and pride made it clear this was more than just a book. It was a day of confidence, recognition and lifelong memories."



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### History in the Making

Pabilan's special education class reached a historic milestone at The Academy of Math and Science with the publication of their classbook, *We Are Exceptional*, authored entirely by his second-grade students. The classbook marks the first time students from the school's special education program have come together to publish a collective work.

*We Are Exceptional* centers on a deeply personal theme: what makes each student unique. Students used their own voices to celebrate their talents, dreams and identities through imaginative short stories, heartfelt reflections and expressive illustrations.

"This book wasn't just about writing mechanics; it was about empowerment, self-advocacy and pride," said Pabilan.

"Seeing their names in print gave my students a profound sense of accomplishment and reminded them that their stories matter."

### Finding Power in Self-Expression

For Pabilan and his class, the publishing process was as transformative as the final product. He noted that the journey of crafting the classbook became a powerful outlet for self-expression and discovery.

"While many of my students were not yet comfortable expressing themselves verbally, something magical happened when they were given a pencil and paper; their imaginations took flight," Pabilan recalled. "Some students created entire storylines through drawings, while others paired illustrations with powerful, heart-felt phrases like, 'I'm smart even when it's hard to show it.' That's when I knew we had something special to share."

What began as simple brainstorming sessions, highlighting each students' unique talents and personalities, soon evolved into a vibrant collection of stories featuring superheroes, scientists, future educators and courageous young voices.



## Transformative Writing

Publishing a classbook proved to be a turning point for many of the young authors involved, jumpstarting growth in both their writing skills and confidence.

“For several of my students, this project made a real difference,” said Pabilan. “One student who had struggled with spelling and often felt discouraged during writing time began using phonics tools and working with peers to express his ideas.”

Another student, who spoke very little in class, used bold illustrations and simple, powerful language to share her perspective. Her story became one of the standout entries in the book; a reminder, her teacher said, “that every voice has something meaningful to say.”

Through the process of writing, illustrating and presenting their work, students not only developed stronger literacy skills but also discovered a deeper sense of purpose and belonging, extending far beyond the pages of the book.

## Confidence, Recognition and Lifelong Memories

Right before holiday break, Pabilan hosted a celebration in his classroom to mark a defining moment in his students’ writing journey: a publishing party!

Although the students believed they were gathering for a small holiday celebration, Pabilan had planned a sweet surprise. When they entered the room, they were met with festive decorations and tables of treats.

“Their eyes sparkled with pride and disbelief as I revealed the final surprise: the printed copies of our classroom book, *We Are Exceptional!*,” Pabilan said.

To showcase their growth, the classroom featured a gallery wall displaying each students’ writing journey, from early brainstorming pages to their final pieces. The transformation highlighted not only their improved writing skills but also their creativity and dedication.

As the celebration continued, several students stepped up to read their stories aloud, earning cheers from their classmates. Pabilan said, “One student, once quiet and hesitant, stood before the group and proudly declared, ‘This is my story. I wrote this.’”

“It was a moment that silenced us with awe,” said Pabilan. “Their smiles, laughter and pride made it clear this was more than just a book. It was a day of confidence, recognition and lifelong memories.”

## Reflection

For teachers considering a classbook, the results can be powerful, especially in classrooms that serve students with exceptional needs. Pabilan recalled the publishing process, saying, “The entire process was joyful, creative and deeply meaningful for every child involved.”

“My most significant piece of advice is to meet your students where they are and build from their strengths,” he shared. “Keep writing sessions fun and relaxed, and break tasks into small, manageable steps so no one feels overwhelmed.”



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The activity helped many of his students see themselves as writers for the very first time. "They rose to the occasion with pride," he said. "Watching their confidence grow was magical."

His message to fellow educators is clear: "I wholeheartedly recommend it."

## Empowered Learners and Lifelong Authors

What began as a simple classbook activity quickly became something much more meaningful for this second-grade class.

"This project was so much more than just publishing a book; it was a turning point," he said. "For many of my students, it was the first time they saw themselves as successful writers, storytellers and creators."

Parents also took notice. "For the first time, I see my son proud of something academic," one parent shared, a moment that Pabilan described as deeply meaningful. "That single sentence speaks volumes," he said. "It represents what this journey was truly about: recognition, confidence and lasting pride."

The experience of publishing a classbook left a lasting impression. "It reminded my students that their thoughts, their stories and they matter," he said. "The joy, growth and sense of accomplishment we experienced will stay with us forever."

And perhaps most exciting of all: "This is only the beginning of their journey as empowered learners and lifelong authors."



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