



the conscious kid

Books to help build inclusive classrooms

A curated list of teacher-facing materials and evaluation criteria to affirm and reflect students' identities and to help facilitate important conversations about equity, racism, and belonging

Fighting racism and injustice is a lifelong journey of understanding ourselves, our power, our history and the role we play in perpetuating it. Starting to talk about race and equity at a young age is critical to creating awareness and lasting change, and books are one of the most effective and practical tools for initiating these conversations.

We are grateful to the experts at [The Conscious Kid](#) for curating this list of books and resources. Their organization is dedicated to equity, disrupting racism, and promoting positive racial identity development in youth. The Conscious Kid follows guidelines supported by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Media Literacy (CRML) to inform their recommendations. These critical approaches are intersectional and not only concerned about representation in the content, but also about the representation and power relationships behind the ownership, production, and creation of the content itself. These books are also teacher-validated with many in the list of top-requested reading materials from the [#ISeeMe program](#) at DonorsChoose.

This list of book titles and supporting materials is by no means exhaustive, and we hope to continue adding to it. In addition to the list, The Conscious Kid has also recommended helpful guidelines and questions to use when selecting inclusive and identity-affirming content:

Identify power relationships

Who are the central figures and who is controlling the narrative? Are there biases in how relationships are handled among various identities?

Derman-Sparks, 2013
Perez-Huber et al., 2018

Support counter stories

Include texts that push back against deficit-narratives of people of color and center the knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups. Select books that name and acknowledge racism and those whose lives are affected by it daily.

Delgado, 1989
Solórzano & Yosso, 2002
Martinez et al., 2017

Avoid savior narratives

Select stories where Black characters and characters of color are empowered to create their own change as opposed to being saved or rescued by someone else .

Yosso, 2002
Aronson, 2017

Beware of tokenism

Regularly seeing only “one” person of any group teaches children about who is more or less important.

Derman-Sparks, 2013

Watch for invisibility

What children do not see in their books also teaches them about who matters and who does not. Absence or minimal portrayals teaches young people about their perceived worth by showing whose stories and lives are worthy of being celebrated.

Derman-Sparks, 2013
Perez-Huber et al., 2018

Steer clear of stereotypes

Expose young people to empowering non-stereotypical imagery and text in order to help counter biased messaging

Derman-Sparks, 2013

Foster healthy racial identity

Counter whiteness as the norm or definition of success and avoid books where characters of color only succeed when conforming to white values or norms

King, 2018
Seale et al., 2000

Re-evaluate the “classics”

Re-evaluate “classic” books or stories which can convey and reinforce outdated values and messaging of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, ableism, or colonialism

Banks, 1993
Derman-Sparks, 2013

Question what is being reinforced

Question what values, rules and laws are being reinforced and be aware of how these might marginalize or disregard the experiences of some communities

Banks, 1993

Kellner & Share, 2005

Oakland Public Library, 2017

Choose social justice books

Choose social justice books to help push back against embedded biases and reinforcing values of sexism, racism or ableism

Santora, 2018

Model positive action

Select books that demonstrate children and adults engaging in action for racial equity, including supporters and co-activists that are not members of racially marginalized communities.

Funk et al., 2016

Consider the author's background, perspective and expertise

Choose books that are written by authors who are members of the communities they are writing about. Push back against cultural appropriation by directly supporting Black, Indigenous, and authors of color.

Ladson-Billings, 1995

Kellner & Share, 2005

Reese, 2018

Affirm intersecting identities

Avoid selecting books that teach children to feel inferior or superior because of their skin color, gender, family income, family structure, disability, sexual orientation or other identity.

Crenshaw, 1988

Derman-Sparks, 2013

Seek out specificity

Avoid books that generalize the experiences of race, culture or ethnicity and instead select books that provide specific and nuanced experiences of the identity being depicted .

Reese, 2018

Grade Level	Title	Author	Illustrator	Supporting Materials
Pre-K - 2	Sulwe	Lupita Nyong'o	Vashti Harrison	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	Dreamers	Yuyi Morales	Yuyi Morales	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	When We Were Alone	David Alexander Robertson	Julie Flett	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	Where Are You From?	Yamile Saied Méndez	Jaime Kim	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	The Proudest Blue	Ibtihaj Muhammad	Hatem Aly	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	It Began With a Page: How Gyo Fujikawa Drew The Way	Kyo Maclear	Julie Morstad	
Pre-K - 2	Alma and How She Got Her Name	Juana Martinez-Neal	Juana Martinez-Neal	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	All Because You Matter	Tami Charles	Bryan Collier	
Pre-K - 2	A Different Pond	Bao Phi	Thi Bui	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	The Day You Begin	Jacqueline Woodson	Rafael López	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	I Am Enough	Grace Byers	Keturah A. Bobo	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	The Name Jar	Yangsook Choi	Yangsook Choi	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	I Love My Hair	Natasha Tarpley	E. B. Lewis	
Pre-K - 2	Hair Love	Matthew A. Cherry	Vashti Harrison	
Pre-K - 2	Under My Hijab	Hena Khan	Aaliya Jaleel	
Pre-K - 2	I Am Every Good Thing	Derrick Barnes	Gordon C. James	
Pre-K - 2	My Papi Has a Motorcycle	Isabel Quintero	Zeke Peña	
Pre-K - 2	When Aidan Became A Brother	Kyle Lukoff	Kaylani Juanita	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	Missing Daddy	Mariame Kaba	Bria royal	
Pre-K - 2	We Are Water Protectors	Carole Lindstrom	Michaela Goade	Teaching Guide
Pre-K - 2	Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story	Kevin Noble Maillard	Juana Martinez-Neal	
3 - 5	Separate Is Never Equal	Duncan Tonatiuh	Duncan Tonatiuh	Teaching Guide

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3 - 5	The Undefeated	Kwame Alexander	Kadir Nelson	Teaching Guide
3 - 5	Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library	Carole Boston Weatherford	Eric Velasquez	
3 - 5	Brown Girl Dreaming	Jacqueline Woodson		Teaching Guide
3 - 5	The Whispering Town	Jennifer Riesmeyer Elvgren	Fabio Santomauro	Teaching Guide
3 - 5	Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History	Vashti Harrison	Vashti Harrison	
3 - 5	Front Desk	Kelly Yang		Teaching Guide
3 - 5	El Deafo	Cece Bell		Teaching Guide
3 - 5	George	Alex Gino		Teaching Guide
3 - 5	Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon	Kelly Starling Lyons	Laura Freeman	
6 - 8	We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices	Wayne and Cheryl Willis Hudson		Teaching Guide
6 - 8	An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States For Young People	Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Reese		Teaching Guide
6 - 8	Black Enough	Ibi Zoboi		
6 - 8	This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do The Work	Tiffany Jewel	Aurelia Durand	Teaching Guide
6 - 8	Harbor Me	Jacqueline Woodson		Teaching Guide
6 - 8	New Kid	Jerry Craft	Jerry Craft	Teaching Guide
6 - 8	Say Her Name	Zetta Elliott	Loveis Wise	
6 - 8	Pet	Akwaeke Emezi		Teaching Guide
6 - 8	Genesis Begins Again	Alicia D. Williams		
6 - 8	Piecing Me Together	Renée Watson		Teaching Guide

Grade Level	Title	Author	Illustrator	Supporting Materials
6 - 8	Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky	Kwame Mbalia		Teaching Guide
9 - 12	Punching the Air	Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam		Teaching Guide
9 - 12	Children of Blood and Bone	Tomi Adeyemi		Teaching Guide
9 - 12	Dear Martin	Nic Stone		
9 - 12	The Poet X	Elizabeth Acevedo		Teaching Guide
9 - 12	We Are Not Yet Equal: Understanding Our Racial Divide	Carol Anderson		
9 - 12	Patron Saints of Nothing	Randy Ribay		
9 - 12	Just Mercy	Bryan Stevenson		Teaching Guide
9 - 12	The Sun Does Shine	Anthony Ray Hinton		
9 - 12	All Boys Aren't Blue	George M. Johnson		
9 - 12	American Street	Ibi Zoboi		
9 - 12	Felix Ever After	Kacen Callender		Teaching Guide

Additional Resources

[American Indians in Children's Literature](#)

Provides critical analysis of Indigenous peoples in children's and young adult books.

[Disability in KidLit](#)

Dedicated to discussing the portrayal of disability in middle grade and young adult literature. They publish articles, reviews, interviews, and discussions examining this topic from various angles—and always from the disabled perspective.

[#DisruptTexts](#)

A crowdsourced, grass roots effort by teachers for teachers to challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve.

[DonorsChoose #ISeeMe](#)

Supporting classroom requests from underrepresented educators and from all teachers who seek materials that reflect their students' identities.

[How To Talk To Kids About Race](#)

A YouTube playlist videos in which authors, experts, and parents share how to have conversations about racism with children.

YouTube Kids — [For preschoolers: Togetherness](#). This playlist uses short videos and songs from creators like Sesame Street to show that all people deserve respect.

YouTube Kids — [For kids 5+: Understanding Each Other](#). This playlist covers topics such as race, bias, and activism in stories, talks and songs. It also provides information about the civil rights movement.

[Social Justice Books](#)

A project of Teaching for Change, a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide teachers and parents with the tools to create schools where students learn to read, write and change the world.

[The Conscious Kid](#)

An education, research and policy organization dedicated to equity and promoting positive racial identity development in youth. They support organizations, families, and educators in taking action to disrupt racism in young children. They also promote access to children's books centering underrepresented groups and authors.

[Zinn Education Project](#)

Introducing students to a more accurate, complex and engaging understanding through teaching of people's history. Free lessons for middle and high school, coordinated by Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change.

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