



Why Diverse Books Matter

A Resource Guide for Families and Educators

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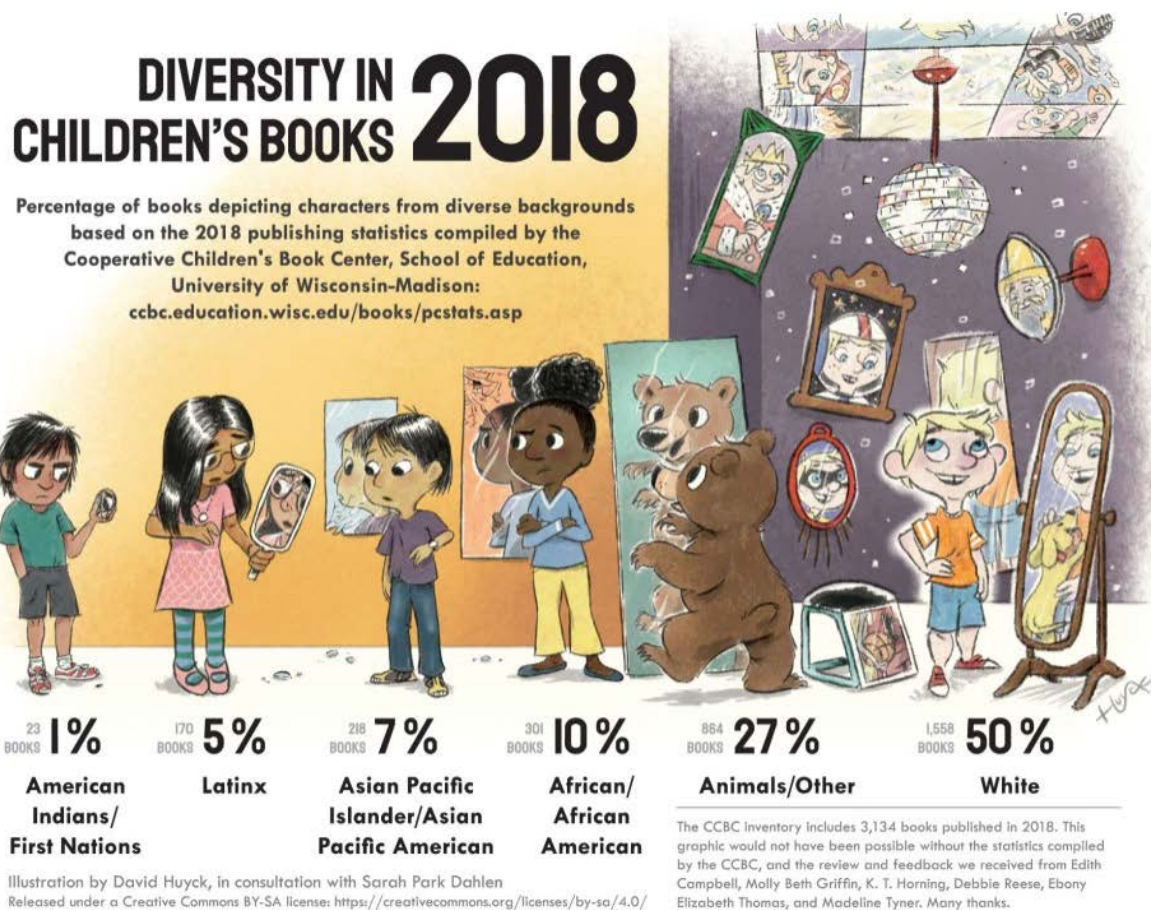
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Mirrors and windows

Our world is full of stories. Stories shape our beliefs about ourselves and others. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop describes children's books as "mirrors" and "windows." Children need "mirrors" to see themselves and their unique cultures reflected back. They also need "windows" to gaze into worlds and experiences different from their own. White children have always had an immense variety of mirrors, while children from diverse backgrounds have experienced a chronic shortage.

Most children's books—even the ones more recently published—don't tell diverse stories (CCBC). Out of over 3,000 books published in 2018, young readers were still more likely to see an animal or a truck in a picturebook than a child of color.

Here's where YOU come in. It takes intentional, proactive effort by families, teachers, and faith leaders to seek out multicultural books.



Benefits of diverse children's books

Why do we need diversity in children's literature? Why should we be intentional about making sure our kids read a variety of "mirror" and "window" books?

The positive effects of "mirror" books for children of color are well-documented. Benefits include **heightened self-esteem and racial pride**¹ as well as a **greater enthusiasm and love for reading**.² However, without exposure to characters of color, children of all races falsely understand White as the default, normal existence and conclude that everyone else must be *different*.

Quality multicultural books can **dispute harmful stereotypes** through "counter-storytelling," breaking down barriers between cultural groups.³ In this way, multicultural children's literature can do more than simply celebrate or represent a culture; these books can actually challenge the status quo.

Keep in mind, glossing over racial conflict or remaining silent about the realities of racism is not a productive strategy for parents and caregivers who want to raise children with minimal bias.⁴ In fact, openly discussing race with children can correct faulty assumptions.⁵ Diverse books provide a natural entry point for **engaging complex conversations** in an age-appropriate manner.

- PBS Parents offers a variety of articles and video resources:
<https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>
- National Museum of African American History and Culture has an online toolkit for "Talking About Race":
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>

¹ Rudine Sims Bishop, 2003. Reframing the debate about cultural authenticity in children's literature.

² Wanda Brooks and Jonda C. McNair, 2009. But This Story of Mine Is Not Unique': A Review of Research on African American Children's Literature.

³ Melanie Koss, 2015. Diversity in contemporary picturebooks: A content analysis

⁴ Brigitte Vittrup, 2015. How silence can breed prejudice: A child development professor explains how and why to talk to kids about race

⁵ Rebecca S. Bigler and Lynn S. Liben, 2006. A Developmental Intergroup Theory of Social Stereotypes and Prejudice

Educate yourself

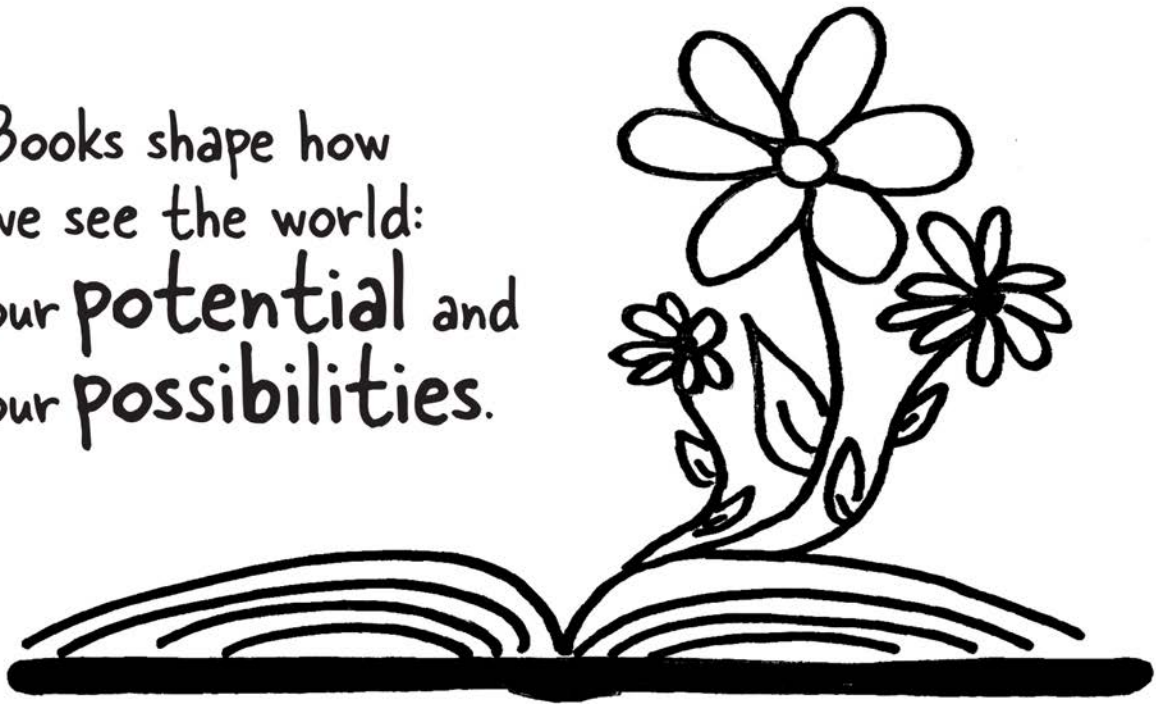
As an adult—especially if you are White and were raised to be “colorblind”—you might need to expand your own knowledge base to be equipped for conversations about race with your children or students.

1. Can you commit to **give preference and priority to reading books written by non-White authors** for the next 3–6 months? Beyond books, seek out other forms of narratives: Watch TV shows and documentaries. Visit museums and art galleries. Read blogs and listen to podcasts. Explore different music than you usually listen to. This challenge could be a profound immersion experience in discovering “windows.”
2. **Go online and take Harvard’s 10-min “Project Implicit: Race” test.** Anti-Black bias shows up in 75% of people tested. Regardless of the test-taker’s race, there are strong positive associations toward people of European descent (White people). Conversely, people of African descent (Black people) are associated with low leadership capacity, lack of character, poverty, and criminality. It is eye-opening to take this test and realize how we are affected by our racialized society; it is like “smog in the air” (Tatum). <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
3. **Read an interview with Beverly Daniel Tatum, “Race: The Power of an Illusion”** www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-03-04.htm
4. **Listen to podcast episodes on race and healing from On Being:** <https://onbeing.org/libraries/race-healing>
5. **Join the Be the Bridge Facebook Group** to better understand racial inequities within the U.S. www.facebook.com/groups/BetheBridge/

1. **Racism** depends on two tenets:
a belief in the **inherent superiority** of some people
and the **inherent inferiority** of others
2. the acceptance of distributing goods and services—
let alone respect—in accordance with such
judgments of unequal worth

Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education
Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, 2018

Books shape how
we see the world:
our **potential** and
our **possibilities**.



“We know that the **visual and verbal messages** young children absorb heavily influence their ideas about themselves and others. Children’s books teach children about who is important, who matters, who is even visible.”

– Louise Derman-Sparks

<http://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books>

Sample book evaluation

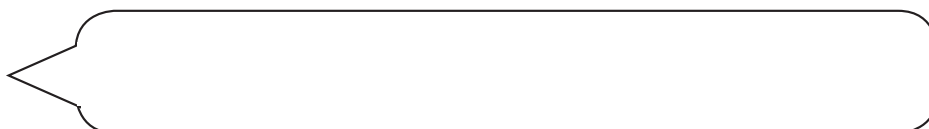
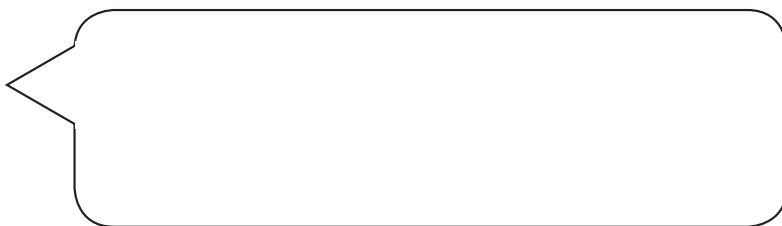
BOOK TITLE			
AUTHOR	ILLUSTRATOR		
Is the author a member of the cultural group being portrayed?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Is the illustrator a member of the cultural group being portrayed?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
What is the copyright date?			
Is this book free from offensive expressions, negative attitudes or stereotypes? <i>Look out for loaded words like "savage," "lazy," "silly" and "bashful."</i> **	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Is there historical accuracy/authenticity, to the best of your knowledge?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Are the characters presented as real human beings, as opposed to two-dimensional "hero/exceptional" or "victim/oppressed"?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Does the story include words and phrases true to the culture it depicts? <i>Extra points if there's a glossary and/or pronunciation guide in the back!</i>	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Does the book specifically name the cultural roots of the group being depicted? <i>For example: Demonstrates an awareness of the customs, history, dress and ways of speaking of a particular Native American nation rather than generic "Indians."</i>	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Is the book careful not to set two racial/ethnic groups in opposition with each other? <i>All x are bad and all y are good.</i>	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
Does the story acknowledge diversity of experiences within a cultural group? <i>Watch out for broad statements like all people in this group have these values or believe this to be true.</i>	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Not sure
What age range would this book be suitable for?			
Would I want my child to read this independently or with me?			
Is this book a "mirror" or a "window" for my child?*** <i>A mirror helps the child see a character like himself/herself. A window helps the child see into the world of a child unlike himself/herself.</i>			
Other observations about this book:			

* Evaluation adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Head Start: National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

***"Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors" by Rudine Sims Bishop, Ohio State University.

IMAGINE A CONVERSATION
YOU'D HAVE WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT THIS BOOK

Write down what your child might ask and how you might answer them.
Or, start with what you might say and how your child might respond.



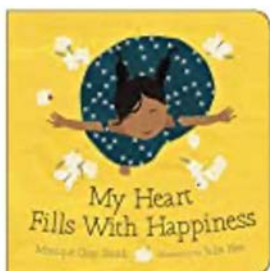
Book Recommendations

**Build your own “diverse library”
at home and in the classroom**

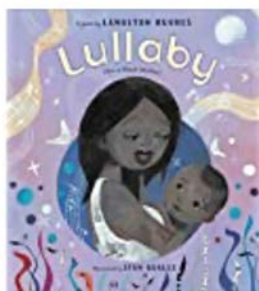
Note: Because anti-Black bias is so prevalent in U.S. mainstream culture, many of the books on this list (although not all) feature Black protagonists and themes. By request, I’ve also included books from a Judeo-Christian perspective.

Book Recommendations

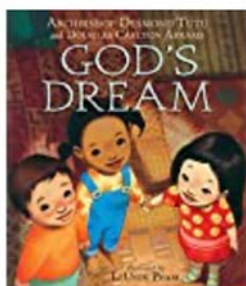
Babies & Toddlers



My Heart Fills With Happiness by Monique Gray Smith, Julie Flett



Lullaby (For a Black Mother) by Langston Hughes, Sean Qualls



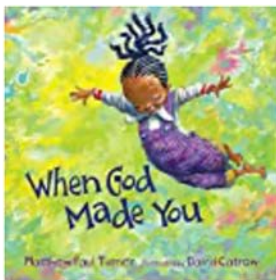
God's Dream by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Douglas Carlton Abrams

Book Recommendations

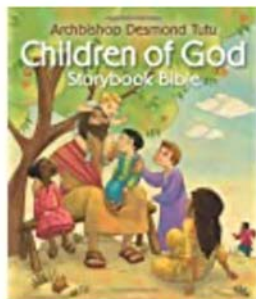
Preschoolers



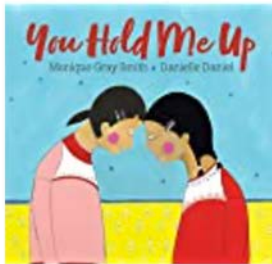
The Marvelous Mustard Seed by Amy-Jill Levine



When God Made You by Matthew Paul Turner



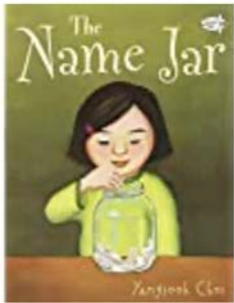
Children of God Storybook Bible by Archbishop Desmond Tutu



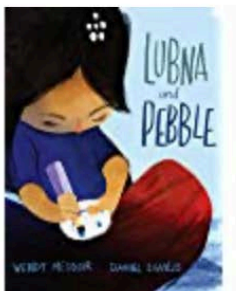
You Hold Me Up by Monique Gray Smith



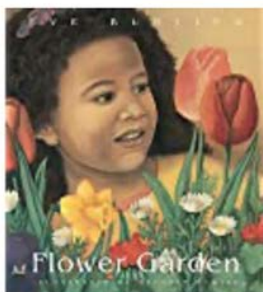
Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match by Monica Brown



The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi



Lubna and Pebble by Wendy Meddour



The Flower Garden by Eve Bunting

Book Recommendations

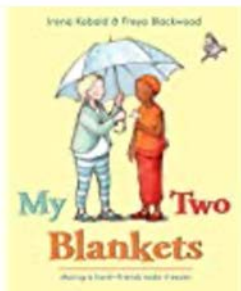
Ages 5-7 (K-2nd)



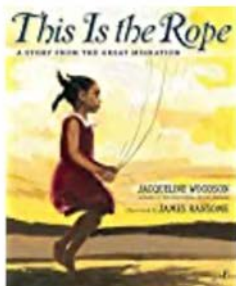
Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice
by Marianne Celano Ph.D., Marrietta Collins, Ph.D.



I'm New Here by Anne Sibley O'Brien



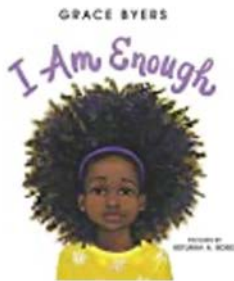
My Two Blankets by Irena Kobald, Freya Blackwood



This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration
by Jacqueline Woodson, James Ransome



Juana and Lucas by Juana Medina



I Am Enough by Grace Byers, Keturah A. Bobo



We Came to America by Faith Ringgold

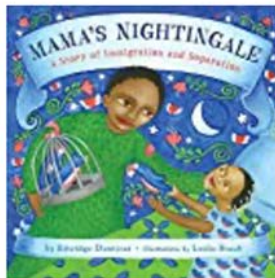


Dreamers by Yuyi Morales



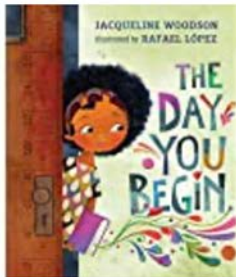
All Different Now: Juneteenth, the First Day of Freedom

by Angela Johnson, E. B. Lewis



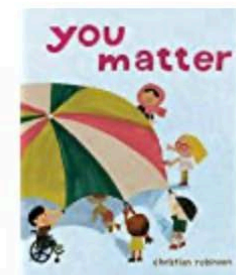
Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation

by Edwidge Danticat, Leslie Staub



The Day You Begin

by Jacqueline Woodson, Rafael Lopez

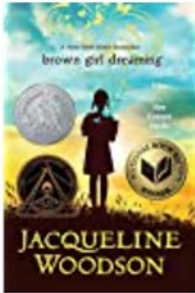


You Matter

by Christian Robinson

Book Recommendations

Ages 8-10 (3rd-5th)



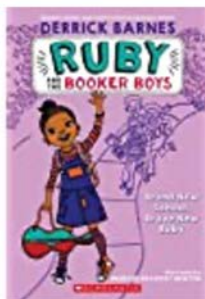
Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson



Elijah of Buxton by Christopher Paul Curtis



The Season of Styx Malone by Kekla Magoon



Brand New School, Brave New Ruby (Ruby and the Booker Boys)
by Derrick Barnes, Vanessa Brantley Newton



The Space Mission Adventure (Clubhouse Mysteries)

by Sharon M. Draper, Jesse Joshua Watson



Black Panther: The Young Prince

by Ronald L. Smith

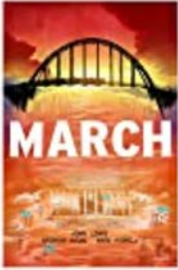


Can I Touch Your Hair? Poems of Race, Mistakes and Friendship

by Irene Latham, Charles Waters

Book Recommendations

Ages 11-13 (6th-8th)



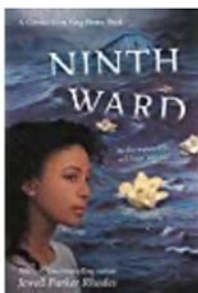
March

by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin



The Colors of the Rain

by R. L. Toalson



Ninth Ward

by Jewell Parker Rhodes

Additional Resources

Making the case for diverse books

- Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors:
 - o www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AAu58SNSyc&list=PLLxDwKxHxlyLH9iOwFT2lxxYSSMjS4KGi&index=5
- Where are the people of color in children's books?
 - o www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/where-are-the-people-of-color-in-childrens-books.html
- Importance of books with cross-racial friendships:
 - o www.slj.com/?detailStory=how-cross-racial-scenes-in-picture-books-build-acceptance
- The danger of a "single story":
 - o www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

Diverse book lists and tools

- Diverse Book Finder (excellent archive of picture books searchable by topic, racial identity of characters, award-winning, etc.)
 - o <https://diversebookfinder.org>
- We Need Diverse Books
 - o <https://diversebooks.org>
- Our Story App
 - o www.diversebooks.org/ourstory
- Tips for selecting diverse books
 - o <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/selecting-culturally-appropriate-books.pdf>
- Webinars about engaging diverse stories with kids
 - o www.embracerace.org/resources/choosing-good-picture-books-featuring-diverse-bipoc-characters
 - o www.embracerace.org/resources/finding-and-reading-books-for-and-with-kids
 - o www.embracerace.org/resources/reading-picture-books-with-children-through-a-race-conscious-lens