

As you start to explore your book collection, this guide can help you select books that include different cultures and reflect diversity by setting achievable goals. Each goal includes helpful tips for where and how to find books that match your families interests while exploring new themes. The aim is to come together over books that reflect your family's own identity and choose new options that expand your child's accurate understanding of the world around them.

GOAL: Seek out books that introduce your reader to experiences outside of their own.

[Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop](#) coined the phrase windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors as a way of explaining that children's books should reflect our experiences, give us a glimpse inside the lives of others, or offer us another world into which readers can escape. Reading a healthy mix of these metaphors—window books, mirror books and sliding glass door books—nurtures young readers while informing and inspiring them to think beyond their own lived experience. This concept includes but extends well beyond racial, ethnic or sexual identities. For example, read about city living if you live in a rural area, science fiction or fantasy worlds if you typically reach for realistic fiction, apartment living if you're in a single-family home, the daily lives of children in another part of the world, trans stories if everyone in your family is cisgender (a person whose gender identity aligns with those typical of the sex assigned them at birth), or recent immigrant experiences if your citizenship is established.

Reach for: *Going Up!*, by Sherry J. Lee and Charlene Chua, a celebration of apartment living featuring a child in a single-parent household and a wonderfully diverse cast of racially diverse neighbors, including a wheelchair user and a same-sex couple, among others; or *Under My Hijab*, by Hena Khan and Aaliya Jaleel, a cheerfully illustrated picture book from a child's perspective with rhyming text celebrating self-expression and many ways of wearing hijab.

GOAL: Read books about families like yours, and actively seek out stories with accurate and respectful representation of identities beyond your own.

This goal dovetails Dr. Bishop's work mentioned above but asks for intention on your part as the selector of books for your family. Think of these two goals as working together on the why and the how of reading diversely! The [most recent survey of representation in children's literature](#) shows that stories about white main characters make up more than 40% of protagonists, while animal stories comprise another 29%. Looking for a book about a Latinx child, or one with a disability? Only 5% of books published last year feature a Latinx main character, and a mere 3% were about characters with a disability. Put simply, if you are raising a white child—or a bear—it's easy to scan a bookshelf and find a main character who looks like you. It takes intention on your part to include stories that celebrate identities beyond your child's own. Keeping those books in circulation, either at your local library or by purchasing them, also signals to publishers that you would like to see more books featuring more diverse main characters.

Reach for: A book from a recent year of an identity-based book award, such as the [Pura Belpré Award](#) (outstanding books by Latinx authors and illustrators), the [Rainbow List](#) (significant LGBTQIA+ content), or the [Schneider Family Book Award](#) (disability experience).

GOAL: Select stories written *by* the group of people that the book is about.

The phrase Own Voices has been used most recently to indicate that a member of a group is writing from their first-person experience. The author and/or illustrator may be drawing from their experience as a member of a particular racial or ethnic identity, such as Black or tribally enrolled in the Cherokee Nation, or as a member of an affinity group, such as queer or transgender. While it isn't always obvious when reading an author's biography if they are writing an Own Voices story, it's a good idea to seek out these options when race or culture are a critical element of a book.

Reach for: *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade, a picture book inspired by indigenous-led efforts of environmental activism that was written by a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe Indians and illustrated by a member of the Raven moiety and Kiks.áti Clan. Also consider *When Aiden Became a Brother*, a picture book celebrating a child's coming out and his family's subsequent support, by Kyle Lukoff, a transgender author, and Kaylani Juanita, a femme queer illustrator.

GOAL: Avoid stories with tokenism or stereotypical representation of a group.

Illustrations (or photographic images in informational books) should depict distinctive individuals with a realistic and wide range of skin tones as well as hair textures, colors and styles.

Racial and ethnic identities vary widely, and no group of people should be represented as a token representative of diversity or with stereotyping in either text or visual representation. Are all Black people in a picture book depicted with the exact same skin tone or facial structure? Are people of Asian descent described only by their facial features? Is there only one child with a disability in a playground illustration, and are they shown off to the side or actively engaged? Critically examine representation in the texts you select, both the words and the images, to ensure diversity is celebrated across the spectrum.

Reach for: *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* by Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James, a celebratory picture book with outstanding portraiture centering Black boys and the confidence boost from a trip to the barber shop, or *Si Quisqueya fuera un color* by Sili Recio and Brianna McCarthy, celebrating the exuberance and diversity of Hispaniola (available in English as *If Dominican Were a Color*).

GOAL: Avoid stories that depict people in need of assistance, be it financial or physical, as somehow lesser than whole.

Financial hardship often stays hidden behind closed doors. Homeless, hunger and financial insecurity are rarely represented in children’s literature, and grown-ups may steer clear of discussing hefty social issues like those with children because the topics feel overwhelming. Conversations around class differences can begin at the earliest age and are best facilitated with thoughtful picture book selections that address those issues with sensitivity and insensitive perspectives.

Reach for: *Maddi’s Fridge* by Lois Brandt and Vin Vogel, a thoughtful, humorous and informative picture book in which loyal friend Sofia wants to help Maddi and her family with food upon seeing Maddi’s empty fridge.

Need more? Check out:

- [The Conscious Kid](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)
- Cooperative Children’s Book Center [Diversity Statistics](#)
- [Notes from the Backpack podcast conversation](#) with [EmbraceRace](#) founders