



# The **Awesome Powers** of **Ethan Z.**

**UP CLOSE** **Being Powerful** What does it mean to be powerful? How is Ethan powerful? Think about this as you read.

**LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 5 WORDS IN BOLD**

**Born with two fingers instead of ten, Ethan Zucker has learned that being different makes him just like you**

By **Lauren Tarshis**

**T**here are a few things you'll notice right away when you spend time with fourth-grader Ethan Zucker. First, there are his bright green eyes. They are the eyes of a person who will keep your secrets, listen to your worries, and laugh at your jokes.

You'll see that he is a good shot in basketball, that he can dribble a ball between his legs. You'll admire his room filled with cool treasures—a map of the universe that glows in the dark, a model of the solar system, pictures of him and his brother and sister on their favorite beach.

And you'll notice Ethan's hands. They aren't like your hands, or the hands of any of

All photos by Carey Kikela/Getty Images for Scholastic

your friends. They are unique and **fascinating**. Instead of having five fingers on each hand, Ethan has one. Those two fingers appear longer than any of your fingers. The rest of each hand is smooth and rounded, like a rock you might find by a river and keep on a shelf in your room.

Ethan can do almost everything with his two fingers that you can do with ten. Ethan can, for example, dribble a basketball, play video games, type on a computer, play tennis, help his mom with the dishes, play rock-paper-scissors, throw a baseball and football, play card games, shoot a water gun, ride a bike, play

### STORYWORKS SCIENCE

## How Ethan Got His Hands



Ever wonder why you look like you? The answer is that you inherited your eye color, your height, and thousands of other traits from your parents.

Your parents passed these traits down to you through chemicals known as “genes.” Genes are almost like computer codes that tell your body how to develop.

There are genes for tens of thousands of different human traits. And it was a gene that caused Ethan’s hands to develop in their unique way. Ethan’s condition is known as **ectrodactyly**.

He inherited it from his mom, who has the same condition.

The chemicals containing genes are known as DNA. (left) This is a picture of what these chemicals look like under a microscope.



miniature golf, Boogie Board in the ocean, and go fishing. He can high-five.

Ethan understands that people are curious about his hands. Why wouldn’t they be? Seeing Ethan’s hands for the first time is like seeing a gold race car speeding down your street. Your brain says, “Wow! I’ve never seen that before!”

### Like the Burning Hot Sun

Ethan is used to strangers staring at his hands. But he doesn’t like the feeling. Imagine if everyone stared at the freckle on your nose or the scar on your ankle. After a while, all those eyes on you would feel like the burning hot sun. You’d want to move into the shade.

So if you just can’t stop yourself from staring, Ethan would like you to simply walk right up to him and say hi.

He would like you to say, in a polite voice, “How did your hands get that way?”

He will tell you what he tells anyone who asks him that question:

“I was born this way.”

He was born with his two fingers just as you were born with your blue or brown eyes, or your straight or curly hair, or your funny laugh, or the gap between your front teeth. And just as you wouldn’t want to have to talk forever about your blue or brown eyes, or your straight or curly hair, or your funny laugh, or the gap between your teeth, Ethan would rather not spend tons of time talking about his hands. He’d like you to get used to them so that you can start talking about other things, like Harry Potter or basketball or World War I.

Most kids do exactly this.

A few kids don’t.

Like the kid who saw Ethan at swimming class and called him a monster. Or the kid on the playground who said he looked “creepy.”

Why do some kids act this way?

This is one of the mysteries of the universe. But we’ve all met kids like this. It’s



Clockwise from top left: Ethan wrestling with his sister, Savanna, 4; posing with his family on the beach; hanging with his buddy Roger; playing with his brother, Charlie, 6.



that boy who said your new sneakers were lame, that girl who whispered to her friend and laughed when you walked by. They are the kids who think it’s fun to make someone feel *this big*.

Maybe nobody taught these kids how to act. Or probably, secretly, inside their hearts, these mean kids feel *this big* themselves. Maybe making someone else feel bad for being different makes them feel a little bigger.

Over time, Ethan has come to realize it doesn’t do much good to worry about why these kids act this way. What’s important is to figure out how to deal with them.

Here’s what Ethan does.

He tells himself that if a person can’t accept him, then that person isn’t a friend. And if that person isn’t a friend, he shouldn’t care about what that person thinks of him.

Sounds simple. Just don’t care.

But it takes practice. Luckily for Ethan, he had an expert to practice with: his mom.

### “I Don’t Care”

Ethan’s mom, Meg, looks like a beautiful actress on a TV show. She is a lawyer who works to fight **terrorism**. Her hands are like Ethan’s.

Ethan’s mom has had plenty of practice dealing with burning hot stares and people who don’t know how to act.

In the days after that boy called him a monster at swimming, Ethan and his mom spent hours practicing how he could respond. They worked like actors **rehearsing** for a play.

His mom would call him names.

And Ethan would say back, “I don’t care what you think about me.”

Over time, Ethan learned to say these words in exactly the right tone of voice. Not mad or

Right top & bottom Courtesy Zucker family

WRITE A PARAGRAPH

Sentence Chef



Directions:

1. Read "The Awesome Powers of Ethan Z." Then reread the section titled "I Don't Care," and do the Sentence Chef activity below.
2. Use the color-coded boxes and lines as guides to help you write each part of the paragraph.
3. Remember to back up your statements by including information and details found in the article.
4. When you're finished, copy the entire paragraph onto a separate piece of paper.

THE PROMPT

What are Ethan's awesome powers?

**Topic Sentence** With help from his mom, Ethan Zucker developed the power to ignore mean behavior from people concerning his hands.

**Supporting Sentence 1** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Explain how Ethan's mom helped him come up with good responses to mean behavior.

**Detail Sentence 1** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Provide a detail about this. (Hint: What does Ethan say in response to teasing or name-calling?)

**Supporting Sentence 2** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Describe how using that response helped Ethan to feel more powerful.

**Detail Sentence 2** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Provide a detail about this. (Hint: How does Ethan cope with bullying and rude behavior now?)

**Concluding Sentence** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Repeat the topic sentence, but in different words.

Lance Leander

ETHAN'S TIPS

How to Deal With Bullies



- ▶ **If people are rude,** accept that you won't be able to control them. Try not to show them your feelings. Walk away. Talk to a grown-up if they don't stop.
- ▶ **Remind yourself** that truly happy kids are never intentionally mean. So the problem is not yours, it's theirs.
- ▶ **Get busy** with things you really enjoy. Kids will focus more on what you are doing than on how you look.
- ▶ **Practice** dealing with kids who are mean. Ask your parent or your best friend to play the role of the mean kid. This will help you figure out what to say.



▶ **When kids ask you questions** about the thing that makes you different, answer them, but also ask them about themselves; start a regular conversation.

hurt. Just plain, with a shrug. He'd say, "I don't care what you think about me" the way you'd say, "I don't care for cauliflower."

Ethan said the words over and over again. He didn't really believe those words at first. But as he practiced, he felt a power growing inside him—the power of knowing that what some rude kid thinks is of no use to him. There will always be those few people who don't know how to act. Ethan can't control them. But he can control how he responds to them, how their stares or mean words make him feel.

Not long ago, Ethan had a chance to test his not-caring powers.

He was at a birthday party with many kids he had never met before. He felt some people staring at him, and at first he wanted to put his hands in his pockets. Then he decided that rather than feeling **ashamed**, he would take their stares as a challenge. He made sure he kept his hands front and center so that everyone could see them. He kept focusing on all the fun he was having with his friends. He decided not to waste his time caring what those other kids thought.

He not only had a great time at the party, but he also felt a sense of **accomplishment**. He had met the challenge.

Since then, Ethan has come to a realization: Everyone has something different about them, something that isn't so easy to manage. Maybe it's not right out front for everyone to see. It could be a learning problem, or asthma, or being shy, or a fear of dogs, or a sick parent, or being a boy who hates sports, or a girl who can't dance or do gymnastics, or feeling **this big** for no reason.

Being different, Ethan realized, isn't so different at all. Being different makes him like everyone else. Being different, in fact, makes Ethan just like you. ●

WRITE TO WIN!

What are Ethan's "awesome powers"? Send your answer in a well-organized paragraph to "Ethan Contest" by Nov. 15, 2011. We'll send 10 winners a copy of *Powerless* by Matthew Cody. See page 2 for details.



GET THIS CONTEST ONLINE

USE SENTENCE CHEF ON THE NEXT PAGE TO HELP YOU!