

Literary Genre Bibliography: Realistic Fiction

Grades K-2

Muhammad, Ibtihaj. **The Proudest Blue: a story of hijab and family.** Little, Brown and Company, 2019. ISBN: 9780316519007.

Summary: Faizah is excited for her first day of school but even more excited for her older sister, Asiya. Asiya is starting sixth grade with her brand-new blue hijab. As Faizah walks to the school in her new light-up shoes and backpack, she admires her sister who looks like a princess in her blue head scarf. At school, some students celebrate with her, some are ambivalent, and some faceless, nameless characters taunt her. Their mother has prepared the girls with wise words. When the kids in the school bully Asiya, she remembers her mother's advice to not carry hurtful words as "they are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them." The illustration and the colors are just as powerful as words conveying the passionate message of how to be proud of one's culture, individuality, and religion and how to stay strong and keep one's faith. This is an empowering book for young readers who can see themselves in Asiya or know someone like her. The touching and celebratory illustrations complement the quiet strength of Asiya as she steps into a beautiful and celebrated coming-of-age rite. VERDICT This excellent story about identity, visibility, and confidence, touches on rites of passage, bonds between sisters, and bullying and is unapologetic in tackling misconceptions and demanding equality.-Noureen Qadir-Jafar, Syosset Library, NY (SLJ)

Curricular use: In a time when everyone is trying to "fit in" this is a great story highlighting what makes us unique. Where do we come from? What is important to our culture? To our family? How can we share our story with our classmates?

Audience: K-4

Sotomayor, Sonia. **Just Ask!--be different, be brave, be you.** Philomel Books, 2019. ISBN: 9781713700883.

Summary: In this inviting picture book, 12 friends are planting a garden. Each child is distinct in appearance and personality, but other differences are harder to see or to understand. Seven-year-old Sonia tells of pricking her finger to measure her blood sugar and giving herself insulin shots to manage diabetes, which she briefly explains. Next, Rafael talks about having asthma and using an inhaler when he has trouble breathing. Ten more children in succession talk about their wheelchair, blindness, deafness, dyslexia, autism, stuttering, Tourette's syndrome, ADHD, nut allergy, or Down syndrome. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who began giving herself insulin shots at age seven, offers an amiable, matter-of-fact text in which each child handles a challenge with courage and grace. Created with pencil, watercolor, and acrylic, then digitally manipulated, the vibrant artwork celebrates these self-assured kids, shown working, communicating, and interacting with nature. The garden becomes a metaphor for a community where "all the ways we are different make our neighborhood—our whole world really—more interesting and fun." Along the way, Sotomayor quietly encourages those who don't understand someone else's differences to "just ask" that person or a parent. Addressing topics too often ignored, this picture book presents information in a direct and wonderfully child-friendly way. (Booklist starred)

Curricular use: This book can be used to teach students that it's ok to ask about our differences in a polite way. Everyone is different but we have a lot of similarities too! It would also be nice to introduce who Sonia Sotomayor is and all that she has overcome to be where she is today. (Pairing this with "She Persisted" by Chelsea Clinton and the part about Sonia)

Audience: Preschool-3rd grade

Grades 3-4

Lord, Cynthia. **Because of the Rabbit**. Scholastic Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780545914246.

Summary: A young girl learns about honesty, integrity, and friendship when she finds a lost rabbit and starts school for the first time. Home-schooled by her mother, young Emma is very close to her parents and brother. She has beautiful memories of visiting her grandparents (now deceased) across the border in Quebec, where she learned about French-Canadian farming culture. Mémère taught her to bake, while Pépère told her stories about Monsieur Lapin, the rabbit, and all his woodland friends. But now Emma's life is changing. Her older brother, Owen, was her constant companion until he started high school and built a social life all his own. Lonely and hoping to make a friend, Emma decides to quit home schooling and enter the fifth grade at Lakeview Elementary. The night before she embarks on her first class, she accompanies her game-warden father on a call, and they find a pet bunny stuck in a fence. Mischievous Lapi—named for Pépère's stories—will offer both challenges and lessons to Emma as she navigates her new school and the politics of making friends with an unpopular boy. The beauty in Lord's tale of finding home in a new community is the way Emma's grandfather reaches her with his stories of magic even after he is gone, teaching her important lessons about following through on one's promises. Emma and her family are white, their Franco-American heritage a rarity in children's literature. Delightful. (Kirkus Reviews starred)

Curricular use: This book would be a great tie in with the studying of folktales, especially Peter Rabbit or Monsieur Lapin. You could also discuss the importance of family traditions/memories and how even after they're gone, their stories live on.

Audience: Grades 3-5

Mackler, Carolyn. **Not If I Can Help It**. Scholastic Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780545709484.

Summary: Willa, who has sensory processing disorder, is best friends with Ruby, who struggles with anxiety. Things for the friends get rough at the end of fifth grade as they await their middle school placements and when Willa's dad and Ruby's mom announce that not only have they been dating for quite some time, but are getting engaged. On top of these massive changes, Joshua, Willa and her brother's sitter, is moving to Chicago with his boyfriend before the summer is over, and Willa's long-promised plans to adopt a dog are put on hold. All these changes make living in Willa's body harder than it already is, but luckily she has a strong support network. Both her father and mother are sensitive and supportive and work well as a divorced couple co-parenting their children. Willa has a wonderful occupational therapist, and she's paired with Sophie, a kindergartener who is also having a rough time. This novel manages to convey not only the experience of living with sensory processing disorder, but also the message that all families and people are unique and valued, not in spite of but because of their differences. Willa and her biological family are white, Ruby is first-generation American, and her mother is Indian. Mackler weaves friendship, family, disability, and race into a story which feels genuine, engaging, and never didactic. VERDICT Loving and hopeful, this is a recommended first purchase. -Taylor Worley, Springfield Public Library, OR (SLJ starred)

Curricular use: Growing up is hard anyway but if you have anxiety, a sensory processing disorder, struggling with divorce of parents, etc, it will seem overwhelming. This book does a nice job of highlighting how it feels to want to stay hidden or be viewed as "normal". It can help to teach empathy.

Audience: Grades 3-6

Grades 5-6

Williams, Alicia. **Genesis Begins Again**. Atheneum, 2019. ISBN: 9781481465809.

Summary: Genesis comes home from school to find her family's belongings on the lawn; they've been evicted again. Her father promises that this next time will be different, renting a house in the suburbs and promising that he will get a promotion at work so they can afford it. At school, Genesis makes friends for the first time and is mentored by Mrs. Hill, the choir teacher, but Genesis's father still drinks too much and her parents' marriage is unraveling. Genesis tries lightening her skin, begs to be able to use relaxer in her hair, and keeps a list of things she hates about herself, believing that if she only looked like her light-skinned mother and not her dark-skinned father, the situation at home would improve. This message is hammered home by her father's cruel comments and her grandmother's story of the "brown paper bag" test. Genesis escapes by singing; she is

inspired by greats like Billie Holiday and Etta James. When she has the opportunity to sing in the school talent show, Genesis must find the power in using her voice to speak her truth. Genesis' struggles are age appropriate but do not shy away from the hard truth about colorism within the Afro American community. Through each character, readers come to understand the significance of how one's story plays out in reactions and interactions with the people around them. The hopeful but not happy ending adds to the realism and emotional impact of this powerful story. VERDICT This is a sensitive and nuanced portrayal of a girl grappling with hard truths about her family and her own feelings of self-worth. A must for all collections.-Kefira Phillipe, Nichols Middle School, Evanston, IL (SLJ starred)

Curricular use: A great tie in for a music teacher teaching some of the jazz greats. This story was written with a great "voice" and students will be able to see and feel the struggles that Genesis is going through even if they can't relate.

Audience: Grades 5-8

Hunt, Lynda Mullaly. **Shouting at the Rain.** Nancy Paulsen Books, 2019. ISBN: 9780399175152.

Summary: Linn'd in northeastern sea salt and Adirondack chairs, Hunt's latest offering explores those frustrating preteen years when friends become enemies and family is at once embarrassing and desired. Delsie, obsessed with the weather, lives with her grandmother on the coast, and summers on the coast are always special. But this summer feels different; her best friend seems distant and a new kid in town, Ronan, is confusingly magnetic. Underscoring all of these mixed emotions is Delsie's hurt and turmoil over being abandoned by her mother. Sometimes it feels like her efforts in life amount to "shouting at the rain" or punching a tornado. When push comes to shove, Delsie must decide whether she will embrace the family she's built in her small seaside town. Hunt creates a realistic sketch of small-town life and the agonies of growing up in an imperfect family. VERDICT While the cast lacks racial diversity, the thematic elements of tweenage angst are timeless and relatable.-Amanda C. Buschmann, Carroll Elementary School, Houston (SLJ)

Curricular use: Can be tied in with a meteorology unit. This book would accompany a good discussion on friendships, growing up, and growing apart. Also, what makes a family unit?

Audience: Grades 3-6

Bonus books:

Meddour, Wendy. **Lubna and Pebble.** Dial Books for Young Readers, 2019. ISBN: 9780525554165.

Swartz, Elly D. **Finding Perfect.** Square Fish, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2019. ISBN: 9781250294135.

Gemeinhart, Dan. **The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise.** Henry Holt and Company, 2019. ISBN: 9781250233615.

Warga, Jasmine. **Other Words for Home.** Balzer+Bray, 2019. ISBN: 9780062747808.

Venkatraman, Padma. **The Bridge Home.** Nancy Paulsen Books, 2019. ISBN: 9781524738112.

Benjamin, Ali. **Next Great Paulie Fink.** Little, Brown Books for Y, 2019. ISBN: 9780316380874.

Lockington, Mariama. **For Black Girls Like Me.** Farrar Straus Giroux, 2019. ISBN: 9780374308049.