

# Culturally Responsive Library Books for Students

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## Introduction

Classroom library books and other printed materials should represent the interests of the students and reflect the diversity of students within the classroom. However, until the recent past, it was not uncommon to find classrooms completely void of reading materials that either were written by African American, Latino, or Asian authors or which prominently featured the lively and rich histories of the diverse cultures represented in the school.

Many young students were never exposed to their own cultural heritage in the books available to them in the classroom. In addition, a culturally responsive classroom acknowledges and appreciates children's home cultures and attempts to build upon the uses of language and literacy with which children are already familiar. Familiar stories and predictable books may help children express their cultural uniqueness and share their personal stories (Neuman, 1994).

## Helpful Resources/Links

The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning. The Center makes available for purchase a number of different instructional resources for classrooms, such as: Classroom Library Bundles, Core Literature Sets (by grade level), and Culture Kits with lesson plans. [www.culturallyresponsive.org/libraries.html](http://www.culturallyresponsive.org/libraries.html)

Teaching Tolerance. Founded in 1991 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children. [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)

Celebrating Cultural Diversity Through Children's Literature. This web site contains links to annotated bibliographies of children's multicultural books appropriate for the elementary grades (kindergarten through grade six). Cultural groups currently listed include: African Americans, Chinese Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, Japanese Americans, Jewish Americans, Native Americans, and Korean Americans. Books are categorized by genre: realistic fiction, information (non-fiction), traditional literature, biography, historical fiction, poetry, and fantasy. [www.multiculturalchildrenslit.com/](http://www.multiculturalchildrenslit.com/)

The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC). A unique and vital gathering place for books, ideas, and expertise in the field of children's and young adult literature. The CCBC is a non-circulating examination, study, and research library for Wisconsin school and public librarians, teachers, early childhood care providers, university students, and others interested in children's and young adult literature. [www.education.wisc.edu](http://www.education.wisc.edu)

International Reading Association. Since 1956, IRA has been a nonprofit, global network of individuals and institutions committed to worldwide literacy. The site hosts Choices Booklists. Each year, thousands of children, young adults, teachers, and librarians around the United States select their favorite recently published books for the “Choices” booklists. These lists are used in classrooms, libraries, and homes to help young readers find books they will enjoy. [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)

Children’s Book Council. The Children’s Book Council is the national nonprofit trade association for children’s trade book publishers. The Children’s Book Council works annually on reading lists to help teachers, librarians, parents, and booksellers discover new, wonderful books for the children in their lives. [www.cbcbooks.org](http://www.cbcbooks.org)

## Book Lists

Since 1989, the Teachers’ Choices project, hosted on the International Reading Association web-site, has developed an annual annotated reading list of new books that will encourage young people to read. The following is a partial book list of children’s multicultural books from the Teachers’ Choices.

### Primary (Grades K-2; ages 5-8)

**Ain’t Nobody a Stranger to Me.** From *Ain’t Nobody a Stranger to Me* by Ann Grifalconi. Text copyright 2007 by Ann Grifalconi. Illustrations copyright 2007 by Jerry Pinkney. Reprinted by permission of Hyperion Books for Children. All rights reserved. Ann Grifalconi. Ill. Jerry Pinkney.

*The Underground Railroad comes to life in this picture book through a grandfather’s recounting of his lesson in friendship to his granddaughter. Based loosely on the life of Orleans Finger, a former slave, who lived by the words, “Ain’t nobody a stranger to me,” the text and illustrations combine to create a picture of past and present in a grandfather’s life. CU: Beautifully illustrated. This is an excellent read-aloud to grades K and up, especially during grandparents or Black History celebrations. NA*

Hyperion. 32 pp. US\$16.99.

**D Is for Drinking Gourd: An African American Alphabet.** Nancy I. Sanders. Ill. E.B. Lewis.

*Iconic watercolor paintings that portray African American impressions are displayed in alphabetical order and enhanced with carefully crafted, emphatic poetry. This exquisitely complex picture book invites readers’ understanding and appreciation on many levels of thinking. The parallel informational text provides important facts to support memory of important historic events in the African American, nation-building experience. CU: American history social studies units; poetry; art and music. JHB*

Sleeping Bear. 36 pp. US\$17.95.

**Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story From the Underground Railroad.** From *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine. Illustrations by Kadir Nelson. Used by permission of Scholastic Press.

*Stunning illustrations tell the historical account of Henry, a runaway slave who mailed himself 350 miles in a box to freedom from Richmond, VA, to Philadelphia, PA. Simple text delivers a heartbreaking and inspiring story of Henry Brown, a real-life hero who never knew his age or birthday, and his escape from slavery. CU: All grade levels will benefit from this introduction to the era leading up to the Civil War and the ingenious use of the famous Underground Railroad. TF*

Scholastic. 40 pp. US\$16.99.

**The Orange Shoes.** Trinka Hakes Noble. Ill. Doris Ettlinger.

*Delly, a young rural girl from a poor but loving family, discovers the true riches in life are found in family and making the best of difficult times. Her love of art and nature paired with her creative problem-solving skills make Delly an inspiring character who finds positive ways to fuel her spirit. The illustrations invite the reader into the story and enhance the storytelling. CU: This heartwarming story provides discussion opportunities related to poverty (what makes a person rich?), bullying, and self-reliance. PK*

Sleeping Bear. 38 pp. US\$16.95.

## Intermediate (Grades 3-5; Ages 8-11)

**A Friendship for Today.** From *A Friendship for Today* by Patricia C. McKissack. Used by permission of Scholastic Press. Patricia C. McKissack.

*Rosemary is one of the first African Americans to enroll in an all-white school. Throughout the year she develops an uneasy friendship with her neighborhood nemesis, Grace "the tasteless" Hamilton, and with the help of supportive adults and a rescued, injured kitten, learns the value of tolerance and perseverance. This book is based on the author's own experience in 1954 Missouri. CU: This historical novel supports middle school Civil Rights movement and school integration curriculum and speaks to students in all schools where there is intolerance, whether for ethnic, economic, or social reasons. NA*

Scholastic. 240 pp. US\$16.99.

**One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II.** Lita Judge. Ill. by the author.

*This story was inspired by the author's discovery of thousands of tracings of feet in her grandparents' attic. What began as her grandparents' effort to help one family grew into a grassroots relief campaign to provide shoes for children and adults in war-torn Europe following WWII. Emotion-filled watercolor illustrations are interspersed with photographs, tracings, and other artifacts that help tell the story. This is a poignant reminder that ordinary people can make an extraordinary difference. CU: World War II; journals; diversity; and overcoming adversity. LJG*

Hyperion. 40 pp. US\$15.99.

**A Song for Harlem: Scraps of Time, 1928.** Patricia C. McKissack. Ill. Gordon C. James.

*After being accepted into a summer writing program, Lilly Belle, a young girl from a small town in Tennessee, travels to Harlem to be instructed by the writer Zora Neale Hurston during the summer of 1928. Through the summer writing program she learns not only about writing, but also about friendships and her own character as well as the character of others. CU: This book could be used for teaching about the Harlem Renaissance and where ideas and voice come from when writing. JH*

Viking Juvenile. 112 pp. US\$14.99.

**Sweet Land of Liberty.** Deborah Hopkinson. Ill. Leonard Jenkins.

*As a child, Oscar Chapman watched his black friends suffer racial injustices. As an adult and assistant secretary of interior under President Franklin Roosevelt, Chapman again witnessed racial injustice. When African American opera singer Marian Anderson was denied the use of Constitution Hall, Chapman organized the 1939 Anderson concert given at the Lincoln Memorial for 75,000 people. CU: Mixed-media collages illustrate connections between past and present, childhood experiences and works for civil rights and community good. Author's notes provide more political history, making the book a great read-aloud for any grade level. PK*

Peachtree. 32 pp. US\$16.95.

**This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness.** Joyce Sidman. Ill. Pamela Zagarenski.

*An imaginary class of students writes poems apologizing to friends, family, and each other. Recipients of the poems respond with poems of forgiveness. The poems are written with deep emotion and feeling. Poems, like the one apologizing for euthanizing a pet dog, are very moving and will easily make connections with students. CU: This book can be used to teach poetry by connecting to the reader. Poetry can be intimidating, but this book shows how things from your everyday life can become a poem. TL*

Houghton Mifflin. 48 pp. US\$16.00.

## Advanced (Grades 6-8; Ages 11-14)

**Celeste's Harlem Renaissance.** From *Celeste's Harlem Renaissance* by Eleanora E. Tate. Used by permission of Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

*Harlem, the Colored world capital of the early 1900s, was the only place Celeste (Cece) Lassiter Massey could go when her father was confined to a tuberculosis sanitarium near home in Raleigh, NC. Upon arrival in New York, she discovered that her Aunt Val was not famous, just an aspiring performer who did menial work to support a meager lifestyle. Cece's prospects were bleak until her talent as a violinist provided a way for her aunt to work in the chorus line of a show. CU: Harlem Renaissance; music; theater. JHB*

**Reaching for Sun.** From *Reaching for Sun* by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer. Copyright 2007 Bloomsbury Children's Books.

*Josie, a seventh grader with cerebral palsy, struggles to find her place in the world. She lives with her mother and grandmother on a small portion of family farm not sold to developers. Josie's life becomes more interesting when Jordan, a science-minded geek, moves into the area. Their friendship carries Josie into summer when life takes more twists and turns. CU: Written in free-verse, reluctant readers will enjoy the quick read while more mature readers will appreciate the poetic structure and figurative language. Josie's strong voice provides insights into life for persons with disabilities. PK*

Bloomsbury USA Children's Books. 144 pp. US\$15.99.

**Sequoyah: Inventor of Written Cherokee.** Roberta Basel.

*The life of Sequoyah is detailed in an easy-to-read-and-understand format. The reader learns how Sequoyah, a deeply committed Cherokee, developed the Cherokee written language. While describing his life, the reader is engaged by interesting facts and glimpses of life in the 1800s. CU: This book is formatted in a manner that will help students use it as a research tool. Included is an effective timeline using pictures and captions. The book could also be used with a lesson about source notes. TL*

Compass Point. 112 pp. US\$5.95.

**Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood.** Ibtisam Barakat.

*This first-person memoir of a young Palestinian girl's memory of the Six-Day War in Ramallah paints the perspective of war from a child's point of view. When the bombing ceases and the dust settles, the protagonist's mother advises her daughter to forget, but she wants to remember. The young refugee shares the joy of discovering literacy; her language and literacy empower her voice to share her story. CU: This autobiographical text provides a wonderful springboard for current events and point of view in literature. MM*

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 192 pp. US\$16.00.

## Young Adults (Grades 7-12)

The 2008 Young Adults' Choices list is the 22nd that U.S. teenagers (grades 7–12) have helped create. This project began in 1986, funded by a special grant given to the International Reading Association and supervised by the Association's Literature for Young Adults Committee.

**Being Bindy.** Alyssa Brugman.

*This funny, coming-of-age novel from Australia reassures young readers that even after the worst day of your life, things can get better. Teens will recognize many of Bindy's problems including losing a best friend, divorce, parental dating, and the idea of blended families. Bindy is left out and bullied, but she does have support from her father, her brother, and two new friends. There is humiliation and embarrassment here, but Bindy finds the strength to make tough decisions. Teens will like this story about being true to yourself. (KDT)*

Delacorte Books for Young Readers. 208 pp. US\$17.99.

**The Boy in the Striped Pajamas.** John Boyne.

*Readers will remember this story long after the book is finished. In the early 1940s in Nazi Germany, 9-year-old Bruno moves from Berlin to a place in Poland called "Out-With" after a visit from the "Fury." Bruno can see a high wire fence and hundreds of people wearing striped pajamas. Like most boys, Bruno is curious and more than anything he wants a friend. So does a boy in the striped pajamas. What happens next in this Holocaust tale is heart-stopping and unforgettable. Students will want to talk about this story. Mature readers. (KDT)*

David Fickling. 224 pp. US\$15.95.

**Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888.** Selection from *Casey at the Bat* by Ernest L. Thayer and illustrated by Joe Morse. Reprinted by permission of Kids Can Press Ltd., Toronto. Text copyright 2006 Ernest L. Thayer. Illustrations copyright 2006 Joe Morse.

*Thayer's classic poem, "Casey at the Bat," is accompanied by striking oil and acrylic illustrations. Reinterpreted in an inner-city context, the text as illustrated by Morse imagines the events of the poem played out by and for a multicultural cast surrounded by the artistic graffiti and buildings of the city. This pairing results in a new reading of the poem, which will undoubtedly appeal to young and old alike. (AR)*

Kids Can. 48 pp. US\$16.95.

**Fly on the Wall: How One Girl Saw Everything.** E. Lockhart.

*Gretchen Yee is a talented artist who perceives herself as someone who doesn't quite fit in at the elite Manhattan High School for the Arts. She struggles to be normal around her ex-boyfriend and her current crush, all the while dealing with the news of her parents' divorce. Gretchen's off-hand comment about a desire to be a fly on the wall in the boy's locker room becomes a reality. Her fly's perspective provides her with a greater understanding of the male physique but more important gives her realistic insight into the lives and thoughts of boys. (AR)*

Delacorte Books for Young Readers. 192 pp. US\$15.95.

**Lush.** Natasha Friend.

*Living with an alcoholic parent is especially tough on Samantha, who can't believe even her best friends will understand. With nowhere else to turn, Sam sends notes through a library book to a random girl who she hopes can advise her. When an older boy asks her to a party, Sam lies to her friends and sneaks out to meet him. Things only get worse as she deals with the consequences and discovers that her fellow note writer is not whom she thinks. Through confronting her parents and reconciling with her friends, Sam gains a deeper understanding of herself. (KS)*

Scholastic. 192 pp. US\$16.99.

**Mismatch.** Lensey Namioka.

*Star-crossed lovers? This relevant story addresses issues of assimilation into American society, examining the cultural differences between Japanese and Chinese Americans. Sue, a viola player in the school orchestra, and Andy, a violinist, attempt a romantic relationship in spite of their parents' bigoted viewpoints. As the characters get to know each other, their mutual understanding blossoms, and they come to terms with their own cultural and personal identities. This is a must-read book for all diverse students who populate modern classrooms. (KR)*

Delacorte Books for Young Readers. 224 pp. US\$15.95.

**Returnable Girl.** Pamela Lowell.

*This fictional account of a 13-year-old girl in foster care is a gripping story of a teenage girl longing to belong. Ronnie has been "returned" since she was abandoned by her mother at the age of 11. When she's finally found a home where she can settle in, her mother reappears. Written in Ronnie's voice in journal format, this book deals with many sensitive issues, such as sex, depression, and bullying, with which young readers will identify. It is a story of hope. (EAO)*

Marshall Cavendish Children's Books. 229 pp. US\$16.99.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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