



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

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The need for diverse and inclusive books for children has become clear. When children see themselves reflected in books, it increases their feelings of positive self-worth. Conversely, 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.”

Furthermore, research shows that without thoughtful adult intervention, children develop stereotypes. As early childhood anti-bias education expert and human development faculty member at Pacific Oaks College, Louise Derman-Sparks, explains:

“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 help combat this. But they can’t do the work alone.

Why the need for adult conversation around these books?

Children often need adult guidance in order to make the connection between what they read in books and their own knowledge and experiences. Connecting new information to what they already know enables children to make meaning of the new information and integrate it into their lives. Savvy teachers often introduce a topic by asking children what they already know. This activates children’s prior knowledge, which gives them a context for integrating new information. It also allows the teacher to assess where there may be gaps in understanding.

Adults also play a key role in answering questions about a book: 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, sexual orientation and abilities 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.

When having conversations with children, adults should find the balance between drawing out what kids know and providing factual information. 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?

Questions to ask

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

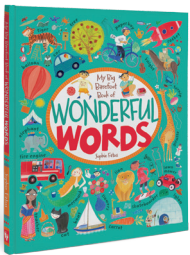
Begin with questions that prompt children to think about their own identities:

- 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?

Recommended Books:



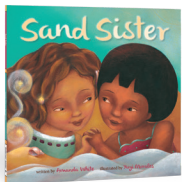
My Big Barefoot Book of Wonderful Words
Available in English and Spanish, and coming soon in French!

With its urban setting and diverse cast of characters, *Wonderful Words* is carefully crafted to break down stereotypes by reflecting our modern world. Caregivers and children can point out mosques and temples, children of wide-ranging abilities and backgrounds, women construction workers and more.



The Girl with a Brave Heart

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.



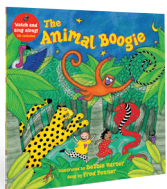
Sand Sister

With artwork by Caldecott Honor- and Pura Belpre-winning illustrator Yuyi Morales, *Sand Sister* encourages kids to empathize with those they see playing alone while celebrating the unique experience of only children.



The Boy Who Grew Flowers

“[W]hat makes us different is what makes us wonderful!” — Author Jen Wojtowicz
Inspired by her brother’s experience of autism, Jen Wojtowicz tells the story of a growing friendship between a young boy with an unusual talent and a girl with limb length discrepancy.



The Animal Boogie

Our bestselling singalong ever, *The Animal Boogie* provides a model for including children of various backgrounds and abilities in a fun, lively activity! Both the illustrations and the creative movements prompted by the song are designed to be safe and fun for all children.

Your Barefoot Books Ambassador

To learn more and to shop our entire collection of diverse and inclusive books, contact your local Barefoot Books Ambassador or visit www.barefootbooks.com.