

Books for Parents to Read to Children

Contributing to the classroom and school community

Key themes: kindness, friendship, inclusive and helpful

Horace and Morris but Mostly Dolores, Howe, James, 1999

Summary – Horace, Morris and Dolores are the best of friends until Horace and Morris decide to join a boys-only club, leaving Dolores downhearted. Dolores reluctantly joins the girls-only club, “The Cheese Puffs”. Gender stereotypes keep the friends apart until Dolores and another girl get bored and quit the club. They reunite with Horace and Morris and create a club where everyone is welcome.

Discussion points – Gender stereotypes make it difficult to be inclusive in friendships.

How to be a Friend, Brown, Laurie Krasny and Marc Brown, 1998

Summary – Using an attractive cartoon format, this is a multifaceted book that explores the definition of friendship and many of its aspects.

Discussion points – This nonfiction book could be taught chapter by chapter. Chapters include themes such as ways to be a friend, how ‘not’ to be a friend, and talking out arguments.

(See also **How to Lose All Your Friends** by Nancy Carlson for a similar message)

Stone Soup, Muth, Jon J., 2003

Summary – In this new version of a classic tale, three monks arrive in a troubled village where villagers are untrusting of strangers and even their neighbors. The wise monks set out to bring them happiness by making stone soup. In order to make the soup everyone contributes, and as a result the villagers become friendlier and more trusting.

Discussion points – Working as a community benefits everyone and teaches the value of generosity.

Sam and the Lucky Money, Chinn, Karen, 1995

Summary – A young boy in Chinatown on New Year’s Day is excited about spending his four dollars in lucky money. He becomes angry when he discovers how little he can buy with his money. “What is four dollars good for?” he complains. He begins to see things differently when he sees how grateful a beggar is to receive a quarter. Sam realizes that he’s the lucky one and gives his lucky money to the beggar.

Discussion points – Sam learns to empathize with others and finds that his act of generosity helps make him more appreciative of his own life.

Ballerinas Don’t Wear Glasses, Manson, Ainslie, 2000

Summary – Ben would like to play with his friends, but since his mother is working late he has to look after his little sister Allison. Ben and his friends pick on her, reducing her to tears. Gradually Ben begins to empathize with his sister and at home that night, he begins to help her get ready for her ballet recital. After all of Ben’s help, Allison’s recital goes very well.

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Discussion points – Ben benefits from his act of kindness towards his sister.

Fox, Wild, Margaret, 2001

Summary – When Dog saves Magpie from a charred forest, he tries to convince her that life is still good despite the fact that she can no longer fly. He argues that while she can't fly and he is blind in one eye, together they can become a new creature. Their friendship blossoms. With Magpie on his back directing him, Dog can run through the forest almost as if he is flying. Their friendship is tested when Fox comes along, jealous of their friendship. He entices Magpie to run away with him. When they are far away he deserts Magpie saying "Now you and Dog will know what it is like to be truly alone". Magpie would like to give up and die, but thinks of Dog and slowly begins the long journey home.

Discussion points – This beautifully illustrated book explores the nature of friendship and loyalty.

Me and Mr. Mah, Spalding, Andrea, 1999

Summary – When his parents split up, Ian has to leave his father on their farm and move to the city with his mother. Ian misses his old home on the farm. He slowly befriends an elderly Chinese man who works in his garden next door. They discover they each have a special box, filled with important mementos. Later Ian and his mother move to a nicer house across the city. Ian realizes something has happened to Mr. Mah when he finds his box in a second hand store. Mr. Mah, now in a nursing home, is thrilled to get his special box back. It had been sold by mistake. The two continue their friendship.

Discussion points – This story of an unlikely relationship explores the nature of friendship.

Nobody Likes Me, Krischanitz, Raoul, 1999

Summary – When Buddy the new dog in town asks other animals to play with him they all say no. Buddy assumes they don't like him. Finally, a fox suggests that he goes back and ask the other animals why they won't play with him. In each case, this begins a conversation that leads to friendship.

Discussion points – Unfortunately this book is now out of print but if you can find a copy we feel it illustrates an excellent strategy for making friends and how assumptions can sometimes stand in the way of forming new bonds.

(See also: **Franklin's New Friend** by Paulette Bourgeois for a very similar message)

The Very Best of Friends, Wild, Margaret, 1989

Summary – Jessie and James are a couple who run a small farm. James and his cat William are the very best of friends, but Jessie doesn't like the cat. When James dies

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suddenly, a grief-stricken Jessie rejects William. Forced to fend for himself, William becomes wild. When he bites Jessie one day, she realizes what she has done and brings him back into the house. Gradually they come to love each other.

Discussion points – This book explores the nature of friendship. Friendships need to be cultivated and worked on in order to flourish.

Chester's Way, Henkes, Kevin, 1988

Summary – Chester and Wilson are the very best of friends. They do everything together and are like two peas in a pod. When Lilly comes along with her very different way of doing things they are unwilling to be friends until she scares away some older bullies. As the friendship blossoms, Chester and Wilson teach Lilly some of their practical skills while Lilly teaches the pair to be more imaginative. Then Victor moves into the neighborhood.

Discussion points – Valuable friendships can be found in people who are different from us.

Rosie and Michael, Viorst, Judith, 1974

Summary – Rosie and Michael are best friends and they accept each other through a variety of circumstances.

Discussion points – This book explores the nature of friendship.
(See also **The Best Friends Book** by Todd Parr)

Solving Problems in Peaceful Ways

Key themes: empathy, problem solving, anger management, conflict resolution

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse, Henkes, Kevin, 1996

Summary – Lilly the mouse loves school and especially her teacher Mr. Slinger. One day Lilly brings her new purple plastic purse to school. After several warnings Mr. Slinger takes away the purse for the rest of the day. Lilly is angry and puts a nasty note in his book bag. At the end of the day when Mr. Slinger returns her purse she finds a nice note and some treats in it. Lilly realizes she has made a terrible mistake and finds several ways to say she is really, really sorry.

Discussion points – This book teaches the problem solving technique of owning up to your mistakes and saying you're sorry.

Hunter's Best Friend at School, Elliott, Laura Malone, 2002

Summary – Hunter and Stripe are best friends and do everything together. When Stripe starts to misbehave Hunter follows along and gets into trouble. Hunter talks with his mother and she teaches him that being a best friend doesn't always mean doing what your friend does. Hunter solves the problem by helping his friend to be his "best self".

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Discussion points – Sometimes one friend can be put in a difficult situation when the other one does something wrong. This book offers a strategy for dealing with this problem.

The Day the Whale Came, Bunting, Eve, 1998

Summary – Tommy and his best friend Ben have the opportunity to see a dead whale which is being brought to their small Midwestern town by train. Ben wants Tommy to help him cut a piece of the whale off as a souvenir. Tommy refuses to help, making Ben angry. When the train breaks down just outside of town, the residents are forced to pull together to bury the rotting whale. When Ben once again wants to cut off a piece of the whale Tommy realizes that he hasn't made a good choice of friends.

Discussion points – Tommy realizes that when friends have different values it's sometimes necessary to end the friendship.

Enemy Pie, Munson, Derek, 2000

Summary – Life is good for a young boy until Jeremy Ross moves into the neighborhood and becomes the one and only person on his enemy list. His father tells him he can get rid of his problem with a recipe for enemy pie. His father bakes the pie but in order for the recipe to work the boy must spend an entire day with his enemy and be nice to him. When he and Jeremy spend the day together he ends up liking him.

Discussion points – This book teaches a problem solving strategy for handling relationships and conflict.

Chicken Sunday, Polacco, Patricia, 1992

Summary – A young girl and her friends Stewart and Winston visit a neighborhood hat store run by a Jewish man, to look at Easter bonnets for the boys' grandmother. When some bigger boys throw eggs at Mr. Kodinski's store he thinks the three children did it and calls the grandmother. She believes that they didn't do it but convinces the children that they need to do something to change his mind. After some consideration, they paint several Easter eggs and take a basket of them into his shop as a peace offering. He is thrilled with the eggs and they become friends.

Discussion points – By making a gift of their time, children find a way to solve the problem of their damaged relationship with Mr. Kodinski.

Peace Begins With You, Scholes, Katherine, 1989

Summary – This book provides readers with a definition and description of peace. It suggests ways of solving problems so that peace is maintained.

Discussion points: This book teaches strategies for solving problems in your own life because peace begins with you.

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The Ant Bully, Nickle, John, 1999

Summary – When Lucas is bullied by the neighborhood bully he in turn bullies the ants. The ants capture Lucas and shrink him to their size, forcing him to work along side them. After Lucas learns many lessons about what a community is, the ants return him to his original size.

Discussion points – There is an important note to be made here about the nature of bullying – Lucas is a bully as a result of being bullied. This book also teaches the value of working together as a community as well as the value of friendship.

Mean Soup, Everitt, Betsy, 1992

Summary – When Horace has had a very difficult day his mom makes some soup and she and Horace take turns screaming into it. After Horace has growled, stuck out his tongue and banged on the pot he begins to feel much better. His mother tells him the soup is called “Mean Soup.”

Discussion points – This story illustrates an important strategy for dealing with anger.

When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry, Bang, Molly, 1999

Summary – Sophie is having a terrible day; she gets very angry and kicks and screams. Feeling like she is a volcano ready to explode, she runs and cries and then she begins to notice the things in nature all around her. She is comforted and heads back home when everything is “back together again”.

Discussion points – This story teaches an important strategy for dealing with anger.

The Meanest Thing to Say, Cosby, Bill, 1997

Summary – Little Bill and his friends at school are faced with a new boy Michael who introduces a game that involves saying mean things about other people. Little Bill’s parents teach him an important strategy to deal with the bully. Later when Michael is feeling lonely Bill reaches out in friendship to him.

Discussion points – This book shows children there are ways to resolve conflicts with other children without losing face or resorting to violence. As well, students learn that sometimes a potential bully can be turned around with kindness.

The Recess Queen, O’Neill, Alexis, 2002

Summary – Mean Jean rules the school playground through bullying and intimidation. When the new girl, Katie Sue, comes along she refuses to bow to Jean’s intimidation and instead invites Mean Jean to play. No one has ever asked Mean Jean to play and a friendship ensues.

Discussion points – This book demonstrates another strategy for dealing with bullies.

Books for Parents to Read to Children (cont.)

Hands Are Not For Hitting, Agassi, Martine, 2000

Summary – This nonfiction book explores the negative results of violence and offers better options for using our hands.

Discussion points – Children learn that violence is never an option and that they are capable of loving, constructive actions instead.

Why? Popov, Nikolai, 1996

Summary – A frog is sitting peacefully in a land full of flowers when a mouse comes along and hits him. The frog brings two friends to retaliate and the violence escalates. In the process the land around them is destroyed. In the end nothing has been achieved and much has been lost.

Discussion points – Violence and war are futile and do nothing to solve the problems we have. It is much more useful to solve our problems in peaceful ways. (See also **The Butter Battle Book** by Dr. Seuss for a similar message.)

Valuing Diversity

Key themes: empathy, respect, accepting of differences, supporting human rights

Stellaluna, Cannon, Janell, 1993

Summary – This is an “ugly duckling” story in which Stellaluna is separated from her bat mother and accepted into a bird family. Stellaluna must adapt to the way of life in the nest, but is always more clumsy than her bird ‘siblings’. When she rediscovers her bat family, Stellaluna and the birds realize that she has valuable yet different ‘bat’ skills. In the end they muse that they can be very different yet feel so much alike and still be friends.

Discussion points – This story teaches the value of honoring differences, and the acceptance of a variety of strengths.

(See also **Horace** by Holly Keller for a similar ugly duckling story about Horace the leopard who has been adopted by a loving tiger family. If you can find this out-of-print book it delivers a positive message about adoption, as Horace’s mother repeatedly tells Horace he is their “chosen child”.)

All Families are Special, Simon, Norma, 2003

Summary – Students in a classroom discuss the makeup of their families. They discover there is a vast diversity, including families with adoptions, same sex parents and single parents. There is discussion about bad and good things that can happen in families.

Discussion points – This and other similar books about diverse families empower children to talk about their own family structures.

Books for Parents to Read to Children (cont.)

The Araboolies of Liberty Street, Swope, Sam, 1989

Summary – The houses on Liberty Street are all very similar until the colorful Araboolie family moves in. Everything about the Araboolies offends the Pinch family. They call in the army to remove the family that looks different. The children in the neighborhood secretly spend the night decorating all of the houses except that of the Pinches. As ordered, the army moves in and removes the house that looks different –the Pinch house.

Discussion points –As with other ugly duckling stories, this book makes the point that something that is “odd” or “wrong” in one context may just as easily be the norm in another context.

Weslandia, Fleischman, Paul, 1999

Summary – Wesley, an unusual child, is tormented by other children. He decides to grow his own food and found his own civilization. As his colorful garden grows he finds imaginative ways to use the crops, including making his own clothes, suntan lotion and ink. He begins to include neighborhood children in the games he has invented. When school starts again in September he has no shortage of friends.

Discussion points – This book explores the nature of individual diversity. One particular illustration in this book showing Wesley’s colorful yard in comparison to the rest of the drab neighborhood, makes this book an interesting companion piece to *The Araboolies of Liberty Street*.

(See also **Odd Velvet** by Mary E. Whitcomb and **Elmer** by David McKee for similar messages about valuing people [or elephants] that are different.)

Whoever You Are, Fox, Mem, 1997

Summary – This beautifully illustrated book offers a message to the children of the world that no matter how different they are their joys and pains are all the same.

Discussion points – This book explores what we all have in common, despite our many differences.

(See also **All the Colors of the Earth** by Sheila Hamanaka and **The Colors of Us** by Karen Katz for further descriptions of the diversity of the colors of humanity)

Thank You Mr. Falker, Polacco, Patricia, 1998

Summary – When Trisha starts school she finds reading difficult and begins to realize she is different. Other children call her ‘dummy’ and her first few years in school are torture. When she starts the fifth grade, her teacher Mr. Falker recognizes her artistic abilities and helps her to overcome her learning disabilities.

Discussion points – This autobiographical story can start a valuable class discussion about honoring a variety of learning styles.

Books for Parents to Read to Children (cont.)

(For a younger audience consider using **Cleversticks** by Bernard Ashley in which young Ling Sung finds school difficult because he can't tie his shoelaces or button his clothes or do other physical tasks as well as some of the other children can. He feels validated when he discovers he's the only one who can use chopsticks.)

Suki's Kimono, Uegaki, Chieri, 2003

Summary – On the first day of school Suki wants to wear a kimono given to her by her grandmother. Her sisters don't approve, opting to wear "cool" clothes to school. Though initially the other children make fun of her, Suki does a 'show and tell' about the wonderful Japanese festival her grandmother has taken her to. The teacher and the class think her demonstration is wonderful. Walking home her sisters grumble that no one even noticed their cool new clothes.

Discussion points – This book teaches about finding the courage to value your cultural background.

The Skin I'm In, Thomas, Pat, 2003

Summary – This wonderful non-fiction book provides a first look at the nature of racism. It defines the words race, racism and what it means to be a racist in a simple and powerful way.

Discussion points – This is an excellent book to begin a discussion of racism.

The Sneetches and Other Stories, Dr. Seuss, 1961

Summary – In this Dr. Seuss classic, the Star-Belly Sneetches will not associate with the Plain Belly Sneetches. An entrepreneur brings a machine that will put stars on the Plain Belly Sneetches. A vicious cycle begins of adding and removing stars in an effort to remain "different" and presumably better. In the end Sneetches decide that Sneetches are Sneetches regardless of whether they have stars or not.

Discussion points – This story explores the absurdity of thinking you are better than others because of physical differences.

Amazing Grace, Hoffman, Mary, 1991

Summary – Grace, a young girl with a vivid imagination, is told by her classmates that she can't be Peter Pan in the school play because she's a girl and she's black. Her supportive family tells her she can be anything she wants if she puts her mind to it. Her Nana takes her to a ballet performance in town which stars a black ballerina in Romeo and Juliet. Feeling validated, Grace tries out for Peter Pan and is so amazing that everyone votes for her.

Discussion points – Race and gender stereotypes shouldn't hold you back from being the best you can be.

Books for Parents to Read to Children (cont.)

Mr. Lincoln's Way, Polacco, Patricia, 2001

Summary – Everyone thinks Mr. Lincoln is the coolest principal in the world except “Mean Gene”, the school bully. Mr. Lincoln discovers that Eugene has a love of birds which he learned on his grandpa’s farm. They make a connection when Eugene helps Mr. Lincoln attract birds to the school atrium. For a time Eugene’s bullying stops but when there is a further race related bullying incident, he reveals that his father bullies him and disapproves of his friendship with Mr. Lincoln because he is black. Eugene is taught that ‘differences’, like those of the birds, are valuable.

Discussion points – This book teaches children to question racial and other hateful attitudes they may have learned from their family and friends. It may be a useful tool for discussion among older students about patterns of learned hate that children may have to overcome.

And Tango Makes Three, Cole, Henry, 2005

Summary – The zoo at Central Park is home to many kinds of animal families. In the penguin house, every year at the same time, the girl and boy penguins start to notice each other and become couples. One couple is a little different because Roy and Silo are both boys. The keeper notices that the new couple do everything together and concludes that they must be in love. When he sees that they would like to raise a child like the other couples do, he brings them an egg that needs to be cared for. The keeper names their baby “Tango” because it takes two to make a tango. The new penguin family flourishes.

Discussion points – Based on a true story this touching book beautifully yet subtly explores the value of same-sex relationship and parenting.

Everybody Cooks Rice, Dooley, Norah, 1991

Summary – When Carrie goes from house to house looking for her brother Anthony, each family is cooking rice in the style of their ethnic background. This book includes recipes for all of the traditional dishes mentioned.

Discussion points – This book illustrates both the diversity and similarities of cultures. Also note the companion book **Everybody Bakes Bread** by the same author.

Exercising Democratic Rights and Responsibilities

Key themes: making the world a better place, sense of community, sense of responsibility

Something Beautiful, Wyeth, Sharon Dennis, 1998

Summary – A young girl living in a ghetto searches for something beautiful in her life. Her neighbors tell her about their own ‘beautiful’ things. In the end, she cleans up the area near her home and plans to plant flowers, creating something beautiful in the most unlikely of places.

Books for Parents to Read to Children (cont.)

Discussion points – Even in the most discouraging of circumstances, one person can make a difference.

Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed, Pearson, Emily, 2002

Summary – Ordinary Mary changes the world when she picks blueberries and thoughtfully gives them to Mrs. Bishop. Mrs. Bishop is so happy to receive them she gives plates of muffins to five people. Those five people are so thrilled with the muffins they each do kind things for five other people and so on...The book shows mathematically how a small deed like this can reach everyone on the planet and change the world.

Discussion points – This classic “pay it forward” story demonstrates how a simple act of kindness can truly make a difference.

(Another great example of a “pay it forward” theme is **Because Brian Hugged His Mother** by David L. Rice. This story illustrates a cycle of kindness beginning and ending when Brian hugs his mother. The author makes it clear that each person on the receiving end of an act of kindness feels more respected and valued and is therefore more likely to perform an act of kindness for someone else.)

Prince William, Rand, Gloria, 1992

Summary – When an oil tanker sinks off the coast of Alaska causing a major environmental crisis, the entire community pitches in to clean the beaches and care for all the oil covered animals. A little girl named Denny rescues a baby seal, which she names Prince William, and everyone helps him to survive and go back to the wild. This is a fictional version of a true story and an author's note at the end tells us that local schoolchildren raised money to help save the animals.

Discussion points – In this story we see one child and an entire community working together to make the world a better place by improving the environment.

(See also **The Great Kapok Tree** by Lynne Cherry, which offers another look at improving the world through improving the environment. In this case, one man intending to chop down a tree realizes the harm he could do to all of those living in the rainforest and has a change of heart. Another book that deals with working for the protection of animals is **She's Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head** by Kathryn Lasky which chronicles the true story of two women who campaigned to stop the killing of birds to make fashionable hats.)

The Carpet Boy's Gift, Shea, Pegi Dietz, 2003

Summary – Nadeem works in a carpet factory in Pakistan working from dawn until sundown seven days a week. His parents have sold him to the man who owns the factory. Like the other children in the factory Nadeem is ill from the poor conditions. One day another child named Iqbal Masih, a former carpet worker, arrives at the factory to tell the children that there is a new law against child slavery. Nadeem tries to exercise his new rights and is punished. Eventually he leads the other enslaved

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children to freedom. Information at the back of this book provides the real life story of Iqbal Masih and a variety of resources to help children fight against child labor.

Discussion points – This fictional story honors the legacy of Iqbal Masih, the real boy who escaped from enslavement and went on to crusade against child labour. Iqbal was murdered in Pakistan when he was only twelve years old but he had already made a difference in children’s lives all over the world. Teachers interested in exploring this topic further may wish to investigate the life and works of Craig Kielburger, the American boy who campaigned against child labour.

The Butterfly, Polacco, Patricia, 2000

Luba – The Angel of Bergen–Belsen, Tryszynska–Frederick, Luba (as told to Michelle R. McCann), 2003

Summaries – In *The Butterfly*, a family in the French resistance help a Jewish family to escape. *Luba–The Angel of Bergen–Belsen* chronicles the true story of Luba and the other women in Bergen–Belsen concentration camp who sheltered fifty–four children through a winter of starvation and war.

Discussion points – Both of these books tell the powerful stories of the courageous people who risked their lives helping Jewish people during the holocaust. Teachers who wish to expand on this theme may want to have the class study the novel **Number the Stars** by Lois Lowry.

Hana’s Suitcase, Levine, Karen, 2002

Summary – This is the true story of Hana, a young girl who died in the Nazi Germany, during the Holocaust, but it is also the story of Fumiko Ishioka, the director of the Tokyo Holocaust Center. Fumiko provides guidance to “Small Wings” a group of young Japanese children, aged eight to eighteen, who feel they have the power to create peace in the future. They have used Hana’s suitcase to tell the story of the Holocaust to Japanese people. There is a Canadian connection as Hana’s brother survived the holocaust and ended up living in Toronto.

Discussion points – This book demonstrates the importance of keeping stories like that of the Holocaust alive in people’s minds so that history is not repeated.

The Story of Ruby Bridges, Coles, Robert, 1995

Summary – Six–year–old Ruby Bridges is one of the first black children to be integrated into an all white school in the southern United States in the 1960’s. Every day for months Ruby is escorted into her school by marshals while large crowds of angry white people protest. Ruby stops twice each day to pray for these people who are so full of hate.

Discussion points – Ruby sets an amazing example of courage and forgiveness. This would be a great starting point for discussion of the struggle for racial integration.

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Other books that expand on the same topic are **Through My Eyes** by Ruby Bridges, **If a Bus Could Talk – The Story of Rosa Parks** by Faith Ringgold, **Freedom on the Menu – The Greensboro Sit-Ins** by Carole Boston Weatherford, and **Dear Willie Rudd** by Libba Moore Gray.

I Have A Dream, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Foreword by Coretta Scott King), 1997
Summary – This book is the actual text of the landmark speech made at the March on Washington in 1963 by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Fifteen illustrations by award winning artists complement the text.

Discussion points – This powerful text by the man who headed the civil rights movement in the United States and preached the doctrine of non-violence will appeal to older students. His efforts culminated in the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace later that year. He was assassinated in 1968 but his legacy lives on.