



Barefoot Books
step inside a story

Tips for Selecting Diverse & Inclusive Books

Children internalize messages about themselves and others from a very young age.

Their brains are wired to categorize things somewhat rigidly, which can often result in misconceptions. (“Only boys can be firefighters!”) Diverse and inclusive books encourage both positive self-image and acceptance of differences in others. But how can you know if the books you choose are really sending the right messages? *Here are some helpful guidelines:*

- **First and foremost, it should be a good book.** Is it a good story or, in the case of nonfiction, is it interesting and age-appropriate? Are the illustrations artistic and inviting?
- **Seek out diverse human characters.** Books with animal characters certainly have their place, but make sure you have books in your collection that feature diverse human characters too. (See our quiz on the next page to learn about many types of diversity!)
- **Look out for stereotypes.** Does the book contain stereotypes in either the language or illustrations? (Not sure if characters are stereotypical? Do some research on stereotypes that have historically been associated with a particular culture or group of people.)
- **Is it a “window” or a “mirror”?** Books can serve as windows through which children can learn about others, and also as mirrors in which they see their own lives reflected. Will children learn about others or see themselves in the book?
- **Make sure the information is accurate.** If the book talks explicitly about a country, culture, or group of people, it should be specific and precise in its presentation. For instance, a book about Native American characters should include details about the particular tribe or tribes being represented, as opposed to lumping all Native American people or customs into one category.
- **Check to see if it’s relatable.** Books that depict diverse characters doing everyday things help children build empathy by showing that we all share things in common.
- **Think about the author’s and illustrator’s qualifications.** Do the author and/or illustrator come from the culture or group they are depicting? If not, what qualifies them to create this book sensitively, accurately and without bias?

Find a whole world of diverse and inclusive books at www.barefootbooks.com.



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Professional Development Activity: Diverse & Inclusive Book Quiz

Sit in your classroom's reading area with your teaching team. Now that you're at your students' eye level, evaluate what you see. Take the quiz below and write the number of books next to each question:

- How many books feature **characters of color**? _____
- How many books depict **LGBTQ+ characters**? _____
- How many books depict **people with differing abilities**? _____
- How many books show **religious diversity**? _____
- How many books show **socio-economic (class) diversity**? _____
- How many of the above books **show these characters doing everyday things**? _____
- How many books **feature a main character of color? LGBTQ+? Differently abled? From a minority religion? From a low-income family**? _____
- How many books have been **written and / or illustrated by people who come from the cultures or groups represented in the story**? _____
- How many stories include **language from the country or culture being represented**?

What's your total score? What types of books are missing from your collection? It's never too late to diversify your bookshelf!

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How to facilitate important conversations with kids using diverse and inclusive books

STEFANIE PAIGE WIEDER, M.S.ED.

When children see themselves and their families represented in books, it can increase their feelings of positive self-worth.

On the other hand, when children rarely or never see themselves reflected in books, they receive the message that they are outside of what is acknowledged and accepted as “normal.”

What’s more, without thoughtful adult intervention, children are likely to develop bias against people who are unlike themselves. Two studies by researchers at the University of Toronto and their collaborators from the US, UK, France and China, reveal that infants as young as six months old prefer members of their own race. Early childhood anti-bias education expert, Louise Derman-Sparks, has written:

“By the age of two, children begin absorbing socially prevailing stereotypes, attitudes and biases about themselves and people different from themselves. They begin to show discomfort or fear or even dislike toward a person with a different skin color, different language or with a physical disability.”

Books that depict people from all walks of life can help combat children’s natural tendency towards bias. But they can’t do the work alone.

Why the need for adult conversation around these books?

Adults play a key role in answering questions about a book, such as providing explanations and factual information, or modeling for kids how to do research to get additional information. Talking explicitly about issues like culture, race, religion, abilities and sexual orientation can be awkward for adults. But for children, it’s not awkward. It’s essential. They are already thinking about these topics and making sense of them in their own way, whether adults talk with them about it or not. If a child does express a stereotype or incorrect notion about others, it is important for the adult to gently correct their thinking.

Diverse and inclusive books are a critical and welcome part of children’s lives. As adults, it’s our role to make sure children receive and understand the messages of these books with open hearts and clear minds.

What do the children in your life see in the books they read?

Stefanie Paige Wieder, M.S.Ed. is Director of Education & Content at Barefoot Books and a child development expert with over 25 years of experience working with schools, clinical settings and children’s products. She earned her dual master’s in Early Childhood General & Special Education / Infant & Parent Development & Early Intervention from the Bank Street Graduate School of Education and her B.A. from Harvard University.

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Visit barefootbooks.com/educators for more free resources.

Questions to ask

Here are some examples of questions adults can ask before, during and after reading diverse and inclusive books.

Begin with questions that prompt children to think about their own identities:

- What language/languages do you understand? What languages have you heard? Is there a language you’d like to learn?
- What color is your skin? Your hair? Your eyes?
- What are some things you are good at?
- What special holidays does your family celebrate?
- What kinds of foods do you like to eat?
- Who are the people in your family?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- What is something that people might not know about you that you would like them to know about you?

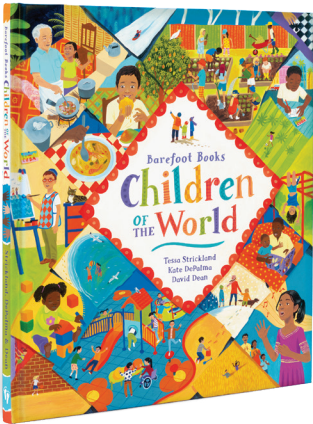
Next, ask about others:

- What do you notice about how this character looks? How this character acts?
- How are you similar to this character? How are you different?
- How do you think this character is feeling? Have you ever felt that way?
- Why do you think the character did this? Would you have done the same thing?
- This character lives in a different country/is from a different culture. What would you like to learn about that country/culture?



www.barefootbooks.com

Recommended Diverse & Inclusive Books



Barefoot Books Children of the World

Every child has a story — and this book tells them all. With *Children of the World*, you'll rediscover the everyday moments, important occasions and big ideas that make childhood special all over the world. Both playful and thought-provoking, *Children of the World* makes for a delightful family, library or classroom read-aloud that's sure to spark timely discussions about diversity, inclusion and acceptance.

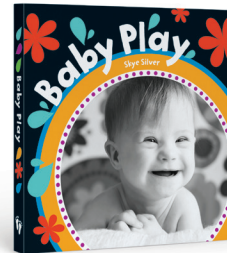
AGES 3 – 10



Mindful Kids 50 Mindfulness Activities for Kindness, Focus and Calm

Build healthy habits by practicing mindfulness throughout your day. Kid-friendly illustrations on both sides of the cards provide easy-to-follow steps for each practice. The cards and 8-page instructional booklet include tips for children of a wide range of abilities, making this deck an inclusive tool for nurturing inner peace and strength.

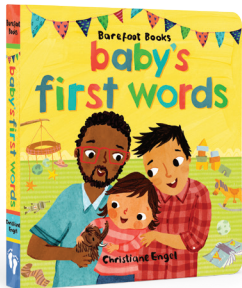
AGES 4+



Baby Play Happy feelings for little ones

Invite little ones to play! Illustrations feature photographs of a wide variety of babies, family situations and caregivers, offering an inclusive representation of caregivers and siblings lovingly interacting with baby. Find other titles in the Baby's Day series online. Also available in bilingual Spanish.

AGES 2 – 4

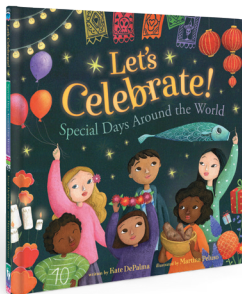


Baby's First Words

This simple, cheerful story with over 100 vocabulary words follows a multiracial family with two dads through an ordinary day. Offers a useful tool for starting age-appropriate conversations about similarities and differences among families. Also available in bilingual Spanish.

AGES 0 – 3

**An ALA Rainbow Book List
Top Ten Pick for 2018!**



Let's Celebrate!

Special Days Around the World

Experience 13 special days from cultures around the world! Rhyming text and vibrant illustrations draw young readers in, while educational notes at the end brim with facts about the special days.

AGES 4 – 10

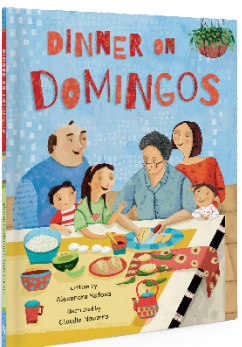
“An accessible tool for teaching children about world cultures, seasonal special events, and festivals” — *School Library Journal*



My Big Barefoot Book of Wonderful Words

With its urban setting and diverse cast of characters, *Wonderful Words* is carefully crafted to break down stereotypes and build crucial vocabulary for our modern world. Each scene teems with people, places and things, labeled for learning new words. Also available in bilingual Spanish and French.

AGES 2 – 6



Dinner on Domingos

Warm memories wash over a first-generation Latinx American girl as she experiences a typical Sunday night dinner at her Abuelita's house. Readers are immersed in the rich ways love is expressed within this home: the delicious smells of Ecuadorian home cooking, dancing, and more.

AGES 4 – 8

“A wonderful celebration of culture and family, ideal for story time or classroom reading” — *Booklist*



The Girl with a Brave Heart A Tale from Tehran

Written by Israeli pop star Rita Jahanforuz, this tale from her native Tehran shows the power of empathy breaking down walls between two lonely people: a young girl who lives with her stepfamily and an isolated elderly woman who has trouble caring for herself and her home.

AGES 4 – 10



La Frontera

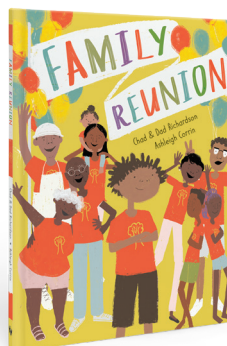
El viaje con papá / My Journey with Papa

Join a young boy and his father on an arduous journey from Mexico to the United States to find a new life. Told in both Spanish and English, this story of perseverance will help parents and educators talk with children about immigration, resilience, empathy and belonging.

AGES 4 – 10

“A must have for classrooms, libraries and bilingual collections”

— *School Library Journal*, starred review



Family Reunion

This modern kid's-eye view depiction of a Black American extended family celebrates the importance of kinship and intergenerational ties.

AGES 5 – 10

“An excellent choice for units on the family” — *Booklist*

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Find many more diverse and inclusive titles at barefootbooks.com.

www.barefootbooks.com



My Story

An Activity for Building Positive Identity

This “My Story” activity is designed to help children think more deeply about the themes presented in *Barefoot Books Children of the World*, as well as to reflect on what makes each of us special.

Through books, thoughtful discussions, and activities like this one, we can help children feel confident in their unique identities, identify and express their feelings, and develop empathy towards others.

Instructions:

- Print out the My Story activity on the next page (double-sided if possible) and fold it in half.
- Keep *Barefoot Books Children of the World* accessible for kids to look at as they work.
- If you have more than one child who has completed the activity, help children to notice what is similar and different about their “stories” when they are done.

Tips:

Self Portrait: Offer children a mirror to use when completing the self-portrait. Provide drawing materials that offer many gradients of color, like crayons and colored pencils, so that children can try to match their skin color, eye color and hair texture as accurately as possible. For children who are not yet creating representational drawings, help them choose colors that match their appearance for scribbling.

Names: Help children look up the meaning of their names online or in a naming book. For children who are not yet writing their names or drawing representational pictures, write their name for them and allow them to scribble on it.



Family: Family means different things to different people. If your child would like to include pets or family friends in the portrait, that is great! For children who are not yet creating figurative artwork, ask them who is in their families and write down their words. Then allow them to scribble or make marks creatively.

Hopes & Dreams: Encourage kids to look at some of the images in *Barefoot Books Children of the World* if they need inspiration! For children who are not yet creating representational drawings, ask them in simple language what they would like to do when they are older. Record their words and let them scribble in the space.



My Hopes & Dreams

What will happen in your story?

Draw what you would like to do if you had the chance!



Find *Barefoot Books Children of the World* and other diverse & inclusive books at www.barefootbooks.com.

My Story



My Self-Portrait What do you look like?



Name _____

Draw yourself here!

 Barefoot Books

My Name

What's your name? Does it have a meaning?



Write your name.
Draw what it means
or what you'd like
it to mean.

My Family

Who is in your family?



Draw your
family here!