



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     | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | Dreamers  | Yuyi Morales              | Yuyi Morales        | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | When We Were Alone                                  | David Alexander Robertson | Julie Flett         | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | Where Are You From?                                 | Yamile Saied Méndez       | Jaime Kim           | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | The Proudest Blue                                   | Ibtihaj Muhammad          | Hatem Aly           | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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 | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | All Because You Matter                              | Tami Charles              | Bryan Collier       |                                |
| Pre-K - 2   | A Different Pond                                    | Bao Phi                   | Thi Bui             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | The Day You Begin                                   | Jacqueline Woodson        | Rafael López        | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | I Am Enough   | Grace Byers               | Keturah A. Bobo     | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | The Name Jar  | Yangsook Choi             | Yangsook Choi       | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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     | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| Pre-K - 2   | Missing Daddy                                       | Mariame Kaba              | Bria royal          |                                |
| Pre-K - 2   | We Are Water Protectors                             | Carole Lindstrom          | Michaela Goade      | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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     | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |

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|-------------|--|--|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 3 - 5       | The Undefeated   | Kwame Alexander  | Kadir Nelson     | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 3 - 5       | Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library   | Carole Boston Weatherford                                      | Eric Velasquez   |                                |
| 3 - 5       | Brown Girl Dreaming  | Jacqueline Woodson   |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 3 - 5       | The Whispering Town  | Jennifer Riesmeyer Elvgren                                     | Fabio Santomauro | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 3 - 5       | Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History  | Vashti Harrison  | Vashti Harrison  |                                |
| 3 - 5       | Front Desk   | Kelly Yang   |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 3 - 5       | El Deafo   | Cece Bell  |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 3 - 5       | George   | Alex Gino  |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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                                 |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 6 - 8       | An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States For Young People                 | Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Reese |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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   | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 6 - 8       | Harbor Me  | Jacqueline Woodson   |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 6 - 8       | New Kid  | Jerry Craft  | Jerry Craft      | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 6 - 8       | Say Her Name   | Zetta Elliott  | Loveis Wise      |                                |
| 6 - 8       | Pet  | Akwaeke Emezi  |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 6 - 8       | Genesis Begins Again   | Alicia D. Williams   |                  |                                |
| 6 - 8       | Piecing Me Together  | Renée Watson   |                  | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |

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|-------------|---|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 6 - 8       | Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky              | Kwame Mbalia               |             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 9 - 12      | Punching the Air                                      | Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam |             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 9 - 12      | Children of Blood and Bone                            | Tomi Adeyemi               |             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 9 - 12      | Dear Martin   | Nic Stone                  |             |                                |
| 9 - 12      | The Poet X  | Elizabeth Acevedo          |             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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            |             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |
| 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            |             | <a href="#">Teaching Guide</a> |

# 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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