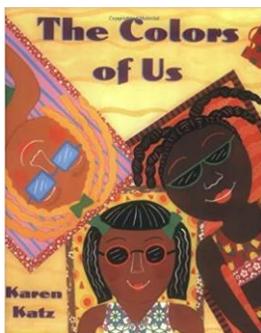


# How to Talk with your Kids About Differences

Children's books share messages and teach lessons that can help facilitate difficult conversations. This holds especially true when teaching kids about differences. Below you will find several books that can help facilitate conversations at home. Many of these books can be found at your local library.

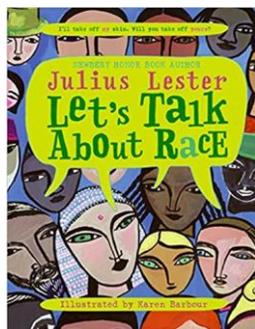
When you read a story with your child, it is important to give him or her time to process and think about what you've read. Below each category we've listed some questions/topics (CONVERSATION STARTERS) that you can use to help get at the deeper meaning of these stories:

## Talking About Race & Racism



### *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz

Seven-year-old Lena is going to paint a picture of herself. She wants to use brown paint for her skin. But when she and her mother take a walk through the neighborhood, Lena learns that brown comes in many different shades. Through the eyes of a little girl who begins to see her familiar world in a new way, this book celebrates the differences and similarities that connect all people.



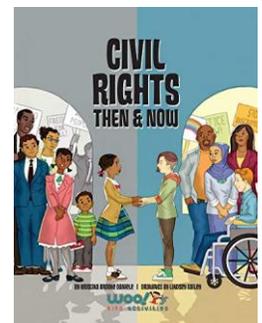
### *Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester

Julius Lester said: "I write because our lives are stories. If enough of these stories are told, then perhaps we will begin to see that our lives are the same story. The differences are merely in the details."

*I am a story. So are you. So is everyone.*

This beautiful book tells the author's story. He says, "Many people and many events are a part of my story, and yours, too!" He goes into many of the details of who he is, what he likes, who is in his family. He talks about how race is a part of his story, and yours too. He talks about how every race has a story of its own. The book talks about how people are constantly trying to compare themselves and say, "I'm better than you." But that these are stories that are not true. This book is interactive and engages the child to see and feel those around them and to realize our similarities and to never assume to know someone else's story.

(Note: We love this book until the last line which says, "I'll take off my skin. Will you take off yours?" His point (made clear earlier in the book) is that underneath our skin, we are more alike than we are different. But I fear the message to kids will be that we must take off our skin in order to appreciate someone for who they are. I know that is not the intent at all. But because of the way this book ends, it needs very careful follow-up by the parent who clarifies this for the child).



## *A Kids Book About Racism* by Jelani Memory

This book clearly defines what racism is, and that it happens all the time. It talks about the BIG ways racism happens, and the “almost invisible” ways. The author explains, “Racism thinks being different is bad. But being different is actually good. Like, really, really, really, really, really, 1000% good.”

(You can find a read aloud done by the author here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnaltG5N8nE>)

## *Civil Rights: Then & Now* by Kristina Brooke Daniele

This is a book for (older) kids and a guide for parents and educators on how to talk about the topics of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. It covers important topics like slavery, the civil war, reconstruction, Emmett Till, sit-ins, landmark cases and amendments, and the Modern Civil Rights Movement which includes discussion of the rise of Islamophobia, and violence against Black Americans. There is a section that details the killing Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, and sadly so many others.

### **\*A note to White Parents:**

It is important for you as a parent to self-reflect on your own views, your own privilege, and your own level of awareness before having these conversations with your children. A few books we would like to recommend to help you do this:

- *White Fragility*, by: Robin DiAngelo
- *How to Be an Anti-Racist* by: Ibram X. Kendi
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* by: Ijeoma Oluo

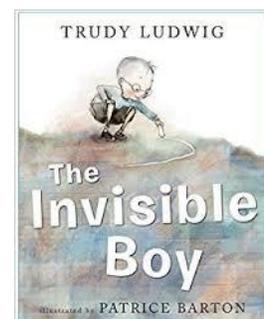
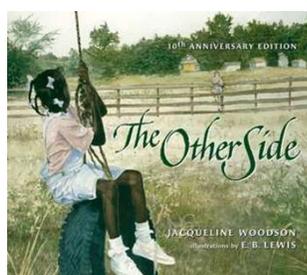
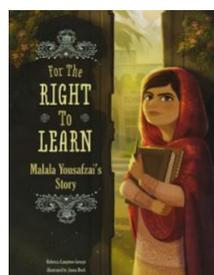
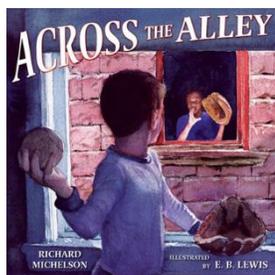
The best thing any parent can do when talking about race with their kids is allowing your kids to ask questions and share their feelings honestly and openly. These are difficult topics. You won't have all the answers. When you don't know an answer, you can say, “That is a really great question. I don't know the answer, but I will do my best to find out.” Then seek out resources in the community, ask for advice, and circle back with your child.

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS for books about Race/Racism:**

- \* What is one thing you learned from this book? Did anything surprise you?
- \* Have you ever made assumptions about someone because of the color of their skin? How do you think that person felt?
- \* What can we as a family do to fight racism?

## **Talking About Differences**

### **Picture Books: Pre-school to 5<sup>th</sup> Grade**



***Across the Alley*** by Richard Michelson and E. B. Lewis

Jewish Abe and African American Willie are best friends, but only secretly at night, through the windows of their city apartment buildings. At night, the boys trade hobbies. It quickly becomes apparent that Willie is a natural musician while Abe is a natural athlete. Their bond strengthens when they discover that racism affected both their ancestors.

***All Are Welcome*** by Alexandra Penfold and Suzan Kauffman

This New York Times best-seller celebrates various cultures and introduces readers to different cultural traditions.

***The Right To Learn*** by Rebecca Ann Langston-George and Janna Rose Bock

This picture book portrays the life of a civil rights leader, Malala Yousafzai, who fought for equal educational rights for girls in a county that did not give power to women.

***The Other Side*** by Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis

Clover's mom says it isn't safe to cross the fence that segregates their African-American side of town from the white side where Anna lives. But the two girls strike up a friendship, and get around the grown-ups' rules by sitting on top of the fence together.

***Same, Same but Different*** by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw

This book follows the pen pal relationship between two children in different countries. They learn that their homes are very similar but also very different.

***Chocolate Milk Por Favor*** by Maria Dismody

Kid-Favorite beverage, chocolate milk serves as a symbol in this book about a growing friendship between a boy and his new classmate who doesn't speak English.

***I'm Like You, You're Like Me*** by Cindy Gainer

*I'm Like You, You're Like Me* not only teaches kids about similarities but it also teaches kids how fun it is to recognize the ways everyone stands out with their differences.

***The Sandwich Swap*** by Queen Rania Al Abdullah

One day, Lily tells Salma her sandwich looks yucky, and before they know it, the girls have started a food fight. Feeling ashamed Salma and Lily try each other's sandwiches and find them delicious.

***The name Jar*** by yangsook Choi

Unhei has just moved from Korea to America and she is very much missing home. She is teased because classmates can't pronounce her name, so she decides she needs an American name. The class starts a name jar for Unhei.

***Just Ask*** by Sonia Sotomayor

Sonia is creating a garden. And as she does she introduces us to the children who are helping her. Each child is different in some way. The images of the garden show us that different plants require different things: more/less

water or more/less sun, but all the plants contribute to the beauty of the garden. Likewise, all the children contribute to the beauty of the world and make it a more interesting place to live.

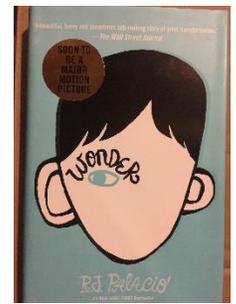
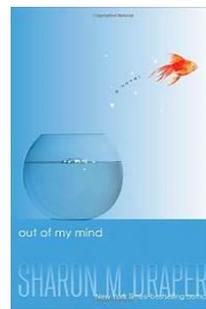
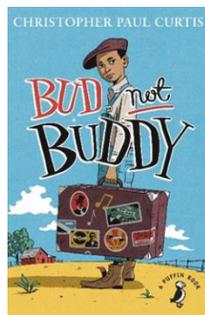
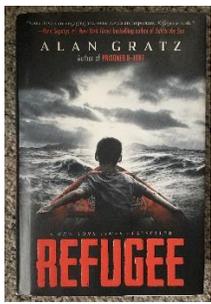
### *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig

Nobody seems to notice Brian or think to include him in any way. Until...a new kid comes to class. Justin, the new boy is made fun of for what he is eating. Brian goes out of his way to make Justin feel welcome. This story shows how small acts of kindness can help children feel included and allow them to flourish.

### *One Green Apple* by Eve Bunting

Farah feels alone, even when surrounded by her classmates. She listens and nods but doesn't speak. It's hard being the new kid in school, especially when you're from another country and don't know the language.

## **Chapter books, grades 3 and up:**



### *Refugee* by Alan Gratz.

Refugee tells the story of three children: Josef, a Jewish boy living in 1930s Nazi Germany. Isabel, a Cuban girl making her way to AMerica in 1994. Mahmoud, a Syrian boy in 2015 beginning the long trek to Europe. These harrowing tales help children develop empathy for other children facing the struggles of traveling to a new land.

### *Out of my Mind* by Sharon M. Draper

Eleven-year-old Melody is the smartest kid in her entire school but no one knows it. Not yet anyway. Melody can't speak. She can't walk. She can't write. She has cerebral palsy. Then new technology helps Melody find her voice for the first time. But not everyone is ready to hear it. This story is told from Melody's perspective and readers can't help but develop empathy for a character who seems so different, and yet who is very much the same. The Denver Post said, "If there's only one book teens and parents can read this year, Out of My Mind should be it!"

### *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate

Told from the perspective of a Tree named Red, this story explores themes of racism and hatred in a beautiful way. The story focuses on a girl named Samar who just moved into the neighborhood. Samar's family is Muslim and they are not welcome by their neighbors. Samar whispers to Red, "I wish for a friend." And Red gets to work. This story is perfect to be read aloud for children of any age. Everyone, from the youngest to the oldest in your family, will love it.

## *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

This is the story of Augie Pullman, a young boy born with a facial difference. He's the new kid in school and experiences bullying and immense unkindness, only to eventually triumph as his classmates realize, Augie really is like them in so many ways.

## *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis

Bud, Not Buddy is the story of 10-year-old orphan Bud Calloway finding his family in the Great Depression. Bud runs away from abusive foster parents, tries and fails to ride the rails, and walks for miles and miles to get to Grand Rapids, where he believes his father lives.

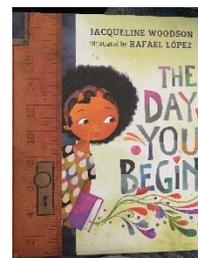
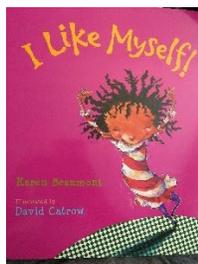
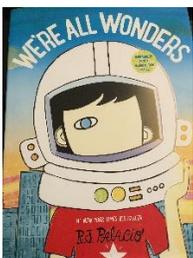
## *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang

Ten-year-old Mia and her parents have fled communist China in the early 1990s, hoping to create a better life for themselves in America. Unfortunately, their expectations don't align with the reality of the immigrant experience. This is a story of struggle, perseverance, and the eventual achievement of "the American dream." This book will help students understand the immigrant experience in the US on a level they can relate.

### CONVERSATION STARTERS for books about differences:

- \*How did that story make you feel? Why? (If your child has a difficult time answering, you can share your answer)
- \*Do you have questions about anything that happened in this story?
- \*When I read this story I was thinking a lot about how \_\_\_\_\_ (insert character) felt. How do you think he/she felt?
- \*If you were in this story, how would you have reacted when \_\_\_\_\_ (insert challenging moment) happened??
- \*It must have taken a lot of bravery for \_\_\_\_\_ (insert moment when one character stood up for another). Where do you think they got the courage to do that? Do you think you could do the same thing?
- \*Which character do you most relate to in this book? Why?
- \*What happened in this book that surprised you?
- \*What is one way you are different from \_\_\_\_\_ (insert character's name) and what is one way you are different?

### IDENTITY via Picture Books (grades K-5):



### *We're All Wonders* by R. J. Palacio

From the book jacket: "Featuring the beloved hero from "Wonder," this picture book taps into every child's longing to be seen for who they really are."

### *I Like Myself* by Karen Beaumont

From the book jacket: "An exuberant ode to self-esteem that celebrates the joy of liking who you are."

### *Be Who You Are* by Todd Parr

From the book jacket: "Be who you are! Be proud of where you're from. Be a different color. Speak your language. Just be who you are!"

### *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson

From the book jacket: There are lots of reasons to feel different. Maybe it's how you look or talk, or where you're from. Maybe it's what you eat or something random. This book celebrates the bravery it takes to go forth even when you feel like an outsider. It reminds us that sometimes when we reach out and begin to share our story that others will be happy we did.

#### CONVERSATION STARTERS for books about identity:

- \*What is something about yourself that you are most proud of?
- \*Has anyone ever made you feel bad about yourself? If so, why do you think they did that?
- \*Have you ever accidentally or on purpose made someone feel bad about themselves? If so, how did you feel after that? How did the other person feel? Is there something you could do to say I am sorry?
- \*Do you think it is possible to be proud of yourself, and also still be really proud of other people too?

Disclaimer: There are hundreds of wonderful books available on these topics. This list is by *no means* exhaustive. These are a sampling of books the founder of *Kindness Grows Here* has read and recommends. She has many others she uses and loves. If you think there is a book we should add to the list, please message our founder at [Kristen@kindnessgrowshere.com](mailto:Kristen@kindnessgrowshere.com).